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The Impact of Leader – Member Exchange (LMX) Theory on the Performance of Teachers at Secondary School Level

Shazia Ansari[1], Dr. Ummara Saher[2], Summia Bibi[3], Farkhanda Jabeen[4], Tayyba Ahmad[5]
[1] MPhil, Institute of Education & Research, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.
Email: Shaziafcoe@gmail.com
[2] Assistant Professor, Institute of Education & Research, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.
Email: ummarach.ier@pu.edu.pk
[3] MPhil, Institute of Education & Research, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.
Email: summiabibisummiabibi667@gmail.com
[4] Department of Education, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.
Email: farkhandajabeen@fjwu.edu.pk
[5] Institute of Education & Research, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.
Email: tayybaahmad797@gmail.com

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Corresponding author:
Shazia Ansari
Email:
Shaziafcoe@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

High quality exchanges indicate that subordinates have better relationships with their leaders which encourage better employee outcomes. This study examines the impact of leader – member exchange (LMX) theory on teachers' performance at secondary school level. The main objectives of the study were to identify teachers with high and low LMX, investigate the impact of leader – member exchange (LMX) on teachers' performance at secondary school level and to identify the strongest predictor of teachers' performance. The retrospective type of causal comparative design was used for the study. The population of the study was all the heads and teachers of Government Girls Secondary Schools of District Lahore and Sahiwal. The sample comprised of 16 headmistresses and 32 teachers of Government Girls Secondary Schools of both the districts. The instruments used for data collection were all adopted and they were LMX- 7 developed by Graen and Uhl-Bien in 1995and teachers' job performance self-rating questionnaire (TJPSQ)by Amin, et al., in 2013 The reliability of LMX -7 is 0.743 and TJPSQ is 0.826. Observation was also carried out and scores were recorded by using check list. For finding the strongest predictor of dependent variable, Multiple linear regression was applied. In first phase, data were collected from heads for overall 160 teachers by using LMX-7. After selecting one teacher from each In-group and Out- group, in phase II data were collected from all the heads and teachers by using TJPSQ. The study revealed that there is significant difference in performance of the teachers with high and low LMX. Among the independent variables, LMX is found to be the strongest predictor of teachers' performance. It is recommended that leaders should build strong LMX with all of their followers without differentiation to get maximum performance and organizational success. Trainings regarding leadership styles and behaviors should be provided to the leaders.

Introduction

As compared to the 20th Century, challenges, needs and demands of the 21st century are much different. Life in the 21st century has become exceedingly connected, multinational; and requires the latest skills and education to succeed in the workplace (Suto, 2013). Same is the case with education as the responsibilities and duties of school leaders have been changed. Now a school leader or principal is held accountable for the performance of its teachers as well as students. Thus educational leadership became more challenging and complicated. It is obvious that present leaders need to be more energetic, efficient and responsible to face challenges of this century.

According to Summer et al., (1990) the focus of organizational research is identifying and understanding the leading factors of organizational performance. While digging in detail, it is obvious that human capital is generally knowledge, skills and ability-based (KSA) combination (Barney, et al. 2001). It is further based on motivation, experience and organizational workforce inspiration; as well as it may deliver significant competitive benefits while they are considered scarce, valuable and complicated to make their replica (Barney, et al. 2001). Therefore, while achieving a significant competitive advantage, with the support of human capital, institutions require not only to lure, obtain and make more investment in the field of human capital; but also they are in need to hold their best employees and experienced managers. Allen (2008) wrote that in the views of "Society for Human Resource Management", the candid expense of hiring or replacing a new workforce is possibly as much as sixty percent of a worker's yearly reimbursement. It is commonly observed that managerial communication shows a constructive relationship with worker's performance, amplified faith and organizational commitment (Zeffane et al, 2011). Accordingly, it lessens the role ambiguity as well as lessens the turnover intentions. This research has concentrated on the LMX theory's role and its influences on the secondary school teacher's performance.

According to views of Harris et al., (2009) the performance history of employees, like the attitude of job and other relative notions such as leader member relationships, but conventionally, these variables have been considered independently of one another. Numerous leadership literatures are there which assesses the leader-followers relation's quality. These relationships further regulate the social nature in exchanging the follower and leader relationship (Harris et al., 2009). The LXM theory irradiates the exchange quality in between subordinate and supervisor.

As described by Schriesheim et al. (1999), different leadership studies further demonstrated that the LXM theory has a positive relation with the behavioral results and attitudes of teachers such as satisfaction from job and job performance. Similarly, Harris et al. (2009) claimed that the LXM theory has direct and indirect impacts on the satisfaction of job, on the performance of employees and their turnover intentions. All these effects provide an essential approach for the relational study of LMX with attitudes and behaviors of teachers (Liden et al. 2000).

Literature Review

Leadership stands out as the art of encouraging a team of people to work in direction of obtaining a usual objective. Leadership is known as a procedure wherein other individuals are generally motivated to comprehend and go along with what is intended to be practiced and ways in which it needs to be effortlessly and in collaboration with other matters applied to achieve an objective (Yukl, 2002).

Theories of Leadership

Theories of leadership are philosophical systems brought towards the description of how as well as why particular people become leaders. With scores of experimental researches on leadership, the review of related literature within segment is absolutely not extensive, however associated with core approaches of research (Yukl, 2006).

Traditional Leadership Theories

Gorton et al., (2007) acknowledged trait, behavioral and contingency as influential research approaches relevant to educational administration.

The Trait Theory

The trait theory of leadership tries to go into detail recognizable attributes in leader efficiency because of the recognition involving number of personalized traits. It had been presumed that prospective leaders may very well be displaying and determining the traits of personality. The approach of trait towards leadership was initially recommended by Stogdill within 1948.

Behavioral Theory

The theory of behavioral leadership helps to explain distinctive styles which effective leaders use in the design of their work. Bass (1990) has concentrated on two important behavioral traits of a leader when describing behavioral leadership theory. These two behavioral elements are the real (employee-centric) concern for people and a deep willingness to complete the mission (job-centric). Employee-centered leader behaviors focus on communicating with employees in a manner that fosters mutual confidence, empathy, and relationships between leader and follower. Employee-centered leader behaviors focus on communicating with employees in a manner that fosters mutual confidence, empathy, and relationships between leader and follower.

Theories of Contemporary Leadership

In the words of Crowther et al., (2002) there are four favored methods of contemporary academic leadership: Theory of Leader - Member Exchange (LXM), transformational, servant leadership as well as an authentic leadership.

Transformational leadership

The very idea of transformational leadership was initially termed in 1973 by James V. Downton, and then afterwards the thought was authored in 1978 by James MacGregor Burns, additionally in 1985 Bernard stretched out the job of Burns. According to the theory of transformational leadership, the core concept is that leaders encourage staff members through positioning the objectives of a worker as matched with the objectives of a leader. The devotees of this leader experience faith, appreciation, commitment and esteem with regards to their leaders.

The Theory of Servant Leadership

Robert Greenleaf was the first person who coined the term “servant leadership” in 1970. That is an approach of leadership which determines the role of leader as offering the requirements of various others. The particular objective of the leader is usually to formulate staff members as well as assist them to achieve their objectives. Servant leaders placed their workers first, comprehend their individual desires and needs, encourage them that assist all of them while making development as part of the professions.

Theory of Authentic Leadership

The theory of authentic leadership had been formulated in 2003 by Luthans and Avolio, whereas it was additionally designed by Gardner and Walumbwa in 2005. The theory of authentic leadership suggested that leaders to be accurate to their personal values. Basic suggestion of this theory is “be yourself”.

Theory of Leader – Member Exchange (LXM)

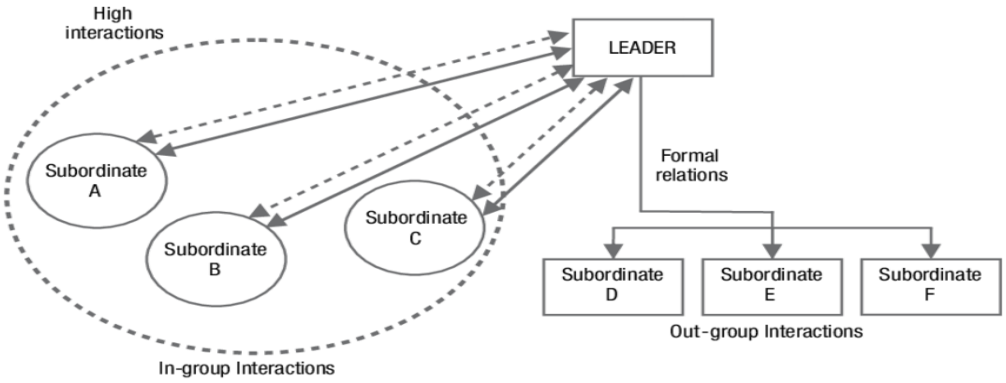
This theory becomes the better dyadic relational strategy for leadership. Leader Member Exchange theory had been initially explained by Graen, Dansereau and Haga in 1975 and according to this theory the leaders creates unique variations of interactions because of their supporters such as Leader Management Exchange as high quality as well as Leader Management low quality interactions. Both the leaders as well as the members are willing to exceed work explanation promoting other’s opportunity to be successful. Theory of LMX explains the association in terms of high or low quality between various leaders and subordinates (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). High-quality interactions suggest stronger contact between the subordinates and their representatives (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). These interactions mean that followers continue to experience stronger social support, clearer communication networks, increased trust and improved results.

According to the evaluation of Gerstner and Day (1997) in a low level Leader Member Exchange followers' commitment end up with a variety of undertaking as verified through behavior of voice. Generally, staff members are unwilling to share about whether they do not include complete commitment together with the leader. This theory describes reputable interactions in between administrator and subordinates which usually motivate much heal their staff member success.

The manager develops varying relationship with his/her employees in an organization/ institution. Indeed, many leaders eventually develop distinct ties with their followers. In-group members may be near their leader and out-group members, who are more remote within the same working group. If you have ever been with your manager or been an in-group member in a high-quality LMX partnership, you can authenticate its benefits.

Figure 1

In- group and out- group Interactions



Source: (Robbins, 2005)

The Evolution of LMX Theory

In the 1970s, scholars began developing a new approach to leadership analysis within organizations (Dansereau et al; 1975). This new approach suggested that the study of leaders and members would be on a one-on-one or dyadic basis as opposed to conventional leadership theories. The Leader-Member Exchange approach further examines the consistency of the supervisors' relationship with their subordinates. The LMX theory describes the interpersonal relationship between an employee and a boss (Schyns et al., 2007).

The debate towards the multidimensional leader - member exchange theory might be further taken from the Social Exchange Approach and Role Approach. Role theory signifies that people have described roles and maintain anticipations of them and other people in keeping with those roles.

The 1980s

The theoretical focus of the 1980's changed from VDL to LMX. What differentiates these two leadership structures in a subtle way with VDL stressing the notion of distinct exchanges and LMX concentrating, in addition to mission domains, mainly on relational areas of jobs? In other words, the answer to a job by somebody is a function of relational variables (especially the relationship with the leader or supervisor), work variables and their interactions.

The 1990s

The Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) model was introduced into the LMX literature in the beginning of the decade, followed by Perceived Organizational Support (POS) in later years. As a predictor of employee work outcomes such as organizational engagement, turnover intention, job satisfaction, performance ratings and employee innovation, LMX was analyzed in terms of cross sectional analysis.

In the second half of the decade, multiple review papers were written, beginning with the widely cited quantitative narrative analysis of the relationship–based approach to leadership (Graen & Uhl Bien, 1995).

2000

LMX has gained greater success in the new millennium. Researchers are finding new and exciting ways to incorporate LMX into different structures, hypotheses, and processes. For example, researchers have incorporated LMX into areas such as trust building (Brower et al., 2000), attribution theory, perspectives on social networks (Sparrowe & Liden, 2005) and nonlinear effects. In the second half of the decade, a promising development included the creation of LMX differentiation (variability in LMX quality among the members of a working group).

The relationship between school leadership and teacher performance has been a central concern in educational research. Among various leadership theories, leader-member exchange (LMX) theory has gained significant attention because it does not focus on the leader's general style, but on the quality of the dyadic relationship between the leader and each individual follower (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). In school settings, this relationship exists between the head teacher or principal and teachers. The present study

reviews recent literature on LMX and its impact on teacher performance at the secondary school level, with special emphasis on the latest theoretical developments in 2025-2026.

From Classic LMX to Latest Extensions (2026)

This classic theory forms the foundation of the present study. However, the present study does not use LMX in its old, simple form. It adopts the two latest extensions developed in 2026.

Latest Extension 1: Leader Differentiation - Triple Properties Model (Liu & Greguras, 2026)

The most recent development in LMX theory is the Leader Differentiation Model proposed by Liu and Greguras (2026). The authors argue that previous research studied LMX differentiation in isolation, which led to contradictory findings. They propose that three properties must be considered together:

1. **LMX Differentiation:** How much the head teacher treats teachers differently from each other.
2. **LMX Quality:** How good is my own relationship with the head teacher?
3. **LMX Social Comparison:** How good is my relationship compared to my colleagues?

Liu and Greguras (2026) found that LMX differentiation indirectly influenced supervisor-directed deviance and organizational citizenship behaviours via supervisory interactional justice perceptions. Crucially, when LMX quality and LMX social comparison were both high, the negative impact of LMX differentiation on justice perceptions was the weakest and did not reliably differ from zero. This means that differentiation is not harmful if teachers feel their own relationship is good and fair compared to others.

Implication for this study: In a secondary school, if a head teacher gives extra support to some teachers, other teachers will not feel injustice if they also perceive their own LMX as high and fair. Therefore, teacher performance depends not only on LMX, but on the fairness of differentiation.

Latest Extension 2: "Too Much of a Good Thing" Effect (Yamaura et al., 2026)

The second latest development challenges the old assumption that "more LMX is always better." Yamaura et al. (2026) systematically reviewed new empirical evidence through the lens of the "too much of a good thing" framework and concluded that LMX outcomes are non-linear rather than strictly linear. Specifically, LMX quality may yield more desirable outcomes at moderate levels, whereas excessively high LMX can lead to unintended consequences such as increased workload, role overload, favouritism accusations, and stress (Yamaura et al., 2026).

Implication for this study: A very high LMX relationship between head teacher and a teacher may create extra expectations - the teacher is given extra classes, extra duties, and extra responsibilities - which can reduce performance in the long run. Therefore, the present study proposes a moderate, fair, and performance-based LMX as the ideal condition for teacher performance.

LMX and Teacher Job Performance

Çevik (2025) conducted a correlational, cross-sectional study on 481 teachers in 43 public schools in Türkiye and found positive and significant relationships among LMX, organisational citizenship behaviours, and teachers' job performance. The study concluded that LMX indirectly affected teachers' job performance through organisational citizenship.

Similarly, Khiong (2023) examined 340 teachers and concluded that LMX has a positive and significant effect on school performance. The study argued that LMX creates a feedback system between leaders and teachers without barriers of seniority or position, which improves communication and ultimately enhances teacher performance.

In the Pakistani context, Rehman et al. (2021) investigated LMX, perception of organizational politics, job performance, and workplace friendship among secondary school teachers in Punjab. Using systematic proportionate random sampling from 751 higher secondary schools in Punjab, where 24,794 teachers were teaching, the study found that LMX showed a significant positive result on job performance, while a significant negative relationship was observed between LMX and perception of organizational politics.

LMX and Instructional Practices

Doğuş (2026) studied 1,185 teachers in Türkiye and found that LMX had a small direct association with instructional practices (β = 0.10) and larger associations with perceived collective innovativeness (β = 0.34) and learning effectiveness (β = 0.25). The two mediators together carried about 63% of the total association.

Fang et al. (2025) further found that LMX, psychological capital, LMX differentiation, and traditionality jointly influence teachers' teaching and learning performance, with psychological capital partially mediating the relationship.

LMX, Creativity and Innovative Work Behaviour

Evers et al. (2024) examined secondary education teachers using a time-lag design (N at T1 = 654 and N at T2 = 293) and found that LMX at T1 was directly connected to teachers' innovative work behaviour at T2 (β = 0.15).

Nantunda (2026) explored LMX in government secondary schools in Uganda and found that high-quality LMX enhanced both head teacher and teacher effectiveness. However, the study also warned that excessive autonomy under laissez-faire leadership, when driven by high LMX, could lead to negative outcomes such as head teacher disengagement and deliberate teacher absenteeism. This finding directly supports the "too much of a good thing" argument of Yamaura et al. (2026).

Under-Performance of Teachers

Under-performance is reflected in poor lesson preparation, chronic lateness, absenteeism, weak classroom management, and low commitment.

Recent evidence shows it is an institutional gap, not only an individual failure. A study of 380 teachers in Tanzanian secondary schools found that under-performance persisted despite punitive measures and was significantly predicted by lack of leadership support — decision-making involvement, recognition, role modelling, and managerial support (Frontiers in Education, 2026). Similarly, a systematic review of 44 studies (2021–2025) found that teacher performance is shaped by individual factors (motivation, self-efficacy), organisational factors (leadership, supervision, climate), and contextual factors (policy, technology), with leadership and supportive climate showing consistent positive effects (Ma & Cheok, 2025).

From an LMX perspective, under-performance emerges when teachers perceive low-quality exchange with the head teacher. Limited support, trust, and recognition reduce motivation and justice perceptions, which lowers effort and performance (Liu & Greguras, 2026; Yamaura et al., 2026).

Teaching Skills

Teacher performance is not limited to subject knowledge. It also requires communication, confidence under stress, lesson planning, classroom management, and teamwork. Leijen et al. (2024), in a study of 161 secondary teachers, found that self-efficacy was more important than pedagogical knowledge for instructional quality, while pedagogical knowledge was more important for professional persistence. In Karachi, a study of 40 interviews found that subject expertise (87%), adaptable lesson planning (80%), and effective communication (93%) were the strongest determinants of performance, and supportive leadership increased participation in professional learning communities by 15% (Discover Education, 2025). Pollescas and Aguilar (2025) further found a very strong correlation ($r = 0.995$, $p < .01$) between classroom management practices and teacher performance among 107 teachers.

Thus, teaching skills are the core of performance. Teachers with high-quality LMX receive more mentoring and feedback, which strengthens these skills, while those with low-quality LMX lack such support, leading to skill gaps and under-performance (Liu & Greguras, 2026).

Regularity and Discipline

Discipline means obeying school rules, maintaining regularity in duties, and showing respectable, orderly conduct. Recent evidence links it directly to performance. Fapohunda (2026) found a significant association between discipline management and instructional quality among 500 secondary teachers ($p < .001$), while Qamar (2025) found that discipline, rules, and routines significantly affected student performance among 400 teachers in Lahore. From an LMX perspective, fair and moderate exchange promotes regularity, whereas unfair or favouritism-based exchange reduces it (Liu & Greguras, 2026; Yamaura et al., 2026).

Interpersonal Relations

Interpersonal relations create confidence and a positive image in a school. An effective supervisor must avoid favouritism and display fairness, respect, and consistent communication. Osekita and Olorunsola (2025) found that teachers' participation in decision-making was significantly related to job performance among 384 respondents, while Ma and Cheok (2025), in a review of 44 studies, found that leadership and school climate consistently predicted performance. In LMX terms, trust-based interpersonal relations increase motivation and cooperation, while favouritism creates injustice perceptions and reduces performance (Liu & Greguras, 2026).

Statement of the Problem

The role of educational leaders and their relationship with subordinates is very important for success of an organization. High LMX and low LMX are the main factors which figure out the power of teachers association with the person in charge and affect their performance. The way leader communicates and assign tasks is very crucial as all the teachers are following their leaders or trying to obey him or her to meet organizational goals. Even today, the leader – subordinate relationship is in debate and concept of biasness does exist in 21st century. The theory of LXM confirmed the kind of relationship between teachers and their headmaster/ headmistress. This specific topic targeted the impact of leader – member exchange (LMX) theory on the performance of teachers at secondary level.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the research study were to:

1. Categorize teachers on the basis of high and low LMX
2. Investigate the impact of LMX on performance of teachers at secondary school level.
3. Identify the strongest predictor/s which explains the teachers' performance

Significance of the Study

This research is significant in identifying the intensity of LMX between Head Mistress/ Head Master and teachers of government girls secondary schools. It is beneficial for the heads to understand the level of members both from in-group and out-group in order to improve their leadership behavior as well as their organization by building strong LMX with all of their followers. The researcher further identifies the LXM theory's impact on the performance of teachers. The study helps in providing literature to scholars whose area of interest is educational leadership and management and working on contemporary theories of leadership.

The study also contributes to existing literature by considering the importance of LMX theory and its indicators which include organizational commitment, job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior and teachers' performance. From the practice point of view, this study helps school leaders to identify such leadership skills that are needed today in order to build a strong bridge between employees (teachers) and themselves. This study brings the unique perspectives of secondary school leaders and teachers about the role of high quality LMX in success of their organization (school).

The research study also helps the District Education Officer and professional development organizations to design innovative and need based training programs for school heads. It also helps the policy makers to bring practical policy initiative to discuss the issues about implementation of LMX theory and school leadership. It helps in setting the criteria for appointing a well qualified and trained leader with certain leadership styles for educational institutions.

Hypotheses

H_{01}: There is no significant difference between performances of the teachers with high and low LMX.

H_{02}: LMX is not the statistically significant predictor of teachers' performance.

Methodology

This research was quantitative in nature and retrospective type of causal comparative design was used. The variables included in the study were LMX (independent variable) and teachers' performance (dependent variable). The focus of the study was to determine the influence of LMX on performance of teachers by administering Self – reported and head – reported questionnaires.

Population and Sample

Population of the study consisted of all the heads and teachers of secondary schools of the Punjab.

The sample comprised of 16 public schools, 16 heads and 32 teachers of district Lahore and Sahiwal.

Instruments of the Study

Following instruments were adopted and used for data collection.

i. Leader – Member Exchange – 7 (LMX – 7) questionnaire for heads

ii. Teachers Job Performance Self Rating Questionnaire (TJPSQ) for heads

iii. Teachers Job Performance Self Rating Questionnaire (TJPSQ) for teachers

iv. Observation check list

Leader – Member Exchange – 7 (LMX – 7) questionnaire

It was developed to measure the quality of working relationships between leaders and followers. LMX -7 was designed to measure the three dimensions of leader – member relationships: respect, trust, and obligation.

Teachers Job Performance Self Rating Questionnaire (TJPSQ)

It was developed to measure the job performance of school teachers. Researcher used the TJPSQ originally developed by Amin, Shah, Ayaz , & Atta in 2013. The psychometric properties of TJPSQ revealed that it has alpha coefficient of 0.81 for the entire scale. The scale comprises of 25 items with 5 point rating scale. The performance indicators include teaching skills, management skills, discipline and regularity and interpersonal relations.

Data Analysis

LMX -7 questionnaire was used to identify or categorize the teachers with high and low LMX. The scores were interpreted by using the guidelines as: very high=30 - 35, high = 25-29, moderate=20-24, low = 15-19, very low = 7 -14 (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

For comparing mean scores of two groups i.e high and low LMX groups for finding difference in performance, independent sample t – test was used.

Table 1: Differences in Performance of the Teachers with High and Low LMX

	High LMX (n=16)		**Low LMX (n=16)**		**Independent t –test**		**95% *CI***	
Variables	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t(df)*	*p*	*LL*	*UL*
Performance (heads)	112.31	8.86	100.06	12.42	3.21(30)	.003	4.46	20.04
Performance (teachers)	117.88	6.08	114.1	6.65	1.66(30)	.11	-.85	8.35
Performance (observer)	74.83	5.76	67.85	4.31	3.87(30)	.001	3.29	10.65

By using the demographic variable information about secondary school teachers' attributes i.e (age, teaching experience, qualifications both academic and professional) and level of LMX as independent variables, Multiple linear regression model was also applied to identify the strongest predictor of dependent variable.

Table 2: LMX is the Strongest Predictor of Teachers' Performance

Variables	**Model 1**			**Model 2**		
	B	***B***	***SE***	***B***	***β***	***SE***
Constant	*81.8*		*2.84*	*73.2*		*4.57*
LMX	*-6.98*	*-0.58*	*1.79*	*-6.71*	*-0.56*	*1.68*
Academic Qualification				*4.19*	*0.324*	*1.81*

R^2	0.334	0.438
ΔR^2		*-0.104*

Results and Finding

The findings of the current study were as follows.

To achieve objective 1, LMX -7 questionnaire was used to identify or categorize the teachers with high and low LMX by using the scoring key which was as: very high=30 - 35, high = 25-29, moderate=20-24, low = 15-19, very low = 7 -14.

For achieving objective 2, independent sample t – test was used to compare the mean scores of teachers' performance. According to heads of the schools significant differences ($p = 0.003 < 0.05$) exist in performance of the teachers. Teachers with high LMX have better performance (M=112.3; SD = 8.86) as compared to the teachers with low LMX (M = 100.06; SD = 12.42). According to the teachers, no significant differences ($p > 0.05$) exist in their performance on the basis of high and low LMX. The observer found significant differences ($p = 0.001 > 0.05$) in performance of the teachers with high and low LMX. The teachers with high LMX (M = 74.82; SD = 5.76) shows good performance as compared to teachers with low LMX (M = 108.50; SD = 8.86). Thus hypothesis 1 was rejected.

To achieve objective 3, Multiple Linear Regression model was applied to predict which of the independent variables is making strong unique contribution towards the dependent variable. The model 2 explains 43.8% of the variance in teachers' performance and is statistically significant ($p = 0.000$). Among the beta values, 0.58 is the largest (ignore negative sign), which shows that LMX is making the strongest unique contribution to explain the teachers' performance. LMX is the strong predictor of teachers' performance and it is statistically significant ($p = 0.001 < 0.05$). Thus hypothesis two was rejected.

Discussion

The present study examined the impact of Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) on teachers' performance at the secondary school level. The findings highlight the importance of the quality of relationships between school heads and teachers in promoting professional performance. The results suggest that mutual trust, respect, communication, and professional support are important elements of effective educational leadership.

The findings revealed a significant difference in teachers' performance between high- and low-LMX groups, as reported by school heads. Teachers with high-quality LMX demonstrated better performance (M = 112.31, SD = 8.86) than those with low-quality LMX (M = 100.06, SD = 12.42). This finding supports the assumptions of LMX theory, which emphasizes that high-quality leader–member relationships are built on mutual trust, respect, and reciprocal obligations (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

Similarly, Rehman et al. (2021) found that LMX significantly contributed to the job performance of secondary school teachers in Punjab, Pakistan. Çevik (2025) also reported a positive association between LMX and teachers' job performance in Türkiye. These findings suggest that supportive relationships with school leaders may encourage teachers to demonstrate greater professional commitment and responsibility.

However, teachers' self-reported assessments did not reveal a statistically significant difference between the high- and low-LMX groups (p = .11). This difference indicates that teachers and school heads may perceive professional performance differently. While school heads may evaluate teachers according to institutional responsibilities and administrative expectations, teachers may assess their performance through their own professional experiences. In contrast, observational assessments revealed significantly better performance among teachers with high LMX (M = 74.83, SD = 5.76) than those with low LMX (M = 67.85, SD = 4.31). This finding provides additional evidence that differences in leader–teacher relationship quality are reflected in observable professional practices.

The results are consistent with recent research by Doğuş (2026), who identified an association between LMX and teachers' instructional practices. Similarly, Evers et al. (2024) found that LMX was associated with teachers' innovative work behaviour. Fang et al. (2025) further highlighted the role of psychological capital and LMX differentiation in explaining teachers' professional performance. Collectively, these studies indicate that supportive leadership relationships may strengthen teachers' professional engagement, cooperation, and instructional effectiveness.

Furthermore, regression analysis identified LMX as the strongest predictor of teachers' performance among the variables included in the model. The final model explained 43.8% of the variance in teachers' performance (R^2 = .438). This finding highlights the importance of leadership relationships alongside other professional and institutional factors. It is also consistent with Rehman et al. (2021), who reported the importance of LMX in explaining secondary school teachers' job performance in Pakistan. From the perspective of social exchange, teachers who experience trust, recognition, and professional support may develop a stronger sense of responsibility towards their institutions.

Recent research also suggests that the quality of leader–member relationships should be considered alongside fairness and equal treatment. Liu and Greguras (2026) emphasized that employees' perceptions of their own relationship quality and their comparisons with colleagues influence their responses to leader differentiation. Similarly, Yamaura et al. (2026) highlighted that excessively high-quality LMX may sometimes produce unintended consequences, including additional work expectations and perceptions of favouritism. These perspectives are particularly relevant to schools, where headmistresses should develop supportive professional relationships with all teachers rather than favouring selected individuals.

Overall, the findings reinforce the importance of LMX in understanding teachers' performance at the secondary school level. They suggest that effective educational leadership involves more than administrative supervision; it also requires trust, fairness, mutual respect, and professional support. School heads should therefore promote positive relationships with all teachers, provide constructive feedback, and ensure fair opportunities for professional development. Such practices may contribute to a more supportive school environment and improved teacher performance.

Conclusions

The present study was about the impact of leader – member exchange (LMX) theory on teachers' performance in government girls secondary schools of district Lahore and Sahiwal. The main objectives of the study were to categorize teachers on the basis of high and low LMX, investigate the impact of leader – member exchange (LMX) on teachers' performance at secondary school level and to identify the strongest predictor of teachers' performance.

The key conclusion drawn on the basis of descriptive and inferential statistics indicated that significant differences between performance of the teachers with high and low LMX has been observed by the headmistresses/ principals of the schools but teachers did not agree with this. Further headmistresses reported that teachers with high LMX have better teaching skills, management skills and have high levels of discipline and regularity; while the teachers with low LMX have strong interpersonal relations. According to the teachers themselves, teachers with low LMX have good teaching skills, management skills and high levels of discipline and regularity. LMX was found the strongest predictor of teachers' performance when compared with all other independent variables.

Recommendations

On the basis of findings and conclusions, following recommendations were made.

1. Leaders should build strong LMX with all of their followers without differentiation to get maximum performance and organizational success.
2. The potentialities and capabilities of the teachers from out- group should not be under estimated by the heads.
3. For the unbiased evaluation of teachers' performance, inter district evaluation system should be established.
4. Teaching practices of teachers should be monitored on regular basis and refresher courses aiming at enhancement of teaching skills, management skills and behavior management should be planned.
5. All the heads of the institutions should be trained to treat all the teachers equally in order to avoid problems related to in-group and out- group interactions.

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