

Prevailing Leadership Styles among the Special Education Leaders from the Point of View of Special Education Teachers Who Teach Student with Autism in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

This study focused on the exploration of democratic and autocratic leadership styles among special education leaders from the point of view of special education teachers who teach students with Autism in Saudi Arabia. The research aimed to explore leadership styles among the special education leaders from the perspective of special education teachers who teach a student with autism in Saudi Arabia and to investigate relations among predictor variables (i.e., gender, types of school, and academic degree). The "Leadership Styles Survey" was used as an instrument to collect data. Multiple linear regression analysis was used to analyze the data. The study sample included 75 special education teachers who work with students with autism spectrum disorder in Saudi Arabia. The results suggested the average level of both democratic and autocratic leadership styles of the special education leaders was moderate. However, female leaders tended to have slightly higher levels of democratic style than males. Other than that difference, gender, school type, and degree were not strong predictors of leadership style. The outcomes of this study may help improve the work environment and quality of education students receive.

Keywords: democratic, autocratic, leadership styles, autism, special education teachers

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1. INTRODUCTION

Educational organizations are considered one of the most important organizations in any country, as this organization seeks the progress and renaissance of its society for a better future. Moreover, the success of any organization depends on leadership. Leadership plays a significant role in any organization in terms of creating the vision, mission, establishment of objectives, strategies, policies, methods and laws to achieve its goals (Belias et al., 2014). The goal of Leadership is to inspire a group of individuals towards a common objective. On the other hand, leaders institute standards, values, and ethics in order to change and motivate employees. Leaders use their own individual style, however, when practicing their leadership role (Sofi et al., 2015).

Effective leaders are needed to motivate and encourage employees. Employee performance and productivity are affected by leadership styles (Nanjundeswaraswamy et al., 2014). Furthermore, the way leaders direct their employees ultimately impacts the performance of the organization itself (Al-Khaled et al., 2020).

Since the 1930s, several researchers, led by psychologist Kurt Lewin, identified three main leadership styles, autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire. Further research has identified additional leadership styles, autocratic, transactional, transformational, charismatic, democratic, and bureaucratic (Gandolfi et al., 2017). All leadership styles are valuable to the success of organizations (Al-Khaled et al., 2020).

This study was underpinned by two leadership styles, autocratic, and democratic. According to Al Khajeh (2018), these leadership styles are the most prevalent leadership styles utilized worldwide. His findings asserted these leadership styles have a positive impact on organizations, providing opportunities and freedom for employees (Al Khajeh, 2018).

Autocratic leadership style is defined as a style exhibiting absolute control over employees, asking for little input from them (Gonos et al., 2013). Autocratic leaders make decisions alone. This leadership style is referred to as coercive or classical leadership style, where the leader is always away from the employees (Puni et al., 2016). Autocratic leadership is characterized by quick decision-making, and non-interference of employees in defining policies, regulations, and laws, because it is the leader who determines the work methods, and the employee is expected to follow instructions without receiving any explanations (Khuong et al., 2015). Autocratic leadership could be beneficial for employees, as it enables them to obtain a high degree of skill at performing certain duties and focus on performing this skill (De Hoogh et al., 2015). Also, the autocratic leadership style is useful for new employees who are not knowledgeable of the job instructions, laws, and policies. However, some researchers have suggested that the autocratic leadership style is ineffective, because it results in a lot of employee burnout or absenteeism (Iqbal et al., 2015). According to Overhe (2016), a leadership position should entail shared responsibility with all the employees in an organization.

On the other hand, democratic leaders were rated as more effective than leaders who adopted authoritarian styles (Folakemi et al., 2018). Democratic leadership styles have proven to empower employees by asking for

their advice and opinion in the decision-making process (Ch et al., 2017). Democratic leadership style is also referred to as participatory leadership style (Al-Khasawneh et al., 2013). According to Bhargavi et al. (2016), the democratic leadership style counts on individuals and success. Democratic leaders prefer to make decisions based upon the opinions of the majority. Democratic leadership is characterized by the use of mistakes as learning opportunities for improvement, caring for employees' needs, and staying open to suggestions (Puni et al., 2014). Democratic leadership motivates employees to perform better by considering their opinions and developing a sense of responsibility among them (Val et al., 2012). Moreover, democratic leadership needs employees who are willing to share their experiences to enhance performance (Terzi et al., 2016).

In democratic leadership, it is necessary for leaders to be clear about the organization's goals and objectives, define responsibilities, and give employees ample time to participate, and make plans and decisions (Munir et al., 2018). However, this does not always occur. For this reason, the democratic leadership style can be characterized by a high probability of weak implementation and poor decision-making (Bosiok, 2013).

The concept of leadership is not as simple in the special education field. The success of individuals with disabilities and their teachers has been linked to the leadership style implemented (Trichas et al., 2020). When determining leadership styles in the field of special education, the roles and responsibilities that lead to the success of the organization must be taken into consideration (Hoppey et al., 2013). The leader must follow a leadership style that ensures the productivity of the special education teacher in the work environment is enhanced. Furthermore, the leader's style in special education has been found to demonstrate the quality of services provided to members of the school community (Schulze et al., 2018).

Special education teachers, especially teachers of students with autism, face many challenges. Individuals with autism spectrum disorder are characterized by persistent impairments in social interactions and reciprocal communication, as well as restricted repetitive patterns of behaviors (Campisi et al., 2018). In order to ensure the best service of care for these individuals, educational and psychosocial support must be provided for them, and it is important their specific needs are understood (Brede et al., 2017). Educational services can then be provided to them according to their needs, either in autism centers (students with a severe or profound intellectual disability or multiple diagnoses) or inclusion schools (students with mild to moderate dysfunction) (Al-Ghamdi, 2020). As teachers seek to provide appropriate learning environments for their students, such as preparing schedules or modifying curricula, the leader must be aware of these responsibilities and adopt supportive leadership styles to teachers and students to ensure the success of the educational process (Swanson et al., 2012).

There is a lack of research related to the prevailing leadership styles among special education leaders from the perspective of special education teachers. This is especially true in the field of autism spectrum disorder. To address this gap, a survey was conducted in order to acknowledge the most successful leadership styles when working with a special educator.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The school is considered the most powerful organization that builds, educates, and aides in generating a developed society (Abdel Fattah et al., 2020). The leader plays a significant role in the development and success of this organization and in ensuring the progress of the educational process. Leaders must have the ability and knowledge to work with special education teachers to ensure that high-quality instruction is accessible to all students within their organization (Roderick, 2012). The importance of the study stems from the importance of the leader's role in the organization, as the leader is considered the first responsible for improving and developing the educational process and ensuring there are good interactions between themselves, teachers, and students. However, school leaders fall short of supporting special education teachers, due to a lack of experience and knowledge in special education. Some leaders adopt specific leadership styles, depending on their motivation. There are various types of leadership styles that leaders can adopt to facilitate the administration of their teachers. There are many leadership styles; however, this study focused on democratic and autocratic leadership styles.

The problem of this study focused on the exploration of democratic and autocratic leadership styles among the special education leaders from the perspective of special education teachers who teach a student with autism in Saudi Arabia and to investigate relations among predictor variables (i.e., gender, types of school, and academic degree). The goal of this study was to contribute to social and leadership changes within the special education field in general and in the autism spectrum disorder field, in particular, in Saudi Arabia by creating awareness of the effective leadership styles that generate positive work performance among special education teachers. Being knowledgeable of the most effective leadership styles in special education in Saudi Arabia is critical to meeting the needs of teachers and students. The importance of the study is evident in the two phases, including theoretical importance and applied importance.

Theoretical Importance. This research is important as it is the first study to be applied in autism centers and inclusive schools for students with autism spectrum disorder. This study will inform research of the best leadership styles, as perceived by special education teachers in the field of research. Furthermore, the theories

associated with this research will gain new understanding. Also, the findings may help future researchers in developing a more comprehensive research approach.

Applied Importance. The results of this study may provide administrators and the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia with additional criteria when selecting leaders for special education schools and programs before they are hired. Also, the outcome of this study can be used to improve the quality of education.

3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this quantitative research method, which is based on deductive logic, was to explore leadership styles among the special education leaders from the perspective of special education teachers who teach a student with autism in Saudi Arabia and to investigate relations among predictor variables (i.e., gender, types of school, and academic degree). To guide the inquiry of this study, the behavioral theory was used as the theoretical framework for this study. The behavioral theory proposed that leadership effectiveness is influenced by both leader behaviors and traits (Gavetti, 2012). This study has relied upon the role, traits, and behaviors of autocratic and democratic leaders in special education. Leader behaviors impact the level of performance of special education teachers. When the leader uses the correct leadership behaviors, it affects the effectiveness of the teacher.

4. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

It is imperative that there is comprehension of effective leadership styles in the field of special education, as these styles affect the performance of the teachers (Boscardin et al., 2018). Defining the relationship between employees' commitment to their work and leadership styles is critical to enhancing overall productivity (Underwood et al., 2016). Leaders play an important role in the success of the educational process. The purpose of this study was to explore leadership styles among the special education leaders from the perspective of special education teachers who teach a student with autism in Saudi Arabia and to investigate relations among predictor variables (i.e., gender, types of school, and academic degree).

5. STUDY QUESTION

This study asked: What are the prevailing leadership styles among the special education leaders from the perspective of special education teachers who teach a student with autism in Saudi Arabia? Additionally, what are the relations between the predictor variables (i.e., gender, types of school, and academic degree).

6. STUDY TERMINOLOGY

6.1 Leadership: Someone's behavior when they are directing others to complete a desired action (Hidayah and Nazaruddin, 2017).

6.2 Autocratic leadership: A kind of leadership style that involves a leader exerting complete control over the entire organization, employees, and all major activities in the organization (Peker et al., 2018).

6.3 Democratic leadership: a kind of leadership style that involves a cooperative leader allowing the employees to participate in the decision-making process (Liggett, 2020).

6.4 Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): A disorder comprised of a typical empathic responses that limit social interactions and communication (Harmsen, 2019).

6.5 Special Education services for individuals with autism spectrum disorder in Saudi Arabia: Services which are provided in public schools for students with mild to moderate autism spectrum disorder dysfunction and in autism centers for students with a severe or profound intellectual disability or multiple diagnoses. (Ahmed, 2019).

7. PREVIOUS STUDIES

Previous research, although not performed in autism centers or inclusive schools, greatly informed this research. Alghadhouri (2020) conducted a study that focused on identifying the leadership styles of school principals and the effect it had on the organizational commitment of teachers in Kuwait public schools. The descriptive statistic approach was used to answer the research question of this study, and the study tool consisted of a questionnaire for data collection. The study sample included 383 teachers from Kuwaiti public schools. The results asserted that the democratic leadership style was ranked first with a mean of (3.98) and the autocratic leadership style was third with a mean of (3.19), which is of medium level. The researcher recommended increasing the awareness of school principals about leadership styles, and how to exercise and apply them within the educational field.

Research conducted by Abdel Fattah et al. (2020) aimed to identify the prevailing leadership styles of managers and the organizational climate prevailing in the public schools in Zarqa. The descriptive approach was used in the study. The researcher employed a questionnaire, which included the scales of the autocratic and democratic leadership styles, to collect and measure data on the study variables. The study sample included 50 teachers. The results indicated that the democratic style was the dominant pattern in the public schools in Zarqa.

The researchers expressed the need to train leaders on the democratic leadership style within public schools in Jordan.

Haddad (2019) conducted a study regarding the prevailing leadership styles (democratic, and autocratic) among the principals of public schools in Jordan. The descriptive method was used to answer the research question by using a questionnaire to collect and measure data on the study variables. The study sample included 100 educators in the Ministry of Education. The results of the study show that the democratic leadership style was the most predominant leadership style followed by an autocratic leadership style. The researcher recommended school principals apply the democratic leadership approach in their schools.

Another study was conducted by Alsmoul (2019), which assessed the prevailing leadership styles among the heads of students' clubs from the perspective of the members of the clubs using the descriptive approach to answer the research question. The questionnaire was used to collect and measure data on the study variables. The results of the study containing 43 participants suggested that the democratic leadership style was the prevailing leadership style over the autocratic leadership approach. The researcher recommended that the heads of public clubs should work on developing their leadership skills further.

The study by Al-Qahtani (2016) focused on examining the relationship between the leadership styles of special education directors in institutes, including the democratic and autocratic style, and the leader's academic degree and years of experience, from the point of view of teachers. The descriptive method was used to answer the research question by using a questionnaire to collect and measure data on the study variables. The study sample included 40 directors in institutes and programs. While results of this study differed slightly and suggested the directors tended to use the autocratic leadership style, with the directors with a higher degree and more years of experience were more likely to use the democratic leadership style. The researchers acknowledged the need to strengthen the democratic style among the special education directors in institutes and programs.

7.1 Commenting on Previous Studies

The findings of some research indicated that the democratic leadership style is the dominant style among leaders (Abdel Fattah et al., 2020; Alghadhouri, 2020; Alsmoul, 2019; Haddad, 2019). Moreover, previous studies are similar in terms of their recommendations regarding leadership styles. Previous studies informed this research of the best research methods for preparing a data collection tool. There were no direct studies related to the leadership styles in the special education field, especially in the field of autism spectrum disorder. In addition, there were no studies conducted in autism centers or inclusive schools, hence the need to conduct this research to fill the gap. This study can enrich the leadership area in special education, due to the lack of studies in this area.

8. METHODOLOGY

The focus of this study was to explore leadership styles among the special education leaders from the perspective of special education teachers who teach a student with autism in Saudi Arabia and to investigate relations among predictor variables (i.e., gender, types of school, and academic degree). This study used a descriptive approach for data collection, data analysis, and the interpretation of the results. The "Leadership Styles Survey" was used as an instrument to collect data. The Leadership Styles Survey (LSS) measured the prevailing leadership style (autocratic or democratic) of the special education leaders.

8.1 The Independent Variables

The independent variables of this study were the demographic variables among participants, including gender, types of school, and academic degree. The demographic variable of gender of special education teachers had 2 categories (1=Male or 2=Female). The independent variable of the types of school they taught in had 2 categories (1=Autism Centers, 2=Inclusion Schools). The last independent variable considered, the participants' academic degrees, had 4 levels (1=Diploma, 2=Bachelor's degree, 3=Master's degree, 4=Doctoral degree).

8.2 The Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this study was the democratic and autocratic leadership styles among the special education leaders from the point of view of special education teachers who taught students with Autism in Saudi Arabia.

8.3 The Statistical Processing

One question was posed by this study, what are the prevailing leadership styles among the special education leaders from the perspective of special education teachers who teach a student with autism in Saudi Arabia? In order to answer this research question, multiple linear regression analysis was used to analyze the data to predict the prevailing leadership styles among the special education leaders from the perspective of special education teachers who taught a student with autism in Saudi Arabia based on the three independent variables used in this study (i.e., gender, types of school, and academic degree).

8.4 Sample Selection

The participants in this study were 75 female and male teachers who specifically work with students with ASD in all Al-Riyadh area in Saudi Arabia. The target population had differences in gender, types of school, and academic degree, which were the demographic factors presented in the target sample. Engaging these special education teachers and eliciting their views via the survey was the best approach to collect knowledge and investigate prevailing leadership styles among the special education leaders from their perspective (Creswell, 2015).

8.5 Tools of the Study

The survey for this study contained two parts to collect data from the participants. The first part of the questionnaire focused on three questions that collected the data for the three independent variables: gender, types of school, and academic degree. The second part of the questionnaire focused on specific dimensions about the autocratic or democratic leadership styles among the special education leaders from the point of view of special education teachers who taught students with Autism in Saudi Arabia. For this study, the Leadership Styles Survey (LSS) was used as an instrument to collect data on prevailing leadership styles among the special education leaders. The LSS is a tool designed to measure autocratic or democratic leadership styles. After reviewing the related literature, indicators of autocratic or democratic leadership styles were identified. Afterwards, questions based on these indicators were formulated, which were refined with the help of experts on leadership and special education. A pilot test was carried out to determine the validity and reliability of the LSS questionnaire. The LSS questionnaire was distributed to 29 educators, both male and female, who work in the education field, and they were asked to complete the survey. Afterward, the results were gathered from the pilot sample and SPSS was used to analyze the data. The results of the pilot test showed that the survey was deemed valid for other participants. While the reliability Cronbach alpha results indicated that the reliability estimate of the autocratic leadership style scale was .82, the reliability Cronbach alpha results indicated that the reliability estimate of the democratic leadership style scale was .90. Therefore, it was established the LSS had high credibility and stability. The final draft of the LSS questionnaire was comprised of 14 items that evaluated autocratic or democratic leadership styles (Communication, Guidance, Motivation, Orders, directions, instructions, Supporting, Decision making, Supervision, Authority, and Effort) that were measured from 0 to 6 (1 = Disagree very much, 2 = Disagree moderately, 3 = Disagree slightly, 4 = Agree slightly, 5 = Agree moderately, 6 = Agree very much) (see Table 1).

Table 1

The Leadership Styles Survey (LSS) Form

	Items
The Democratic Leadership Style	There are 7 items of questions asked about The Democratic Leadership Style.
The Autocratic Leadership Style	There are 7 items of questions asked about The Autocratic Leadership Style.

Note. Rating scale: (1 = disagree very much, 2 = disagree moderately, 3 = disagree slightly, 4 = agree slightly, 5 = agree moderately, 6 = agree very much).

The cutoff points for subscale means are as follows: For the democratic leadership, high is greater than or equal to 5, medium is between 3 and 4, and low is less than or equal to 2; and for autocratic leadership high is greater than or equal to 5, medium is between 3 and 4, and low is less than or equal to 2 (see Table 2).

Table 2

The Leadership Styles Survey (LSS) Form Subscales: Number of Items, and Score Range

	The Democratic Leadership Style	The Autocratic Leadership Style
Number of Items	7	7
Score Range	0-6	0-6

8.6 Study Limitations

There were four limitations which this study faced.

The time limitation: This study was conducted in the school year 2020-2021.

The place limitation: The setting of this study included Autism Centers and Inclusion Schools in Saudi Arabia.

The human limitations: This study was conducted with participants who were special education teachers of students with ASD in a large region in Saudi Arabia.

The objective limitations: Democratic and Autocratic leadership styles

9. RESULTS

9.1 Descriptive Statistics

The study sample consisted of 75 special education teachers who taught students with autism in Saudi Arabia. All the participants (100%) taught students with ASD, 34 (45.3%) of whom were male and 41 (54.7%) of whom were female. Of those 75 participants, there were 20 (26.7%) teachers who had taught students with autism in autism centers and 55 (73.3%) teachers who had taught students with Autism in inclusion schools. On the other hand, 2 (2.7%) of those 75 participants held diplomas degrees, 59 (78.7%) held bachelor's degrees, 10 (13.3%) possessed master's degrees, and 4 (5.3%) held doctorates. (see Table 2).

Table 3

Demographics of the Study Participants

Demographic Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	34	45.3%
Female	41	54.7%
Types of school		
Autism Centers	20	26.7%
Inclusion Schools	55	73.3%
Academic degree		
Diploma	2	2.7%
Bachelor's	59	78.7%
Master's	10	13.3%
Doctorate	4	5.3%

9.2 Descriptive Statistics of Democratic Leadership Styles

For the democratic leadership style measure, there were seven items. The responses of the seven items were coded as follows: (1 = Disagree very much, 2 = Disagree moderately, 3 = Disagree slightly, 4 = Agree slightly, 5 = Agree moderately, 6 = Agree very much). The mean degree of the democratic leadership style perceived by the faculty was 3.88 with a standard deviation of .141. According to the scoring guide, high is greater than or equal to 5, medium is between 3 and 4, and low is less than or equal to 2. Results showed that the average level of the democratic leadership style of the special education leaders for the sample of special education teachers who taught students with autism in Saudi Arabia was moderate (see Table 3).

9.3 Descriptive Statistics of Autocratic Leadership Styles

For the autocratic leadership style measure, there were seven items. The responses of the seven items were coded as follows: (1 = Disagree very much, 2 = Disagree moderately, 3 = Disagree slightly, 4 = Agree slightly, 5 = Agree moderately, 6 = Agree very much). The mean degree of the autocratic leadership style perceived by the faculty was 3.90 with a standard deviation of 1.15. According to the scoring guide, high is greater than or equal to 5, medium is between 3 and 4, and low is less than or equal to 2. Results showed that the average level of the democratic leadership style of the special education leaders for the sample of special education teachers who taught students with autism in Saudi Arabia was moderate (see Table 3).

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations of Democratic and Autocratic Leadership Styles and Job Satisfaction

Variable	Means	SDs
Democratic Leadership Style	3.88	1.41
Autocratic Leadership Style	3.90	1.15

9.4 Results of Regression Models

To answer the study question, multiple linear regression analysis was used to analyze the data to explore democratic and autocratic leadership styles among the special education leaders from the point of view of special education teachers who teach students with Autism in Saudi Arabia based on the three independent variables used in this study (i.e., gender, types of school, and academic degree). The mean value and the standard deviation of the mean exploration of democratic and autocratic leadership styles among the special education leaders from the point of view of special education teachers who teach students with Autism in Saudi Arabia were calculated according to each independent variable as well, as the total of all variables.

9.4.1 Regression one: Democratic Leadership Style

In the linear regression model, the independent variables were gender, degree, and school type. The dependent variable was democratic style, which was an average of the 7 items that comprised the Democratic style from the survey. The overall regression model was not significant, $F(3, 71) = 2.350$, $p = .080$. The R squared of the regression was .090, and the adjusted R squared was .052, indicating that approximately 5.2% of the variation in democratic leadership style among special education teachers who taught students with autism in Saudi Arabia can be explained by a combination of gender, degree, and school type.

Among the individual independent variables, gender was the only one of the three that was significant, $t(71) = .023$. On average, females had a .742 higher average score on democratic style than males did. School type and degree were not significantly related to democratic leadership style (see Table 4).

Table 5

Results of a Regression of Democratic Leadership Style and Independent Variables

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
(Constant)	3.011	1.131		2.662	.010
Gender	.742	.319	.264	2.327	.023
Types of school	-.384	.365	-.122	-1.054	.296
Academic degree	.174	.283	.071	.615	.541

9.4.2 Regression two: Autocratic Leadership Style

In the linear regression model, the independent variables were gender, degree, and school type. The dependent variable was autocratic style, which was an average of the 7 items that comprised the Autocratic style from the survey. The overall regression model was not significant, $F(3, 71) = .701$, $p = .555$. The R squared of the regression was .029, and the adjusted R squared was -.012, which indicated a weak model. In other words, the combination of gender, degree, and school type did not reliably predict autocratic leadership style. Further, none of the individual variables were significant predictors of Autocratic style (see Table 5).

Table 6

Results of a Regression of Autocratic Leadership Style and Independent Variables

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
(Constant)	4.058	.953		4.260	.000
Gender	-.112	.268	-.049	-.418	.678
Types of school	-.260	.307	-.101	-.847	.400
Academic degree	.210	.238	.106	.882	.381

Overall, most special education teachers who taught students with autism in Saudi Arabia had medium levels of both Democratic and Autocratic leadership styles. Female teachers tended to have slightly higher levels of Democratic style than males. Other than that difference, gender, school type, and degree were not strong predictors of leadership style.

10. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to identify the dominant pattern of the democratic and autocratic leadership styles employed by the special education leaders who work with special education teachers by their gender, school type, and degree. Results indicated that the average level of both democratic and autocratic leadership styles of the special education leaders of the teachers who work with students with autism spectrum disorder in Saudi Arabia was moderate.

This study's findings are supported by previous studies indicating that the democratic leadership style was the prevailing leadership style (Alghadhouri, 2020; Alsmoul, 2019; Haddad, 2019). On the other hand, the results of this study do not support those of previous studies which indicated that the autocratic leadership style was the prevailing leadership style = (Abdel Fattah et al., 2020; Al-Qahtani, 2016).

However, female teachers reported the democratic leadership style is the dominant style of their leaders with slightly higher levels. This study's findings are supported by previous studies indicating that the democratic leadership style was the prevailing leadership style with high degrees (Abdel Fattah et al., 2020; Alghadhouri, 2020; Alsmoul, 2019; Haddad, 2019). Every leader has a set of characteristics that is adopted through leadership styles. This may indicate that democratic leadership is slightly higher in females, as it is characteristic of them to negotiate more than men, and they are more likely to be flexible, carrying out their roles in a way they deem best for their organization (Cuadrado et al., 2012).

Other than that difference, gender, school type, and degree were not strong predictors of leadership styles. These results are not supported by Al-Qahtani (2016), who indicated that leaders with a higher degree tend to use the democratic leadership style. The reason for the discrepancy may be that the regulations and laws are the same in both Autism Centers and Inclusion Schools. In addition, teachers of all academic degrees have the same privileges in Saudi Arabia (Ministry of Education, 2021). On the other hand, this has not been substantiated by any prior research. It seems more research needs to be conducted, which includes these variables.

The findings indicated that both democratic and autocratic leadership styles are effective. Using the democratic and autocratic leadership styles is preferred to give organizations the best chance for success (Malos, 2012). Democratic leadership is the most efficient leadership approach, as it allows employees to participate in making decisions, share their skills, and develop strategies. However, if the responsibilities and tasks are not clear to the employees and there is a delay in making decisions, then autocratic leadership becomes necessary. Therefore, special education leaders must implement appropriate measures of using democratic and autocratic leadership styles to ensure their employees continue working in their organization.

Both democratic and autocratic leadership styles help employees to have a clear mission and vision of the organization. The democratic leadership style creates greater cooperation among employees to develop the organization, which enables them to be more creative. On the other hand, the autocratic leadership style makes them more committed to the goals and laws of the organization.

10.1 Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of the research showed, in general, that democratic and autocratic leadership styles are prevalent among special education leaders. Although, female teachers tend to have slightly higher levels of democratic leadership style than males. Furthermore, there is not a significant relationship between gender, school type, and degree, and leadership style. Based on these findings, more studies are needed to determine the influencing factors. It is necessary to know what are the factors that affect the styles of leaders and therefore to provide the best strategies and means to support teachers.

It is possible the lack of knowledge and experience working with special education teachers may have contributed to the two leadership styles only being used at an average level. The special education teacher does an exceptional job, as they are responsible for the students' academic and personal progress and ensuring that they receive all the services they need. The more knowledge that leaders have about special education, the better that they will be able to help and understand the teachers. Leadership styles play a significant role in organizational success and it is merely up to the leaders to adopt the right one. Every leadership style has a positive or negative impact. It is important for a leadership style to offer opportunities for teachers to be involved in the decision-making and enhance their skills.

Recommendations

- The importance of leadership styles needs to be communicated by the Ministry of Education.
- The gap between teachers' perceptions and leaders' performance needs to be reduced
- The administrators should develop the leadership behaviors identified as most valuable by special education teachers who work with students with autism spectrum disorder in Saudi Arabia.
- A supportive environment should be provided for special education teachers, in general, and for teachers who work with students with autism spectrum disorder, in particular.
- Similar studies need to be conducted on leaders of special education programs.
- A good and competent leader in special education programs needs to be selected, who seeks to achieve special education goals.
- The researcher recommends strengthening relationships between the leader and special education teachers in special education programs, in general, and autism spectrum disorder programs, in particular, to achieve success in the educational process.

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