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A Model for Enhancing School Effectiveness at Private Schools in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China

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Abstract

This study was conducted to address the necessity of enhancing school effectiveness at private schools in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China. Given the competitive educational landscape and evolving regulatory environment, private schools face significant challenges in achieving sustained effectiveness. Therefore, the study aimed to develop and validate a comprehensive model for enhancing school effectiveness, grounded in school effectiveness theory (Marzano et al., 2005), school-based management theory (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988), and flexible leadership theory (Yukl & Lepsinger, 2004). The research adopted qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative methods involved descriptive literature reviews and expert interviews to identify critical factors and verify the developed model. The quantitative method was utilized by administering a questionnaire to 335 private school teachers, employing statistical analyses. The study pursued five objectives: exploring school effectiveness factors, identifying the desired and current states, analyzing enhancement needs, developing a context-specific model, and validating the model through expert evaluation forms. Instruments included literature reviews, expert interviews, questionnaires, and SPSS analyses (Frequency, Mean and Standard Deviation). Findings revealed clear mission, good environment, empowering schools, leadership style, and collaborative governance as pivotal factors influencing school effectiveness, with gaps identified particularly in clear mission, good environment, and empowering schools. Consequently, a validated model was developed, integrating these five factors with Yukl's flexible leadership practices and three encouraged strategies based on the interview with 5 experts to generate significant findings and conclusions, and responses from these experts guided the development of these strategies. The study recommends adopting this model at private schools to systematically improve leadership adaptability and organizational effectiveness while also suggesting future research explore broader implementation scenarios to test the model's generalizability.

Keywords: School Effectiveness, Private Schools, Teachers, Flexible Leadership

Introduction

The pursuit of academic effectiveness has become a global priority, with private educational institutions often leading innovations to meet emerging challenges. In China, the rapid expansion of private schools is driven by urbanization and education reforms, playing a crucial role in reducing disparities and supporting socio-economic advancement. In Shenzhen, private schools reflect the region's transformation into a global innovation hub, integrating international pedagogical practices with local cultural values (Liu, 2022).

National policy changes have profoundly shaped Shenzhen's private education sector. The Regulations for the Private Education Promotion Law in 2021 mandates adherence to socialist values, limits foreign curricula, and requires Chinese Communist Party (CCP) participation in school governance (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2021). While these regulations aim to preserve national identity, they present operational challenges, especially for private schools (Huang, 2024).

Beyond regulatory hurdles, Shenzhen's private schools contend with over-commercialization, unequal teacher compensation, and heightened competition (Liu, 2022; Huang & Ye, 2013; Qian et al., 2022). Existing research on school effectiveness largely emphasizes leadership and resource management (Robinson et al., 2008) but fails to fully account for Shenzhen's unique socio-economic and cultural complexities. Without a localized framework, private schools' risk declining quality, cultural disconnection, and weakened competitiveness (Cheng, 2005; Qian et al., 2022).

This study seeks to address these gaps by developing a school effectiveness model adapted to Shenzhen's private education sector. By integrating flexible leadership practices with local regulatory and cultural contexts, the research aims to provide practical strategies to enhance school effectiveness and foster sustainable educational excellence.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the factors of school effectiveness at school level in China.
2. To identify the desired and current practices for enhancing school effectiveness at private schools in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China.
3. To identify the needs for enhancing the school effectiveness at private schools in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China.
4. To develop a model for enhancing the school effectiveness at private schools in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China.
5. To verify a model for enhancing school effectiveness at private schools in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China.

Literature Review

School Effectiveness (Marzano et al., 2005)

School effectiveness has evolved significantly over the decades, shaped by foundational contributions from prominent scholars. Edmonds (1979), a pioneering figure in the Effective Schools Movement (ESM), posited that students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds have the capacity to attain academic success, contingent upon the presence of conducive school conditions. His work established that high expectations, strong leadership, and continuous monitoring of student progress are key factors in improving school effectiveness. Building upon these findings, James Coleman et al. (1966) seminal study, the Coleman Report (CR), examined the relationship between school resources and student achievement. Notwithstanding the controversy surrounding his findings, Coleman's report underscored the pivotal role of school culture, teacher expectations, and student demographics in shaping educational outcomes. Building on these seminal contributions, Wilbur Brookover (1979) further emphasized the pivotal role of school climate and teacher expectations in cultivating an environment conducive to academic success. Lawrence Lezotte (1991) identified seven correlates of an effective school, including a safe and orderly environment, climate of high expectations for success, instructional leadership, clear and focused mission, opportunity to learn and student time on task, frequent monitoring of student progress, and home-school relations. In the contemporary context, Marzano et al. (2005) expanded upon these earlier frameworks by proposing a more holistic and structured approach to school effectiveness. Marzano outlined critical dimensions, including instructional leadership, a clear mission, a good environment, high expectations of success, continuing to review student progress, learning opportunities, effective time management, and a positive school-home relationship. Each dimension resonates with and expands on earlier foundational works, integrating classical principles with current educational dynamics. Marzano et al. (2005) model emphasizes the importance of strong instructional leadership in providing clear guidance and support for educators, aligning with Edmonds (1979) and Lezotte (1991) focus on leadership as a crucial determinant of educational success. Furthermore, the clear mission in Marzano's model reflects the essential insights from Brookover (1979) regarding the necessity of cohesive school climates and high teacher expectations. Additionally, Marzano's stress on home-school collaboration echoes the earlier findings by Coleman et al. (1966), affirming the integral role of family and community engagement in shaping student outcomes. Thus, Marzano et al. (2005) school effectiveness theory serves as an integrative model, synthesizing foundational insights from prominent scholars. By combining traditional effectiveness principles with contemporary educational demands, Marzano et al. (2005) provides a robust framework applicable to diverse educational settings, including the unique context of private schools in Shenzhen. In this study, Marzano et al. (2005) dimensions are further complemented by Caldwell and Spinks' SBM theory, which emphasizes decentralized decision making to empower individual schools, and Yukl and Lepsinger's flexible leadership theory, which stresses the need for leadership adaptability in dynamic environments. Together, these theories

provide a comprehensive lens to understand and enhance school effectiveness, linking strategic leadership, participatory management, and academic excellence.

School-Based Management Theory (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988)

The fundamental objective of school-based management (SBM) is to enhance school effectiveness by increasing accountability, flexibility, and responsiveness to local educational requirements. According to Caldwell (2005), SBM strengthens the functioning of schools by improving resource management, promoting participation, and fostering curricular innovations. By decentralizing decision-making, SBM empowers schools to allocate funds based on immediate needs and ensures more efficient use of resources. Furthermore, the autonomy granted to educators enhances participation among teachers and students, fostering a sense of collective responsibility within the school community (Caldwell, 2005). Furthermore, school-based management fosters innovation in curriculum design, enabling educational institutions to integrate local and global best practices, optimize learning outcomes, and address diverse educational needs. Sun's (2022) study in China found that SBM enhanced teacher satisfaction, leading to heightened engagement among teachers and students. Annisa et al. (2023) underscored the pivotal role of SBM in curriculum development and enhancing learning quality. However, Kwan and Li (2015) observed that SBM reforms in Hong Kong encountered governance challenges due to decentralization, leading to conflicts between school administrators and local authorities. In Shenzhen, implementing school-based management is paramount, particularly considering accelerated urbanization, socio-economic diversification, and regulatory restrictions on private schools. Drawing from Caldwell and Spinks (1988) as current sources reflecting SBM practices worldwide and in China, the study aims to show that SBM can help maintain high levels of school effectiveness in a competitive and fast-evolving environment. By merging the SBM framework with leadership theories, a deeper understanding of the factors influencing school performance emerges, paving the way for creating a model suited to the Shenzhen educational setting. SBM's emphasis on decentralized decision-making complements Marzano et al. (2005) focus on creating clear missions, fostering positive school climates, and enhancing stakeholder collaboration. When combined with Yukl and Lepsinger (2004) flexible leadership theory, SBM also provides a structural foundation that enables adaptive leadership behaviors to flourish, ensuring that autonomy is balanced with strategic oversight. Three theories reinforce the need for both structural empowerment and leadership agility to optimize school effectiveness in rapidly changing educational environments.

Flexible Leadership Theory (Yukl & Lepsinger, 2004)

Yukl and Lepsinger (2004) articulated that flexible leadership theory emphasizes leaders' adaptability in dynamic environments by balancing task-oriented actions and people-oriented behaviors. Central to flexible leadership are strategies in human resource management. Leaders adopting this approach prioritize talent management, succession planning, rigorous recruitment, and comprehensive staff development programs, cultivating a workforce equipped

to respond effectively to evolving challenges (Yukl & Lepsinger, 2004). Effective human resource management under flexible leadership further involves strategically allocating resources, establishing efficient personnel management frameworks, and developing leadership capabilities responsive to stakeholders' expectations and organizational needs (Anzengruber et al., 2017; Mumford et al., 2007). Strategic planning is another integral component within this leadership framework, involving a clear definition of educational goals, accurate evaluation of institutional strengths and weaknesses, and actionable planning that capitalizes on organizational capabilities (Yukl & Lepsinger, 2004). Yukl emphasizes the value of inclusive planning processes involving diverse stakeholders, thus enhancing organizational alignment and facilitating resilient and practical strategic decisions. Leaders who effectively engage with stakeholders and maintain environmental awareness through systematic feedback mechanisms are better positioned to innovate, adapt, and make strategic decisions conducive to educational excellence (Wall & Wall, 1995). Adaptability to educational excellence is also crucial within Yukl and Lepsinger flexible leadership. Educational leaders are encouraged to foster innovation by empowering staff to challenge conventional norms and explore creative pedagogical methods (Pellet, 2002; Sutton, 2002). Effective communication, transparency, and promoting a collaborative institutional culture are emphasized as fundamental strategies to facilitate adaptability and continuous improvement (Collins, 2001; Peters & Austin, 1985). Yukl and Lepsinger (2004) contend that leaders who embody the values of accountability, quality, and openness significantly shape the school culture, positively influencing overall institutional effectiveness and adaptability. Integrating flexible leadership with SBM creates a powerful synergy: while SBM decentralizes authority to allow schools greater autonomy (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988), flexible leadership ensures that this autonomy is exercised strategically and responsively. These two theories provide the operational and behavioral flexibility necessary to implement Marzano et al. (2005) school effectiveness dimensions, particularly in areas like clear mission, instructional leadership, stakeholder collaboration, creation of a dynamic, and inclusive school environment. This integrated approach is especially critical for navigating the complex, fast-evolving educational landscape in Shenzhen's private schools.

Previous Studies on the School Effectiveness

Cheng (2023) highlights that school effectiveness is not static; it requires constant evolution to address challenges and seize opportunities. Bryson (2018) also stresses the need for planning in education, incorporating feedback loops to maintain organizational success, which inspires us to improve practices continuously. Cheng (2023) suggests that schools should innovate their teaching methods and leadership styles to create an environment that supports improvement and responsiveness to advancements and societal shifts. Cameron (2015) echoes this idea, emphasizing the significance of effectiveness in education and stating that effectiveness should be viewed as a concept encompassing various aspects of school performance. Otherwise, the dynamic approach to school effectiveness differs from traditional approaches by emphasizing adaptability and responsiveness, underscoring the importance of

involving stakeholders and integrating with the community, as Hackman and Walton (1986) highlighted. They argue that effective leadership entails managing groups in ways that adjust to their changing needs and contexts. This viewpoint aligns with Earley's (2017) assertion that successful school improvement strategies consider the complexities of settings, including the requirements of teachers and staff. Mullis et al. (2012) and colleagues illustrate how international assessments can gauge the changing aspects of school effectiveness, emphasizing the need for these tools to evolve in line with educational priorities and methods. Similarly, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) underscore the significance of development in upholding teacher efficacy amidst the educational landscape. To sum up, achieving school effectiveness requires a strategy that encompasses planning (Bryson, 2018), forward-thinking leadership (Cameron, 2015), and a dedication to continuous enhancement by engaging stakeholders and adapting to external shifts (Cheng, 2023; Earley, 2017; Hackman & Walton, 1986).

Research Methodology

Research Approach

The author employed quantitative and qualitative methods to create a school effectiveness model in this setting.

Qualitative Component

The qualitative methods include Research Objective 1, Research Objective 4, and Research Objective 5. A descriptive literature review of related literature was used for research objective 1 to explore the factors of school effectiveness. A model development was used for research objective 4 to develop a model for school effectiveness at private schools in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China. A form of model verification used for research objective 5 to verify the school effectiveness model at private schools in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China.

Quantitative Component

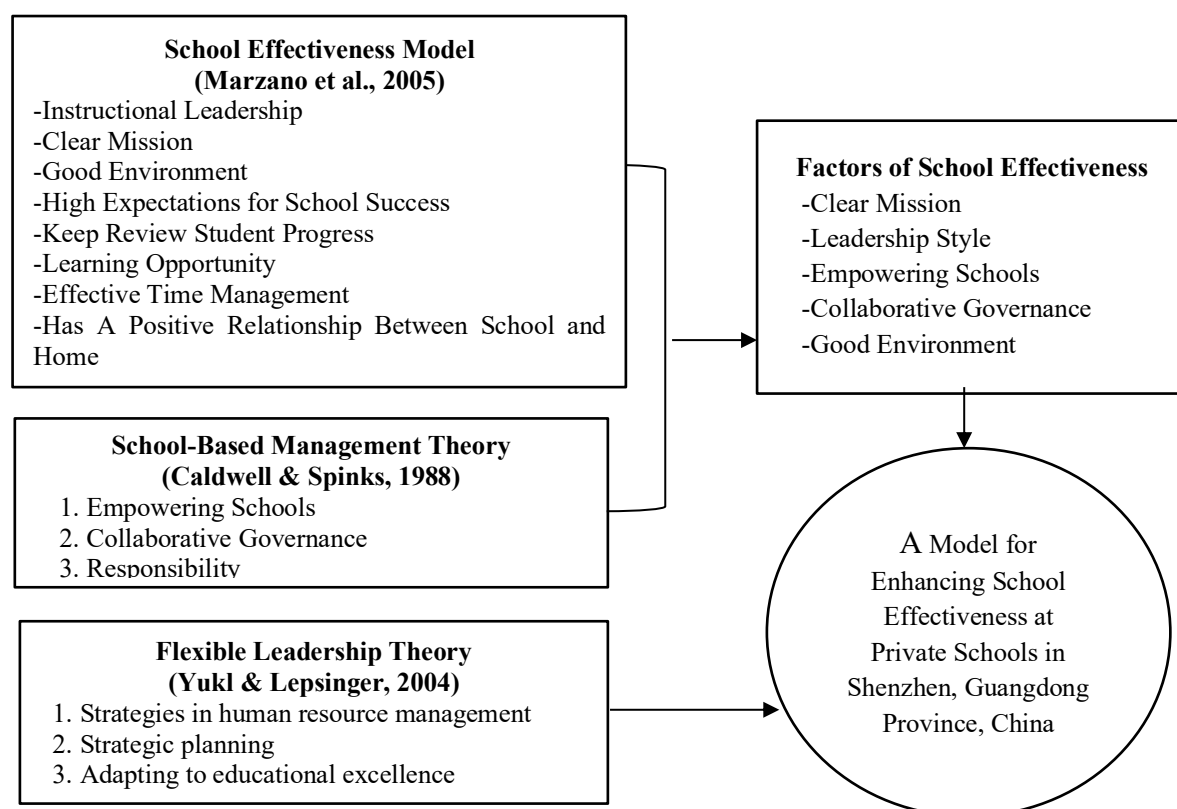
Research objectives 2 and 3 are quantitative; the questionnaire identified the desired and current practices for school effectiveness, and PNImodified became a tool to identify discrepancies between current and desired practices. The PNImodified, developed from the original Priority Needs Index (PNI) by Wongwanich (2005) in Thailand to enhance the quality of education, became a prevalent needs assessment instrument. It employed in various organizational and educational settings to identify differences between desired and current practices. Higher PNI scores indicated more significant gaps between the two practices and highlight areas that require improvement. Lower PNI scores indicated two practices aligned more with the desired, suggesting the problem is less severe.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study, as illustrated in Figure 1, is designed to develop a model for school effectiveness at private schools in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China. The framework is predicated on a comprehensive review of the extant literature, encompassing books, e-books, research articles, reports, and journals, which offer insights into school effectiveness theory, flexible leadership, and school-based management. School effectiveness theory (Marzano et al., 2005) identifies core attributes that contribute to school academic and organizational success. School-based management theory (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988) emphasizes decentralized decision-making and gives schools autonomy to improve responsiveness. Flexible leadership theory (Yukl & Lepsinger, 2004) underscores the need for leadership styles to adapt to the organization's needs and changing environments. The study identifies five key factors contributing to school effectiveness in Shenzhen's private schools: clear mission, flexible leadership, empowering schools, collaborative governance, and a good environment. The conceptual framework integrates theoretical underpinnings with the practical challenges confronting private schools in Shenzhen. It employs a contextualized approach to school effectiveness, balancing government oversight, leadership flexibility, and collaborative governance. The study aims to formulate a model that private school leaders can implement within the constraints of the Chinese education system to ensure compliance and innovation in school management.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of this Study



Sampling Procedure

For research objective 1, the study systematically reviewed the relevant literature to identify school effectiveness factors in the Chinese context, focusing on Shenzhen. The comprehensive literature review encompasses various sources, including online and offline publications such as books, e-books, reports, research articles, theses, journals, dissertations, and publications related to school effectiveness. A comprehensive descriptive literature review was conducted using major databases, including CNKI, Google Scholar, Routledge, Sage, Springer, Elsevier, and ResearchGate. In addition, Chinese sources such as Shenzhen Special Economic Zone Practice and Theory, Educational Observation, and dissertations from Chinese and Hong Kong universities were included to provide a localized perspective. A systematic screening process was employed to refine an initially broad range of sources into a final set of 34 sources. The author ensured that the 34 sources selected provided comprehensive, high-quality, and contextually relevant insights for this study. For research objective 2, there are a total of 257 private schools located in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China (ISAC Teach, 2024). The researcher used purposive sampling to choose five private schools from 257 private schools in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China. Simple random sampling strategies was the way to measure the population of teachers. The total number of teachers employed at the five schools is 747. According to the Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the corresponding sample size is 255. The researcher distributed 747 survey responses and collected 378 responses from five private schools. The return rate was 50.60%. Among them, 335 responses were valid, while 43 responses were invalid. A pilot test was conducted to validate the reliability of the questionnaire and refined its structure. The pilot test involved 30 teachers from a private school in Shenzhen, which was a not part of the main study sample. The 30 teachers were selected using simple random sampling to ensure an equal number of teachers from different subjects and grade levels. For research objective 3, the author used the same population of teachers from research objective 2 to identify the needs for enhancing the school effectiveness by PNI_{modified}.

Research Instruments

To collect the quantitative data, the researcher developed school effectiveness at private schools' questionnaires. The questionnaire comprised three sections: the first section covered basic demographic information. The second and third sections consisted of items measured using a Five Point Likert Scale to determine the mean interval for each item. To test the validity of the questionnaire, the author utilized the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) method, which experts verified. The results indicated that Item 16 required removal. Lastly, Cronbach's Alpha was employed to assess the reliability of the questionnaire, enabling the determination of each variable's internal consistency level. There were 30 teachers who joined the pilot test. After gathering the data of the reliability pilot test, the total Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire showed an excellent internal consistency, $\alpha=.961$, which showed excellent reliability.

Moreover, the author used SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to analyze quantitative data through frequency, mean, and standard deviation. The Priority Needs Index

Modified (PNI_{modified}) formula identified the needs for enhancing the effectiveness of private schools in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China. The author interviewed five experts in research objective 4 to validate and refine the proposed school effectiveness model. The data obtained from the interviews were subjected to content analysis, and the responses were categorized into key themes based on previously identified school effectiveness factors. Finally, the author synthesized the expert feedback into a final, validated model of school effectiveness at private schools in Shenzhen.

Results and Discussion

Research Objective 1 To explore the factors of school effectiveness at the school level in China.

Research objective 1 consisted of a descriptive literature review and expert interview. After abstract screening and full-text analysis, 34 sources were selected from over 100 sources, including 24 English and 10 Chinese sources. From these 34 sources, the researcher identified 17 sub-keywords. After grouping and merging similar sub-keywords, the list was refined to 5 main keywords. They were clear mission, leadership style, empowering schools, collaborative governance, and good environment. Table 1 integrated the factors enhancing school effectiveness identified from the descriptive literature review.

Table 1

Descriptive Literature Review of School Effectiveness Factors

Keyword	Sub-keyword	Description
1. Clear Mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching Strategies Curriculum Implementation Assessment Methods 	Clear mission refers to the effectiveness of teaching methods, the appropriateness of curriculum implementation, and the use of assessment techniques to improve student learning outcomes.
2. Leadership Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transformational Leadership Instructional Leadership Participative Leadership Flat Management 	Leadership style is crucial in determining a school's environment; it includes transformational and instructional leadership, encouraging teacher motivation, improving school performance, and fostering a flat management structure to promote collaboration and inclusivity.
3. Empowering Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial Management Staff Allocation Facility Maintenance 	Effective empowering schools ensures that schools have the necessary financial, human, and physical resources to support educational goals and increase achievements.
4. Collaborative Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parental Engagement Community Partnerships Stakeholder Collaboration Organizational Structure 	Involves the participation of parents, local community members, and other stakeholders in school activities and decision-making processes. An effective organizational structure ensures clear roles, accountability, and smooth stakeholder collaboration.

Keyword	Sub-keyword	Description
5. Good Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety • Respect • Inclusivity 	Reflects the general atmosphere within the school, including safety, respect among students and staff, and an inclusive environment that supports diversity and learning.

After the descriptive literature review, the researcher interviewed five experts based on research objective 1. According to the transcript, five experts mentioned clear mission 16 times, the highest frequency. Additionally, the five experts mentioned good environment 13 times, collaborative governance 12 times, empowering schools 11 times, and finally, leadership styles 4 times. For the sub-keyword, five experts mentioned teaching strategies 5 times, curriculum implementation 5 times, and assessment methods 3 times under a clear mission. For a good environment, five experts mentioned safety 3 times, respect 4 times, and inclusivity 2 times. For collaborative governance, five experts mentioned parental engagement 6 times, stakeholder collaboration 3 times, organizational structure 4 times, and community partnerships 1 time. For empowering schools, five experts mentioned financial management 3 times, staff allocation 8 times, and facility maintenance 3 times. Lastly, five experts mentioned transformational leadership 5 times, instructional leadership 19 times, participative leadership 8 times, and flat management 3 times under leadership style.

Research Objective 2 To identify the desired and current practices for enhancing school effectiveness at private schools in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China.

The author received 335 valid questionnaires from teachers who worked in five private schools. The demographic data included Gender, Age, Educational Background, and Teaching Experience at Private Schools, with frequencies and percentages presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Summary of Frequency for Demographic Information (n=335)

Items	Categories	Number	Percent
Gender	Male	115	34.33%
	Female	220	65.67%
Age	20-30 Years Old	123	36.72%
	31-40 Years Old	115	34.33%
	41-50 Years Old	69	20.6%
	51-60 Years Old	28	8.36%
Educational Background	Bachelor's Degree	76	22.69%
	Master's Degree	233	69.55%
	Doctor's Degree	25	7.46%
	Others	1	0.3%
Teaching Experiences at Private Schools	0-5 Years	161	48.06%
	6-10 Years	58	17.31%
	11-15 Years	42	12.54%

Items	Categories	Number	Percent
	16-20 Years	37	11.04%
	Above 20 Years	37	11.04%

A total of 335 valid teacher questionnaires were used to calculate the desired and current practices for school effectiveness. Table 3 presents the Mean and Standard Deviation for the desired and current practices for school effectiveness of the second part of the questionnaire.

Table 3

Summary of the Results of Desired and Current Practices for School Effectiveness (n=335)

Items	Desired		Current			
	\bar{X}	SD	Interpretation	\bar{X}	SD	Interpretation
Clear Mission	4.17	0.665	High	3.93	0.780	High
Leadership Style	3.99	0.762	High	3.94	0.771	High
Empowering Schools	4.11	0.829	High	3.93	0.740	High
Collaborative Governance	3.97	0.879	High	3.89	0.744	High
Good Environment	4.22	0.684	High	4.00	0.705	High
Overall	4.10	0.752	High	3.94	0.745	High

Table 3 summarizes the results of desired and current practices for school effectiveness. Good environment has the highest mean in the desired category, $\bar{X} = 4.22$ (SD=0.684). The clear mission is $\bar{X} = 4.17$ (SD=0.665). Empowering schools is $\bar{X} = 4.11$ (SD=0.829). Leadership style is $\bar{X} = 3.99$ (SD=0.762). Collaborative governance has the lowest mean in the desired category, at $\bar{X} = 3.97$ (SD=0.879). The overall mean score for the desired practices for school effectiveness is $\bar{X} = 4.10$ (SD=0.752). For current practices for school effectiveness, a good environment still has the highest mean, reaching $\bar{X} = 4.00$ (SD=0.705). Leadership style is $\bar{X} = 3.94$ (SD=0.771). Clear mission is $\bar{X} = 3.93$ (SD=0.780). Empowering schools is $\bar{X} = 3.93$ (SD=0.740). Collaborative governance remains the lowest mean, at $\bar{X} = 3.89$ (SD=0.744). The overall mean score for the current practices for school effectiveness is $\bar{X} = 3.94$ (SD=0.745).

Research Objective 3 To identify the needs for enhancing school effectiveness at private schools in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China.

The author used the same data from Research Objective 2 to conduct Research Objective 3 to identify the need to enhance the school's effectiveness. Table 4 shows the specific details.

Table 4

The Priority Needs Index (PNI_{modified}) of Desired and Current Practices for School Effectiveness (n=335)

Item Description	Desired (I)	Current (D)	PNI _{modified} (I-D)/D	Ranking
	\bar{X}	\bar{X}		
Clear Mission	4.17	3.93	0.061	1
Good Environment	4.22	4.00	0.056	2
Empowering Schools	4.14	3.97	0.046	3
Collaborative Governance	3.97	3.89	0.022	4
Leadership Style	3.99	3.94	0.010	5
Overall	4.10	3.95	0.039	

Table 4 presents the Priority Needs Index (PNI_{modified}) of desired and current practices for school effectiveness. According to the ranking, Clear Mission has the highest PNI score, reaching 0.061, followed by Good Environment at 0.056. Next is Empowering Schools, with a PNI score of 0.046, followed by Collaborative Governance at 0.022. Lastly, Leadership Style has the lowest PNI score, at 0.010. The overall score for PNI_{modified} is 0.039. Three school effectiveness practices exceed the overall score of PNI_{modified}: clear mission, good environment, and empowering schools. Therefore, it implies a difference between the desired and current school effectiveness at private schools. These three school effectiveness practices must be prioritized for development to reduce weaknesses. Nonetheless, two school effectiveness practices are below the overall score of PNI_{modified}: leadership style and collaborative governance. This indicates that these two variables are strong enough to sustain good practices.

Research Objective 4 To develop a model for enhancing school effectiveness at private schools in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China.

The author conducted interviews with five experts regarding six main questions. These experts each have over ten years of experience in the field of education and teaching. The six main questions related to model development and the interview results are shown in Table 5. After the interviews, the researcher analyzed the responses using content analysis.

Table 5

Content Analysis of Interviews for Questions 1-6 (n=5)

Questions	Theme/Conclusive Findings/Responses and Comments
1. What do you think about the five factors in the questionnaire on school effectiveness for private schools?	I think it's quite comprehensive, and now I haven't thought of anything missing. If I think of something later, I'll add it.
2. What are the best ways to enhance school effectiveness based on a clear mission? This area needs improvement.	The school creates activities to transform abstract mission statements into clear, actionable objectives . Specifically, schools should conduct structured workshops involving stakeholders to collaboratively define precise and measurable objectives, making the mission easier to

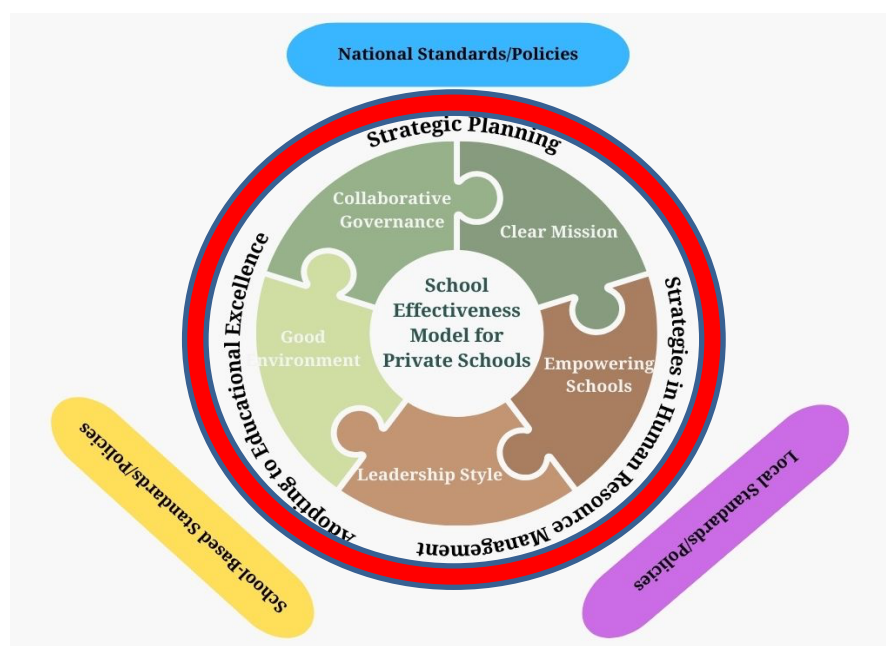
Questions	Theme/Conclusive Findings/Responses and Comments
	implement. Schools ensure practical alignment between the mission and daily practices by clearly specifying short-term and long-term goals.
3. After collecting the questionnaires, the area of empowering schools needs to be enhanced. What is your best way to improve it?	The activity involves designing a structured program that provides teachers and departments with clearly defined, partial autonomy tailored to their competencies and professional needs. Schools could hold professional development workshops and training sessions to clearly outline boundaries of autonomy, identify areas suitable for teacher-led decision-making, and establish measurable frameworks to monitor and evaluate autonomy effectiveness. This would ensure autonomy and support teacher empowerment and overall school growth without compromising operational stability.
4. After collecting the questionnaires, the area of a good environment needs to be improved. What is your best way to enhance it?	The activity involves developing structured programs and workshops designed to establish and reinforce an environment of trust, safety, and emotional security for teachers. It will include transparency and fairness training for administrators, clear guidelines for open communication channels, and regular forums or feedback sessions where teachers can express concerns openly. The activity emphasizes simple yet meaningful daily practices to cultivate a culture of gratitude, fairness, and respect, enhancing the school environment's emotional atmosphere and overall positivity.
5. After collecting the questionnaires, the area of collaborative governance is very close to the overall PNImodified score. What is your best way to enhance it?	Activity will aim to develop structured engagement strategies that allow parents and community members to support the school without direct involvement in daily operations. This includes creating a clear communication platform, such as digital newsletters, forums, and surveys, where stakeholders can stay informed and provide feedback without adding excessive responsibilities to teachers. Additionally, periodic appreciation events such as recognition ceremonies or thank-you letters will be implemented to reinforce stakeholder moral support while maintaining their positive connection to the school.
6. After collecting the questionnaires, the area of leadership style is very close to the overall PNImodified score. What is your best way to enhance it?	The activity will depend on leadership development training that cultivates a multi-dimensional approach incorporating transformational, instructional, and participative leadership elements. The initiative will include leadership workshops where school leaders practice effective change management, strategies for supporting teacher development, and techniques for active participation in daily school activities to enhance teacher engagement and morale. Interactive components will involve case study discussions, role-playing exercises, and real-life leadership application challenges where leaders implement small changes, observe reactions, and refine their leadership style based on teacher feedback. Additionally, shadowing and mentorship programs will be

Questions	Theme/Conclusive Findings/Responses and Comments
	introduced, allowing teachers to experience different leadership approaches firsthand and develop a more collaborative school culture.

Using qualitative and quantitative data analysis, the author constructed a draft model of school effectiveness at private schools in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China. Among the five identified factors for enhancing school effectiveness, three showed significant discrepancies between desired and current practices, indicating the need for targeted improvement and development. Although the remaining two factors scored slightly below the overall score, their proximity prompted the researcher to include them as well, as these factors are also essential competencies for teachers at private schools aiming to enhance school effectiveness. Additionally, the improvement and development of school effectiveness must integrate with flexible leadership practices; thus, their interactions and influences are depicted within the model's conceptual framework. Figure 2 below presents the draft of the model to enhance school effectiveness at private schools in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China.

Figure 2

Draft of the Model for Enhancing School Effectiveness at Private Schools in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China

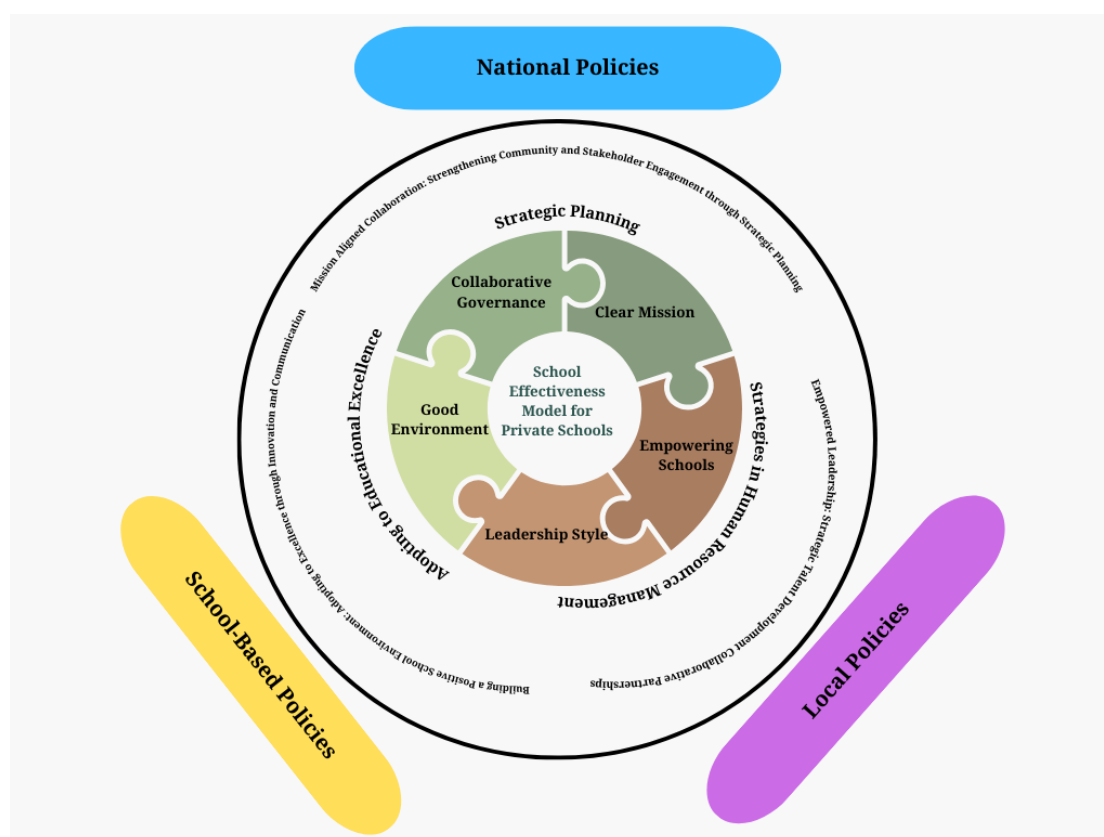


Research Objective 5 To verify a model for enhancing school effectiveness at private schools in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China.

After completing the draft of the model, the author invited nine experts for validation. The validation process is divided into 4 parts: model context, data sources, model process, and model concept diagram. The nine experts validated the draft of the model through face-to-face meetings and online sessions. The experts' evaluations and feedback were documented using a Model Validation Evaluation Form. Based on the feedback and recommendations provided by the nine experts, the author categorized and summarized some key points that required revisions and adjustments. Figure 3 shows the final model proposed by the author for enhancing school effectiveness at private schools in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China.

Figure 3

Final Model for Enhancing School Effectiveness at Private Schools in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China



The final model is divided into five layers. The innermost layer represented the outcome and core objective to improve the effectiveness of private schools through focused leadership and strategic practices designed specifically for private school teachers to enhance school effectiveness, reflecting the ultimate goal. The second layer consisted of five factors essential for improving school effectiveness. Clear mission and collaborative governance are adjacent,

aligning directly with strategic planning, empowering schools, and aligning leadership style directly with human resource management—a good environment aligned with adapting to educational excellence. The third layer comprises three elements related to flexible leadership practices from Gary Yukl, each connecting strategically to the second layer. Strategic planning ensured clear, actionable goals and alignment among stakeholders, enhancing mission clarity and collaboration with parents, community, and stakeholders. Strategies in human resource management practices included comprehensive talent management, flexible recruitment, staff development programs, and nurturing strong leadership skills among educators. Adapting to educational excellence promoted innovation, open communication, transparency, and continuous improvement to cultivate a positive school environment, well-being, and strong school culture. The fourth layer was three encouraged strategies based on Gary Yukl's flexible leadership theory, which aligned with five factors. The three encouraged strategies constituted the specific approaches to achieving the research objectives. They served as a bridge connecting the theoretical framework with the practical enhancement of school effectiveness, directly reflecting the application of theory. The outermost layer included external factors; they were national policies, local policies, and school-based policies. Based on China's Private Education Promotion Law issued by the Ministry of Education (MOE, 2021) and expert interviews conducted under Objective 4, the researcher concluded that private schools, while striving to enhance school effectiveness, must comply with national and local laws and regulations. Within the framework of these laws and regulations, private schools could exercise school-based management tailored to their unique institutional contexts.

The results indicated that five factors impacting school effectiveness within private schools in Shenzhen: emphasizing clear mission, leadership style, empowering schools, collaborative governance, and good environment. Quantitative analysis revealed significant gaps between current and desired practices, particularly regarding the clear mission, good environment, and empowering schools, reflecting the need for strategic improvements aligned with teachers' expectations (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988; Marzano et al., 2005). Notably, leadership style and collaborative governance were identified the smallest discrepancies, with practices even appeared to have current performance at or above the desired level. These results align with established educational theories, particularly Yukl's flexible leadership theory, underscoring the importance of strategies in human resource management, strategic planning, and adapting to educational excellence (Yukl & Lepsinger, 2004). Furthermore, recent policy initiatives from China's Two Sessions in 2025 provide external reinforcement, advocating clearer missions and enhanced resource management for private schools, directly addressing the identified gaps (National Development and Reform Commission, 2025; Sohu Education, 2025). Consequently, private schools in Shenzhen are well-positioned to utilize the developed model, integrating strategic leadership practices to enhance school effectiveness and maintain alignment with evolving educational standards.

Conclusions

Research objective 1 explored five critical factors that emerged through descriptive literature reviews and expert interviews: clear mission, leadership style, empowering schools, collaborative governance, and good environment. The questionnaire results from research objective 2 showed that the interpretation between desired and current practices was high. The PNI^{modified} analysis in research objective 3 showed that significant gaps were identified in three key factors: clear mission, good environment, and empowering schools, which showed notable discrepancies between current and desired levels. These three factors needed to be prioritized for development to reduce weakness. Leadership Style and collaborative governance were below the overall score but still required attention, demonstrating that these factors were strong enough to sustain good practices. While some progress has been made, there is substantial room for improvement. Research objectives 4 and 5 constructed a comprehensive model through qualitative data synthesis from expert interviews, descriptive literature review, and quantitative insights from questionnaires. The model integrated the five identified factors within a framework aligned with Gary Yukl's flexible leadership practices, incorporating strategic planning, human resource management, and adaptability to educational excellence. Based on the experts' suggestions, three designed activities were added after expert validation. In conclusion, the developed model provided a clear, actionable framework tailored to Shenzhen's private school context. Research findings reinforced the robustness and applicability of the model, confirming its potential effectiveness in improving private schools' educational outcomes in Shenzhen.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Students

Students actively participate in activities that align with the model's emphasis on cultivating a positive school environment. Engagement in Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs), Project Based Learning (PBL), and inclusive activities have been demonstrated to enhance educational experiences and promote holistic development. Utilizing feedback channels facilitated by collaborative governance practices enables students to articulate their concerns, suggestions, and insights, thereby contributing to the direct improvement of their school environment.

Recommendations for School Administrators

It is recommended that school administrators implement flexible leadership practices that align with the clear mission and collaborative governance outlined in the developed model. To improve school effectiveness, administrators should prioritize the strategic allocation of resources, promote clear communication, and support decision-making processes that involve teachers, students, parents, and community stakeholders. Furthermore, regular leadership training focused on adaptive and strategic planning should be institutionalized.

Recommendations for School Administrative Staff

School administrative staff should concentrate on refining management techniques and decision-making processes by implementing the data-driven decision-making and collaborative leadership practices delineated in the model. The effective management of resources, the clear delineation of roles and responsibilities, and the streamlining of operational processes should be prioritized. In addition, administrative staff should be provided with training opportunities in strategic resource allocation and governance structures to improve organizational effectiveness further.

Recommendations for Schools

Schools employ the developed model as a comprehensive blueprint to promote educational excellence and enhance performance. This entails implementing innovative curricula, technology integration, and enhanced instructional methods. Furthermore, schools must proactively engage in policy advocacy to align school practices with national, local, and school-based standards and policies delineated in the external layers of the model. Additionally, schools are advised to systematically implement designed activities, including strategic planning, human resource management, and adaptations to educational excellence, to ensure sustained growth and competitive advantage.

Recommendations for Teachers

Teachers are encouraged to adopt the flexible leadership practices outlined in the developed model, particularly in strategic human resource management and educational adaptability. Professional development programs prioritizing inclusivity, innovative pedagogical approaches, and alignment with a clear mission can further enhance teaching and learning outcomes. Teachers should also use structured feedback to promote continuous professional growth and improve classroom dynamics.

Recommendations for Future Studies

In the interest of enhancing the representativeness of the data, future studies should consider increasing the sample size and response rate of teachers' questionnaires. While 747 questionnaires were distributed, only approximately half were returned, and the number of invalid questionnaires was notably reduced. To enhance the representativeness of future findings, it is recommended that targeted incentives or more explicit promotion of the importance of the study be considered to ensure a higher participation rate. In addition, a longitudinal study could employ a follow-up design to assess the long-term impact of implementing the model in different private school settings in Shenzhen, thereby providing more insight into the effectiveness and adaptability of the model over time. Furthermore, a comparative study could delve deeper into the application of flexible leadership practices and their outcomes in educational settings beyond Shenzhen, thus expanding the scope and applicability of the findings.

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