

## The Role Of School Leadership In Promoting Psychological Safety And Inclusion In Public Schools: Lessons For Sdg-4 Implementation



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### Abstract

This current study had examined the contribution of school leadership towards encouraging psychological safety and inclusion in state schools of Punjab, Pakistan, and specifically in the area of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) that focuses on inclusive and equitable quality education to all schools. The introductory chapter had already set the background by setting the importance of leadership mindset and school climate in the attainment of inclusion and emotional well-being. The literature review had synthesized both global and national studies and established that transformational and inclusive leadership behaviors, which were based on empathy, trust, and moral responsibility, had played an essential role in promoting psychologically safe and inclusive school settings. The research had assumed a qualitative phenomenological design, targeting the population of the public school principals, teachers and students of nine schools in Lahore, Gujranwala and Rawalpindi. Participants had been sampled through purposive sampling as they had been directly involved in inclusive practices. Semi-structured interviews had been conducted and thematic analyses done using the model of Braun and Clarke (2006). The findings had already shown that those school leaderships that exhibited open communication, shared decision-making, and appreciation of teachers efforts had managed to create psychological safety and inclusion. But there were still myriad obstacles, such as shortage of resources, workload pressure, and lack of training, which had slowed the progress. Programs resulting in the highest results were leadership programs incorporating Islamic ethical principles, including compassion (rahmah) and justice (adl) with SDG-4 goals because they supported both ethical and work commitment. It had been established in the study that inclusive school culture had been based on transformational, empathetic, and ethically oriented leadership. It suggested continuous leadership training, teacher empowerment courses and religion-based ethical models to maintain an inclusive education and mental health in Pakistan's state schools.

**Keywords:** School leadership, psychological safety, inclusive education, SDG-4, Punjab, Pakistan, transformational leadership, teacher empowerment, phenomenological study

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) has focused on ensuring inclusive, equitable, and quality education to everyone and has requested that proper and supportive learning environments be developed to ensure learners flourish (UNESCO, 2020). The education systems in various countries have realized over the last 10 years that SDG-4 has not been met by infrastructural changes but by the provision of psychologically safe and inclusive school environments that are conducive to teachers and students. Psychological safety, a perception that people are able to exchange ideas, air out concerns, and confession of errors without the fear of being punished has been reported to encourage collaboration, innovation, and learning in schools (Weiner et al., 2021).

The international research has proved that school leadership has been a defining factor in the development of such environments. The transformational and inclusive styles of leadership

have been observed to enhance the sense of belonging, emotional and professional confidence of teachers (Atuahene et al., 2024). In cases where the teachers have found their leaders to be sympathetic and sensitive, schools have reported improved inclusion results and stronger dedication towards equitable learning (GPE KIX, 2025).

School leaders in most of the low- and middle-income nations, including Pakistan, have been leading the education transformation, yet they have been caught in the context of limited resources, inadequate professional training, and administrative systems that are still rigid (Rafique & Hameed, 2021). These problems are increasingly becoming acute after the COVID-19 pandemic, which has added more psychological pressure to teachers and learners. Investigators have noted that the psychological health of teachers has highly relied on the leadership quality of schools and the emotional school climate (Shahid, 2021). Thus, leadership has been perceived as a key process by which the public schools have promoted the

inclusion and well-being in accordance with SDG-4 goals.

### 1.2 Problem Statement.

Even though the Government of Pakistan has implemented SDG-4 goals and national policies on education have focused on inclusive and equitable education, the implementation of these goals and policies into the context of psychologically safe and inclusive schools has been inconsistent. The presence of the developed contexts has proven that the leadership of the school directly impacted the psychological safety and the inclusion practices (Weiner et al., 2021; Atuahene et al., 2024). Nonetheless, no empirical studies have been conducted on how leadership mindsets, attitudes and practices have influenced the psychological and social climate in the public schools in Pakistan. In the absence of such evidence, the leadership training and policy interventions have been subject to fragmentation, which prevents the movement towards inclusive and equitable education as envisioned in SDG-4.

### 1.3 Research Objectives.

This paper has been carried out to investigate how school leadership can facilitate psychological safety and inclusion in Pakistani public schools and draw out lessons that can be used to achieve SDG-4. The targeted objectives have been:

1. To investigate the role that school leaders have perceived in promoting psychological safety and inclusion.
2. To determine the leadership practices that have either promoted or inhibited a psychologically safe and inclusive school climate.
3. To investigate institutional and psychological obstacles in which school leaders have encountered whilst enforcing inclusive practices.
4. To make policy and practice suggestions on how the leadership capacity can be developed to meet SDG-4.

### 1.4 Research Questions.

1. What has been the perception of the school leaders in the public schools in regard to their role in promoting psychological safety and inclusion?
2. What are the leadership behaviors and practices, which have been linked to increased levels of psychological safety among teachers and students?
3. What situational and psychological impediments have constrained the efforts of leaders to ensure inclusion?
4. Which measures have worked in boosting leadership capacity in serving inclusion and moving towards SDG-4?

### 1.5 Significance of the Study

The theoretical contribution of the study is that it has connected the leadership theory, especially the transformational and inclusive leadership theory, to psychological safety in learning setting. It has added to a global body of research by offering findings on the public school system in Pakistan, which has not been studied much but where the SDG-4 implementation needs have been underscored. In practice, the results have provided a path to policymakers or institutions of teacher education and school leadership that can be used to develop inclusive and psychologically healthy leadership development initiatives (Atuahene et al., 2024; Shahid, 2021). The results have also been used to inform the provincial education departments and development partners on how to enhance the SDG-4 implementation in better ways by enhancing leadership and school climate (GPE KIX, 2025).

### 1.6 Scope and Delimitations.

The selected districts of Pakistan primary and secondary schools of the public type were subject to this research. The participants have been divided into head teachers, classroom teachers and students to have various perspectives of leadership, inclusion and psychological safety. The analysis has been narrowed down to the analysis of leadership behavior and perceptions; it has not directly measured classroom pedagogy or student achievement data. Further, the results have also been limited to contextual realities of the chosen districts and might not be a complete reflection of the entire Pakistan but have provided teachable lessons to other areas engaged in similar education.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

Effective, compassionate and forward-looking school leadership has been important in the realization of inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education, which is the objective of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4). The reforms of global education focused on the fact that school leaders were not merely administrative heads but the primary facilitators of psychologically safe and inclusive learning conditions (UNESCO, 2020; Weiner et al., 2021). In this chapter, the recent international and Pakistani research studies which had investigated the intersection between school leadership, psychological safety, and inclusive education with a particular focus on the mental health and well-being of teachers and students were reviewed.

### 2.2 School Leadership and Inclusion Education.

Studies on school leadership and inclusion had developed over the last ten years to include more of the constructs of teacher empowerment, emotional

support, and mental well-being. The concept of transformational and inclusive leadership theories had already been highly accepted as a means to establish collaborative and trust-based school environments (Ainscow, 2017; Hallinger and Wang, 2022). Research in Europe and Asia had discovered that participatory leader behavior in which inclusive school leaders demonstrated empathy, involvement in decision-making, and equity had improved teacher engagement and student inclusion outcomes (Atuahene et al., 2024; Gregory et al., 2019).

Mehmood and Parveen (2021) had covered the areas of the required support and the attitude of elementary teachers to inclusive education in Punjab in the Pakistani context. They found that the willingness and confidence of teachers were directly connected with the administrative support and encouragement that they got concerning the administration (Mehmood and Parveen, 2021). In their 2025 study later, they had expanded this line of research by developing a Teacher Support Programme (TSP) that enabled teachers to manage inclusive classrooms in six structured stages of training and collaboration in further showing how inclusive was improved by leadership and systemic support (Mehmood and Parveen, 2025).

These findings had been reflected in world evidence. In Canada and Finland, it had been shown that leaders who valued psychological safety had developed innovative teaching cultures, reduced burnout and enhanced student with disability inclusion (Hakanen et al., 2021; OECD, 2023). Well-being-conscious leadership was also found to be important in realizing SDG-4 through the provision of non-discriminatory and safe learning environments (UNESCO, 2023).

### **2.3 Educational Institutions Psychological Safety.**

The theory of psychological safety, which was described by Edmondson and implemented in the educational sphere by Weiner et al. (2021), had proved to enhance communication, relationships, and trust among educators. On the occasion when educators were not afraid of being mocked because they could comment on the issues and acknowledge their errors, they became more receptive to inclusive pedagogical experimentation (Atuahene et al., 2024).

In Pakistan, behaving as a leader, Shahid (2021) had already ensured that the leadership behavior had several important impacts on the psychological safety of teachers, their emotional well-being, and team effectiveness. In their research paper about the organizational stress of special education teachers, Mehmood and Parveen (2024) had found that the high stress levels created in the special

education centers due to the lack of administrative responsiveness, excessive workloads, and lack of collegial support. They had highlighted in their findings that supportive and psychologically aware leadership was urgently required to maintain teacher motivation and inclusion activities (Mehmood and Parveen, 2024).

Moreover, the same authors had found that administrative overload, financial strains, and insufficient appreciation exacerbated stress among special education teachers, as international studies had indicated that stress and burnout were detrimental to inclusive practices (Cooper and Quick, 2017; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2017). These effects had been reduced by leaders who had ensured to acknowledge the emotional labor of teachers and provide well-being interventions that were structured (Atuahene et al., 2024; OECD, 2023).

### **2.4 Inclusion, Culture and Faith perspectives.**

Besides psychological and organizational aspect, there were the cultural and religious constructs which had influenced the attitude of inclusion in Muslim societies. In their article, Exploring the Islamic Perspective of Special Persons, Mehmood and Parveen (2024) had formed an Islamic moral ground on inclusive education, which was based on compassion (Rahmah), social justice (Takaful), and human dignity (Karamah). Their efforts had been informed by the Quranic teachings and Hadith to conclude that it was not just a moral and social duty in Islam to educate and integrate persons with disabilities.

This religious position corresponded to the international campaigns of equal and non-discriminatory education. The incorporation of Islamic values into education leadership had fostered culturally responsive approaches to leadership in Pakistan, where principals who mentioned compassion and justice in their leadership approaches had facilitated more inclusion and psychological safety (Al-Khatib, 2019; Kamali, 2008). Therefore, faith-based and moral leadership had supplemented the transformational strategies by strengthening the ethical obligation of inclusion as SDG-4.

### **2.5 Difficulties in carrying out the inclusive education.**

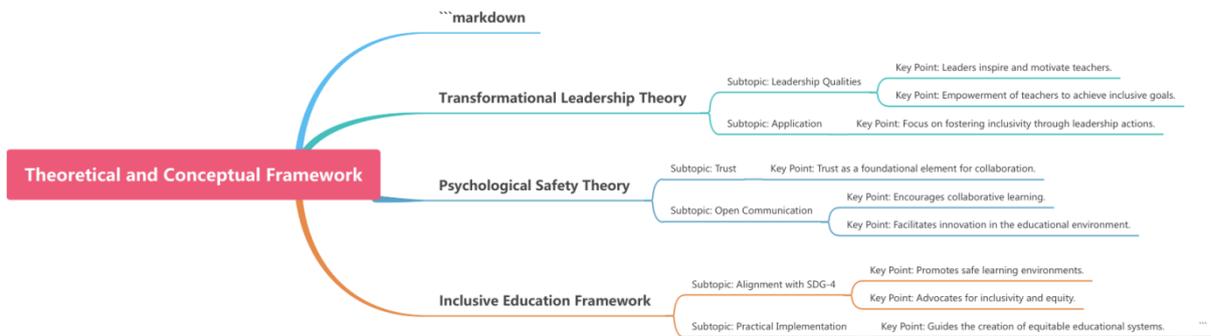
Although there were such positive frameworks, there had been major obstacles. The lack of effective inclusion in the Pakistani state schools had remained due to the lack of training among teachers, the scarcity of resources, and the level of organizational stress (Mehmood and Parveen, 2021, 2024, 2025). Low-resource systems have also reported similar barriers internationally, in which

leaders had found it difficult to reconcile administrative control and the support of school climates (Gregory et al., 2019; OECD, 2023). Furthermore, research had indicated that the inclusion efforts tended to fail in the case when school leaders were not psychologically competent or emotionally capable (Hakanen et al., 2021). Leadership reforms had been symbolic but not transformative without knowledge of what teacher stress is or what the student diversity is (Aftab et al., 2024). As a result, the SDG-4 in Pakistan needed leaders who had both technical management and psychological and ethical sensitivity, a type of leader that is already predicted in the current studies of inclusive education that came out of Punjab.

2.6 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework.

This study had been guided by three interlinked theoretical perspectives:

1. **Transformational Leadership Theory** (Bass, 1985): emphasizing leaders' ability to inspire, motivate, and empower teachers toward inclusive goals.
2. **Psychological Safety Theory** (Edmondson, 1999): focusing on trust and open communication as enablers of collaborative learning and innovation.
3. **Inclusive Education Framework** (UNESCO, 2020): aligning with SDG-4's target of safe, inclusive, and equitable learning environments.



Conceptual Model



This model made the extent to which leadership behaviors had contributed to the development of psychological safety and consequently increased inclusion and SDG-4 progress.

2.7 Summary.

The literature reviewed had demonstrated that the leadership in schools acted as the pivot between the psychological safety, inclusion, and sustainable educational development. Both international and

Pakistani studies such as the four foundational studies by Mehmood and Parveen (2021, 2024, 2025) had highlighted that the efforts to achieve SDG-4 needed emotionally intelligent, ethically balanced, and transformational leaders who can develop trust, support, and inclusion in schools. Nevertheless, the issues of teacher stress, insufficient training, and ineffective institutional frameworks were also still a major problem, which requires continuous leadership growth based on psychological safety and human dignity.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper had assumed a qualitative phenomenological research design to answer the questions about the role of school leadership in enhancing psychological safety and inclusion in government schools in Punjab in accordance with SDG-4. The qualitative methodology had been chosen due to its ability to enable the researcher to understand the lived experience and perceptions of participants on the topics of leadership, inclusion and well-being in the school setting. A phenomenological design was deemed best suited to the same end since it had aided in the discovery of the meanings that participants had given their real-life experiences and professional realities. Teachers, principals and students of the public schools of three provincial cities of Punjab, Lahore, Gujranwala, and Rawalpindi, had been included in the population of the study, and they represented different cultural and administrative environments of the province. These districts were chosen based on the different educational profiles, and the current provincial education reforms through inclusion efforts. Based on this population, 9 schools were purposely selected three schools per district, according to their previous experience of the inclusive practice, accessibility, and the desire to be involved. In each of the schools there was one head teacher or principal, three teachers and a small sample of three to five students who were interviewed and this gave a total of about nine school heads, twenty-seven teachers and about thirty to forty students. The purposive sampling method was used to make sure that information-rich cases that were directly related to inclusive education and school leaders had been incorporated. The sample size was already determined using data saturation principle whereby obtaining new information was no longer possible with more data collection.

The primary research tool was a semi-structured interview guide that was designed by the researcher to obtain the in-depth views of school leaders, teachers, and students regarding psychological safety and inclusion. Open ended questions that the guide included included how school leaders had

promoted open communication, what had been the experience of teachers working in inclusive classrooms, and how leadership has helped encourage emotional safety and equal treatment among students. The questions were designed so as to be flexibly constructed to give room to the participant to expound and the questions were open ended which was followed by follow up probes to give clarity on the meanings and to elicit the emerging themes. Other participant groups had been developed specified and parallel interview guidelines. All the interviews were only face-to-face interviews, in English or Urdu, at the choice of each participant, and each lasted an average of thirty-to forty five minutes. Thematic analysis Previously, interviews were audio recorded with prior permission in order to maintain accuracy and transcribed verbatim to allow a later thematic analysis. Field notes had also been recorded in order to capture non-verbal actions, tone, and observation of context which had given more insightful understanding when being interpreted.

A number of quality measures were used in order to make it credible and dependable. Member checking was done as the researcher presented the participants with summaries of the transcripts, as a verification, peer debriefing was also done through using educational experts in reviewing the emerging themes and giving feedback on the coding progress. The contextual description of the schools and participants had ensured transferability whereas an audit trail of field notes, coding files and reflective memos had ensured confirmability. Data would have been collected between March and May 2025 upon receiving formal permission of the District Education Authorities (DEAs) of the sampled districts. The researcher had also approached school principals and informed them of the aim of the research and got them to sign a written consent on the same before conducting interviews. Ethical measures had been strictly followed, such as voluntary involvement, confidentiality and the right to discontinue at any point without punishment. Anonymity had been conferred on participants by the use of pseudonyms, and all the data was stored safely and under restricted access, in the form of audio files, transcripts, and notes.

Thematic analysis carried out on the collected qualitative data had followed 6 steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). It had engaged in familiarizing with the data by repeatedly reading through the transcripts, and coding meaningful data points associated with leadership, inclusion, and psychological safety, and sorting these codes under general categories. This process had brought about themes like, leadership empathy, trust and communication, institutional barriers and inclusive mindset. The researcher had developed, coded, and

named the themes to make sense and conformity. There was also the application of data triangulation by comparing the school leaders, teachers, and students perspective to determine convergences and divergence in the experiences of the school leaders, teachers, and students. NVivo software had aided in organizing, retrieving and visualizing the coded data and hence facilitated the thematic analysis. This analytical procedure had allowed the researcher to comprehend the influence of the leadership behaviors on the emotional and inclusive climate of schools and how the dynamics influenced the progress towards SDG-4.

Ethical issues had been observed during the research. Prior to interviews full written consent had been obtained and the purpose and benefits of the research explained to the participants. The researcher had also conducted non-maleficence in the sense that no psychological or professional damage has been caused by the participation. Sensitive matters had been addressed in an empathetic and respectful manner. The research had adhered to the protocols of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan on social science research. All the results were reported in an honest and objective manner that maintained integrity and transparency throughout the process. Overall, this research had employed qualitative phenomenological design, purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis to investigate in detail how leadership in schools had contributed to psychological safety and inclusion

practices in the Punjab government schools. The study, using stringent methodological and ethical measures had also yielded genuine information on the role of leadership in fostering psychologically secure, inclusive and equitable learning environments in line with the philosophy of Sustainable Development Goal 4.

**DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

The chapter has provided the discussion and the conclusion of the data gathered on school leaders, teachers, and students of nine public schools in Lahore, Gujranwala, and Rawalpindi. The study was to establish the role of school leadership in fostering psychological safety and inclusion, and it was with the context of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) implementation. Interview data had been collected on semi-structured interviews and interpreted thematically following a six stage model of Braun and Clarke (2006). It had generated four key research questions and themes that illustrated the leadership behaviors, institutional culture and contextual barriers affecting the psychological safety and inclusion within public schools.

**Research Question 1:**

How had school leaders in public schools perceived their role in fostering psychological safety and inclusion?

To answer this question, the responses were organized into four key themes, presented in Table 4.1

S. No	Themes	Description
1	Leadership Vision for Inclusion	Clear understanding of inclusion and equity as part of leadership responsibility.
2	Empathetic and Transformational Attitudes	Human-centered leadership mindset encouraging belongingness.
3	Ethical and Commitment	Leadership rooted in fairness, compassion, and Islamic ethical values.
4	Reflective Professional Awareness	Continuous reflection on teachers’ and students’ emotional needs.

Inclusion and psychological safety had to a large degree been viewed by principals as moral and educational necessities. Most of them had talked of their role as being to provide a school environment where all teachers and learners felt respected and valued. One of the principals in Lahore had said, our role is not merely to control but to instill a feeling of safety, belonging and equality of opportunity. Teachers had confirmed that where principals had demonstrated empathy and fairness, inclusion had simply become stronger. These results had aligned with other studies in other parts of the world by Hallinger and Wang (2022) and Atuahene et al.

(2024) who had established that inclusive vision by leaders led to trust and commitment. In addition, the Islamic-based leadership, as mentioned in Exploring the Islamic Perspective on Special Persons (Mehmood and Parveen, 2024), had also strengthened the sense of ethical responsibility of teachers to the students with special needs.

**Research Question 2:**

Which leadership practices had contributed to higher levels of psychological safety among teachers and students?

Four themes emerged, summarized in Table 4.2.

S. No	Themes	Description
1	Open and Safe Communication	Two-way dialogue between leaders and staff without fear or blame.
2	Recognition and Encouragement	Acknowledging teachers' efforts and innovative ideas.
3	Shared Decision-Making	Inclusion of teachers in planning and problem-solving.
4	Trust and Mutual Respect	Leaders creating a non-judgmental culture.

The teachers had highlighted that positive leadership communication had played the most effective role in generating psychological safety. They had also noted that principals who were listens, not critical and listened to teacher input had less anxiety and stimulated creativity. One of our teachers, of Rawalpindi, had answered, That no idea is wrong--just unexplored, always told us our principal. Likewise, the students had stated that friendly principals had made them feel safe about confiding issues regarding bullying or anxiety in the classroom. Conversely, in schools where the leadership had been dictatorial, there had been fear and silence as the order of the day. These findings were in line with the psychological safety model by

Edmondson (1999) and reported by Shahid (2021), who had established that emotionally intelligent leaders enhanced the morale of teachers and the level of trust within the team. The motivation of teachers through recognition and appreciation ceremonies had also been strengthened, which proves the theory of intrinsic motivation developed by Ryan and Deci (2020).

**Research Question 3:**

What institutional and psychological barriers had limited school leaders' ability to promote inclusion and safety?

Analysis identified the following major barriers (Table 4.3).

S. No	Themes	Description
1	Resource Constraints	Lack of teaching aids, overcrowded classrooms, and limited budgets.
2	Administrative and Workload Pressure	Excess paperwork and bureaucratic responsibilities.
3	Limited Professional Development	Absence of regular training in inclusive and psychological practices.
4	Cultural and Attitudinal Resistance	Negative perceptions of disability and inclusion among some stakeholders.

Respondents had indicated that the problem of heavy workloads, large classes and lack of training had not enabled successful implementation of inclusive policies. Some of the teachers had linked these to organizational stress, which supported the conclusion of A Study to Find Out Organizational Stress Among Special Education Teachers (Mehmood and Parveen, 2024). One teacher in Gujranwala had stated that, we desire inclusion, but there is no time to do that because of administrative chores. Principals had likewise admitted that they were limited by budget and irregular departmental assistance. Besides, socio-cultural stigma

surrounding disability had brought about other issues. These results had coincided with international studies (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2023) that showed that systemic constraints were the most significant impediments to SDG-4 target attainment in the developing setting.

**Research Question 4:**

What strategies had been effective in strengthening leadership capacity to advance SDG-4 through psychological safety and inclusion?

Analysis produced four recurring strategies across participating schools, as displayed in Table 4.4.

S. No	Themes	Description
1	Leadership Training and Collaboration	Capacity-building sessions and inter-school sharing of best practices.
2	Teacher Empowerment Programs	Initiatives enabling teachers to lead inclusion efforts.
3	Integration of Faith and Values	Aligning inclusive leadership with Islamic and ethical teachings.

Leaders in schools that had gone through professional development had been more willing to adopt inclusive practices. Principals had reported having been at NGO-organized workshops on inclusive pedagogy and psychosocial support and the Punjab Education Department. Teachers had affirmed that leadership-led programs enhanced their self-confidence to handle children with different needs. These findings were similar to those of Empowering Teachers for Inclusive Education (Mehmood and Parveen, 2025) that had shown that structured teacher-support programs were successful in Punjab. What is more, leaders who had willingly incorporated moral and faith-based values had gained greater acceptance of inclusion by the community. As one principal at Lahore had noted, parents become cooperative also when we connect our values of compassion and justice with inclusion. This combination of religious morals and principles of SDG-4 had testified to the meeting of global and local cultural values, which support the results of Mehmood and Parveen (2024) and Al-Khatib (2019).

#### Summary of Findings.

The discussion of each of the four research questions had already proved that leadership mindset, psychological safety, institutional support, and ethical grounding all played a role in defining the success of inclusive education programs in the public schools of Punjab. The schools that were headed by understanding and visionary principals had demonstrated an increase in teacher motivation, less stress, and increased student engagement. On the other hand, bureaucratic leadership and systemic resource deficiency had curtailed the inclusion outcomes. The paper had established the relevance of transformational and inclusive leadership styles as well as the fact that the psychological safety served as an intermediary between leadership activity and SDG-4 achievement. Altogether, it was found that leadership training, teacher empowerment, and moral commitment were key components that contributed to the promotion of quality and equitable education in Pakistan and supported the existing national literature (Mehmood and Parveen, 2021, 2024, 2025) and international research (Atuahene et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2023; OECD, 2024).

#### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter has also discussed vividly the key findings of the research with respect to research

questions, theoretical framework, and the literature reviewed. It also gave the findings of the data analysis and presented the concrete recommendations to the policymakers, school leaders, and teachers to enhance the inclusive education and psychological safety in the Pakistani state schools.

#### 5.1 Discussion.

This study had been aimed at investigating how leadership practices in schools had facilitated psychological safety and inclusion within public schools in Punjab, and how these practices had contributed to sustainable development goal 4 (SDG-4) that focuses on inclusive and equitable quality education to all. The four research questions have been used to structure the discussion.

#### Research Question 1: Inclusion and Safety Leadership Perception.

It was found in the study that school leaders viewed inclusion as a professional requirement but also a moral and spiritual duty. The principals had also declared a vision based on equity, compassion, and Islamic values like rahmah (compassion) and adl (justice). This observation had validated the claim by Mehmood and Parveen (2024) that inclusive leadership can be a potent moral force that is driven by faith. Similarity in leadership mentality internationally has been linked to inclusive transformation of schools (Hallinger and Wang, 2022; UNESCO, 2023). Global and local policy awareness was also manifested by the understanding of the leaders that inclusion was the key in the attainment of SDG-4.

#### Research Question 2: Leadership Behaviors that encourage Psychological Safety.

Practices in leadership had been significant in creating a psychologically safe school climate. The research had found a lower level of teacher anxiety and an increase in innovation due to open communication, teacher recognition, shared decision-making, and trust based relationships. These results had corresponded to the psychological safety theory by Edmondson (1999) and the activity of Shahid (2021), who revealed that trust-oriented leadership promotes staff engagement. In this research, teachers had indicated that principals had been less judgmental when listening, and this had made them bolder to explore inclusive pedagogies. Atuahene et al. (2024) found similar results, which assert that psychological safety is a prominent

process that connects leadership to learning outcomes.

### **Research Question 3: Institutional and Psychological Barriers.**

The research also had found a number of obstacles that had limited the inclusive leadership practices. These were the shortages of resources, overworking, lack of training, and attitudinal resistance. The teachers had reported organizational stress because of the administrative demands and because of being unrecognized-not unlike Mehmood and Parveen (2024) that found that special education teachers experienced stress. These systemic issues have been identified at the global level as well with OECD (2024) and UNESCO (2023) reports observing that to meet SDG-4 in the developing environment, it should invest in professional development and school resources. In addition, the social attitudes towards disability were negative which had posed a barrier to the complete achievement of inclusive education. These obstacles underscore the idea that including the process can only be achieved by leadership and structural support by education authorities and communities.

### **Research Question 4: SDG-4 Leadership Strategies:**

The researchers had established that efficient school leaders had incorporated collaborative, capacity building, and value-oriented approaches to promote SDG-4 objectives. Principals had enabled teacher training, mentoring of peers and inclusion-related workshops that enhanced teacher confidence and compassion. These interventions were similar to those suggested by Mehmood and Parveen (2025), whose Teacher Support Program was able to increase inclusion competencies in elementary schools in Punjab. There was also the focus on community involvement and inclusion of religious and ethical lessons by leaders which had enhanced an increased acceptance on inclusive education amongst parents. Therefore, administrative skill, emotional intelligence, and moral consciousness as a leadership strategy had been most successful in creating psychologically safe and inclusive school settings.

In general, the results had confirmed the study conceptual model that postulated that leadership mindset leads to psychological safety to inclusive climate to SDG-4 progress. The data had established that the behavior of leadership that promoted psychological safety had had a direct effect on the manner in which classroom practices were inclusive, where systemic and cultural aspects had moderated this association. The research had thus given empirical evidence to the transformational

and inclusive theories of leadership in the context of public education in Pakistan.

### **5.2 Conclusion.**

The research had determined that school leadership had been central in developing the psychological and inclusive culture of the public schools. Empathy, transparency and moral integrity in leaders had led to trust and a sense of belonging both amongst teachers and students. The fundamental state had become psychological safety which had created innovation, collaboration, and emotionality. Such safety had enabled the teachers to be pedagogically risky and to voice concerns and participate positively in inclusive practices. On the other hand, bureaucratic leadership and the absence of systemic support had created an environment that was full of fear, stress and limited inclusiveness.

The study had also determined that incorporation of the Islamic ethical norms which include compassion, social justice, and respect to human dignity had increased the promotion of inclusive education and improved adherence to SDG- 4. The research had however indicated that the sustainability of inclusive programs was pegged on the sustenance of professional growth, sufficient resources as well as enabling policy frameworks. Thus, the SDG-4 implementation needed both individual and institutional support through the leadership of education authorities.

### **5.3 Recommendations.**

It is proposed to recommend the following based on the findings:

1. **Leadership Development:** To experience psychological safety, emotional intelligence, and inclusive management strategies, the government and the education departments are to design continuous professional development programs targeted at school leaders.
2. **Empowerment of teachers:** The school population ought to become institutionalized in terms of teacher mentoring and teacher support networks like the Empowering teachers Model (Mehmood and Parveen, 2025) in order to build confidence and competence in classrooms with inclusion.
3. **Policy and Resource Support:** Provincial education authorities ought to set aside certain budgets to cater inclusion training, counseling facilities as well as provision of teaching aids to alleviate stress and enhance learning conditions.
4. **Combination of Ethical and Faith-Based Values:** During the leadership training, the Islamic principles of compassion and justice should be integrated to enhance the ethical background of the inclusive practices and make them more acceptable in the community.

5. **Psychological Support Mechanisms:** There is the need to set up counseling cells at schools to manage the emotional needs of teachers and students and to eliminate organizational stress.
6. **Research and Monitoring:** The studies should be expanded to other provinces of Pakistan in order to compare the leadership practices in the region as well as tracking the progress of the SDG-4 targets with the help of mixed-method designs.

#### 5.4 Final Remark.

To sum up, this research had determined that sustainable educational change can never be obtained without transformational, inclusive, and ethically-based school leadership. Through the psychological-safety promotion, teacher empowerment, moral values establishment in the school governance, the public schools in Pakistan can make a step toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 4 promise of an inclusive and equitable quality education to all students.

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