Perpetuating inclusive education amidst the affiliative leadership style: Challenges and potentials

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Abstract

It has been advanced that an instructor who assimilates the affiliated values and beliefs will steadily prepare learners as individuals and respect learners' needs and preferences. This research examines how the affiliative leadership style affects learners' inclusion in foreign language instruction. Students' classroom integration is demanding; therefore, understanding their basic needs, and showing empathy and interest to aid them transcend their frailties and improve their performance are persistent traits of affiliative leaders that should be implemented to achieve the aforementioned aim. This study used an experimental method to analyze how the application of affiliative leadership style in class affects learners. As such the aforementioned style was applied as a teaching skill with third-year students at the university. Based on the results, it was concluded that the effectual applicability of this approach at university has created personal connections and has sustained, as well, a peaceful learning environment besides a positive teacher-learner positive rapport.

Keywords: Achievement; affiliative leadership style; students' inclusion; resilience.

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1. Introduction

This study assesses the application of the affiliative leadership style in the educational context. By doing so, we intend to apply a style that is commonly used in businesses and workplaces to the classroom setting. An instructor who embraces an affiliative mindset values learners as individuals and respects as well their needs and interests (Zhang, Wu, Liu, Ren & Lin, 2022). The learners' classroom incorporation is perplexing (Dong et al., 2021; Kit et al., 2022). Therefore, considering their demands or requisites and aiding them to transcend their weaknesses are essential characteristics of affiliative leaders.

Though many leadership styles are identified, our endeavor sheds light mainly on affiliative leadership due to its power in terms of incorporation and achievement. Nevertheless, no style is free from pitfalls; taking advantage of each style is of pre-eminence. To proceed, the following questions were raised: How is inclusion achieved among generation z learners? To what extent the integration of a leadership style could be effective in educational incorporation, performance, and future workforce entry respectively?

Regardless of the learning preferences and needs of learners, their psychological state and aptitude are prominent too (Jederlund & von Rosen, 2022), yet the training days lack the aforementioned consideration. The overall elements included in the teachers' training days revolve around the applicability of the teaching methods or the situation, action, and result (SARS) technique for course creation. Still, the performance of learners is average without mentioning their poor inclusion in the classroom context (Pang, 2022). As an attempt, this work highlights the possibility of assimilating one of the leadership styles into an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context and measuring the inclusive effects in return.

1.1. Literature Review

1.1.1. Goleman Leadership Styles' Categorization

As mentioned in the figure, Goleman (2000) synthesized six leadership styles including the affiliative technique. They essentially depict their effectiveness in the workplace, and while their level of efficiency varies from one style to the next, each has advantages and disadvantages. As long as the overall quality of the work outcome is required, the coaching style appears to be the best-adopted style in comparison to the others, by which the leader could work on the individuals' zone of proximal development and improve their unconscious competencies. The variation of each depends on the degree of authority and permissiveness. The more authoritative the leader is, the more individuals, employees, or students conform to the norms. As a result, the incorporation of the styles is intended to assist individuals in reducing problems and increasing achievement (Varghese, Vernon-Feagans & Bratsch-Hines, 2019). Nonetheless, the adopted style becomes dysfunctional when there is no background knowledge to make the others improve their performance. In this vein, bridging and breaking the ice between the trainer and the trainee should be taken considerably. We cannot disregard that the student's characteristics are needed to identify the extent to which they are self-directed or regulated (Lorber, Rooney & Van Der Enden, 2019). It is worth mentioning that innovation and creativity are part of the process; students cannot reach a higher order thinking as included in the revised version of Bloom's Taxonomy without adopting an adequate approach that fulfills the aforementioned objective (Styron, 2015).

The suggested styles are not enough to meet the needs of the 21st century. With technological progress, a rich amount of information banks, cultures' shift, changing beliefs and behaviors have constructed a dynamic environment in which one style or approach is not enough to meet the educational needs, i.e., each generation has its characteristics and deficiencies (Dwidienawati et al., 2021). Thus, the integration of a blend of styles is a prerequisite to achieving our teaching objectives. Among the selected objectives, resilience, problem-solving, and creativity shape the modern world to a large extent. Yet, the

previously mentioned skills could not be mastered through a traditional style. Creativity, as an illustration, needs a different avenue to deal with an issue and accords learners with the opportunity to transmit a creative action into an innovative work. As a priority, teachers, who will play the role of leaders, must in return possess the creative skills of authentic leadership. As maintained by Styron (2015, p. 57)*,* this approach must be personalized to build upon the talents and predispositions of leaders by doing so, a creative mindset is built upon fostering personal imagination, developing individual and collective expertise, and establishing an environment that rewards motivated individuals. Goleman proposed styles of leadership, and Figure 1 displays these styles of leadership.

Figure 1
Goleman proposed styles of leadership

Table 1. Six styles of leadership proposed by Goleman

Leadership style	Main characteristics	The style in phrase
Coercive	Demands immediate compliance, has overall negative impact on climate in organization, works good in time of crisis or in case of problems with workers	"Do, what I tell you"
Authoritative	Mobilizes people toward vision, works especially good, if new vision or new direction is required	"Come with me"
Affiliative	Concentrates on harmony and builds emotional bonds, works good, when people face difficult circumstances	"People come first"
Democratic	Forges consensus through participation and works successfully, if there is a need to built buy-in or in consensus, or to get input from valuable team members	"What do you think"
Pacesetting	Style sets high standards for performance, works effectivly with motivated and competent people, knowing, how to get quick results from them	"Do it, as I do, now"
Coaching	Develop people for future, works especially good if there is a need to help others improving performance or setting long term strengths	"Try this"

Source: Based on Goleman [2000, pp. 82-83]

1.1.2.Affiliative Approach Conception

Accordingly, the affiliative style application in any context helps in establishing a peaceful working environment among the group members, by which a positive rapport is created between individuals, further, a good affiliative leader who is apt to create a comfortable working environment makes the others feel safe 'psychological safety'. This safe atmosphere encourages others to think outside of the box and be creative (Sinek, 2014). As depicted by Nwokamma et al. (2018, p. 40) "affiliative leadership style promotes peace and harmony among the team members. It is very appropriate when a leader has the intention to mend bad feelings that may have developed in the team".

In the educational context, it is not merely to integrate all learners into the learning environment because a multi-component approach could not be feasible with overcrowded classrooms. Henceforth, in larger communities whereby the affiliative style's attention is all on people, its integration into the educational context could regard learners without seeking to understand their learning styles and preferences. This would entail that negative feedback is not as pivotal as how to react appropriately when receiving it, this paves the way for individuals to measure their pitfalls and work on them at ease without any pressure or judgmental comments. As asserted by Nwokamma et al. (2018, p. 40):

> This leadership style is best for groups or organizations that are highly volatile and need reassurance. There can also be some kind of difficulties faced when implementing it. A good example is that poor employee performance would not be taken seriously...as this leadership style is all about the people, a leader should try to value his people and their emotions more than the organization's tasks and goals, which is a big risk for a business's bottom line.

In this prospect, this style of leadership that a leader adopts has an impact on the physical, mental, and affective health of a group. As a result, affiliative leadership is one of the styles that can be used to positively influence others. Gaining acquaintance with this leadership style helps in enhancing team performance and builds trust among the members. The majority of affiliative leaders estimate progressive positive feedback whereby formal and informal exchanges between poles are not regarded. Therefore, affiliative leadership mirrors the sense of responsibility and always reveals to the employees how compulsory the factors that affect their working productivity (Strong et al., 2013; Seymen, 2017).

One of the basic features of affiliative leaders is to prioritize their fellows or group members. It is accredited to respecting others' needs, opinions, and feelings, in this way, exceptional performance opportunities are enhanced. Second of all, an increased sense of morality is highlighted in this type whereby any unethical attitude is not tolerated. Third of all, flexibility is compulsory to create a productive environment by which all opinions, suggestions, and even solutions are accounted for. Fourth, concentrating on the positive side behind each issue, and encouraging positive reinforcement and resilience is necessary to prevent stressful situations. (Cwalina & Drzewiecka, 2015; Jackson, 2013; Arnold, 2021).

Therefore, affiliative leaders often have special features that set them apart from other styles of leadership. These features are summarized as follows:

- Good communicators in diversified situations,
- Establishing harmony among the members and concentrating on problem resolution, while focusing on the emotional needs of others,
- Creates an understanding of others' needs,
- A considerable sense of empathy,
- Promoting a flexible working environment,
- Providing positive feedback and appraisal, when necessary,
- Constructing resilience to defeat stressed or effectual events,
- Encourages productivity and innovation.

1.1.3.Inclusive education

The literature review has provided a rich framework that outlines the approaches to inclusive education. Scholars like Corps et al. (2012) maintain that socio-culturally speaking, classrooms are diverse, thus the integration of students in higher education is quite challenging as it is a step to boost engagement and positive achievement respectively. In some cases, teachers could face learners who have certain psychological disorders such as high levels of anxiety, depression, family dynamics, substance use, and so forth. Therefore, the role of the teacher, in this regard, is to understand what kind of problems impedes the learners from pursuing their educational and academic careers. Therefore, inclusive education is a process that encourages students to be active participants in the classroom, to be engaged in their learning, and to minimize exclusion as much as possible to respond to the various requirements of the twenty-first century; it takes into account individuals' teaching and learning styles, interests, and social/personal needs. It is worth mentioning that inclusive learning and teaching in higher education displays how curricula, pedagogy, and assessment are designed and delivered to engage students in

relevant learning that is accessible to all (Fry et al., 2009; Florian, 2015; Soriano et al., 2017; Liu & Chiang, 2019).

Inclusive education is affiliated with social inclusion and people's willingness to be seen as citizens and members of the speech community (Novo-Corti, 2010). It integrates a bound of skills that pave the way for individuals to have a successful academic and professional career, be self-actualized and assume responsibilities, reveal ethno-relativity, and acknowledge as well cultural diversity. In a nutshell, diversity is valued within the inclusive framework as a strength, more than a weakness, as learners work together collaboratively, exchange ideas, and learn from each other.

1.2. Purpose of the study

The literature review plays a vital role in displaying scholarly knowledge regarding classroom management, leadership styles, and learners' inclusion/exclusion in their learning context. Thereupon, it paves the way for teachers to gain acquaintance with the different techniques and approaches applied in the teaching context. This paper, with its original contribution, attempts to examine the possibility of adopting a leadership style, i.e., the affiliative style principles, to ensure learners' inclusion in the learning context. Its application is delimited to workplaces and employers, yet we attempt to re-orient it toward an educational context.

2. Method

This study is a systematic examination of the affiliate values; thus, it is both descriptive and qualitative. It discusses the role of affiliative leadership style in the development of learners' communicative skills and competencies. The study frames the different types of leadership that are approximately similar to the teachers' teaching styles.

2.1. Participants

Hence, as an instructor in college, we intentionally adopted this aforementioned style as a teaching skill with third-year students at university. The sample is selected through a non-probability technique. The study was ethical and the participants were unharmed and remained anonymous.

2.2. Data collection method

Further, data is collected from a structured observation during the first semester. The style was mainly adopted in Linguistics classes while scaffolding our teaching lessons with three separate groups. Gender is not considered an important variable in this endeavor. The effectiveness of the affiliative style as a skill in the EFL context was not instantaneous, but it was recorded at the end of the semester.

3. Results

3.1. The Leadership Style Application

The consideration of the conscious and unconscious competencies of individuals is highly functional in the affiliative approach, and this is quantified through the ability of individuals to re-think their performance in case they fail, i.e., leadership is shared to bring the abstract into action (Gagnon et al., 2012; Arnold, 2021). It is noteworthy to mention that in the affiliative style, there is no deliberate freedom to make decisions as the 'Laissez Fair' style suggests (Corrigan & Merry, 2022); even-though, though coordination and corporation are recommended. Accrediting the psycho-motor and affective domains helps in inspiring people to perform well in different educational tasks (Nsubuga, 2008). Additionally, this style could also apply to teachers to enhance morale in case of conflicts or misunderstandings (Wynn, 2019). In a nutshell, adopting the affiliative type should be seen as an option in the educational context

since it is proximal to achieving resilient leadership and quickly withstand complex problems (Sherman, 2012; Resilient Leadership, 2020).

The integration of this aforementioned approach in the university context was more efficient for the inclusion of learners in the EFL context. It is easy to be authoritative, but it is still hard to convince them to conform to your norms. Hence, our attempt to act as an affiliative leader in class has attracted their attention and unintentionally encouraged the students to conform to the classroom management rules. Creating a conformable learning atmosphere was the key to creating a bridge and maximizing mutual understanding. Learners' inclusion, in this vein, is achieved when learners assure their belongingness to the EFL setting.

The plan to attract their attention was via raising topics of their interest, as we scaffold to create a bridge and minimize the cultural and educational gaps. Once they felt comfortable in learning they established an idea that their suggestions, assumptions, ideas, and opinions are seriously taken into account. Hence, the affiliative leadership style was unintentionally transferred to them to take the role of leaders not in decision-making or management, but in the form of active participation in every decision we made in class or problem-solving cases. This latter is regarded as a tip to reinforce the psychological aspect which influences our learners' performance, i.e., the learning styles and preferences are not the only keys to success in inclusion.

3.2. Effective leadership style for generation Z

The affiliative style was later applied through project work (collaborative work), in which students were asked to take the lead and control the groups to which they belonged. This initiative was not abrupt but planned after raising several issues related to their program as ethnic groups' conflicts, diversity, absence of assimilation, gender differentiation, and so forth. The creation of a safe atmosphere was the first step to reducing tension and anxiety, and then they were given the role to mediate and solve problems from their perspectives. Trust was smoothly built between the researcher and the learner and this displays the participation of all learners in the class. The main role of the teacher was to guide them and minimize any misunderstanding among learners due to the socio-cultural topics that were raised in each session.

The grid below demonstrates the main outcomes of applying the leadership style with Generation Z, considering that Gen Z learners share several characteristics that align to a large extent with the requirements of the selected style. This generation of digital natives embraces Ed-Tech techniques and is always open to new experiences. Gen Z witnessed the revolutionary accessibility of smartphones, social media, and even online gaming. Their addiction to smart technology has advantages and drawbacks; mental health is one of their inescapable problems which need careful consideration, for this reason, the affiliative approach to leadership was selected among all styles to help establish psychological safety in EFL classrooms. The main observed items upon the application of the affiliative leadership style are displayed as follows (Table 1):

Table 1
Major features covered upon the style application in class

Observed items among students	Yes	No
Flexibility	X	
Empathy		X
Good communication		X
Creativity and innovation	X	
Turn-taking		X
Problem-solving	X	

Provide constructive feedback to participants on performance	X	
Autonomy		X
Optimise integration	X	
Manage conflict effectively		X
Have the ability to motivate and inspire	X	
Performance improvement		X
Mis-understanding		X
Reduce Anxiety	X	
Group work/ collaboration	X	
Maintain control and ensure safety.	X	

From a psycho-linguistic perspective, learners' good performance in foreign languages is associated with several ascribed factors such as age, motivation, intelligence, and aptitude (Purba, 2018). These aforementioned remain passive if the instructor lacks the adequate approach to improve them. Thereby, working on the cognitive skills of students is hierarchized. As displayed in the table above, several skills are improved via our selected style, such as flexibility in cultural differences, teamwork collaboration, problem-solving, creative ideas, and anxiety control, these characteristics are part of the 'unconscious competencies' of our sample; though performance is still below the average, positive feedback is embraced and accepted. We cannot disregard the fact that achievement is important for learners, but gaining the basic skills that are required in the workforce is compulsory. In a nutshell, Generation Z, unlike other generations, is highly influenced by digitalization, hence, they share a myriad of characteristics that do not need the affiliative style only, but a fusion of all styles to ease their integration in the workplace and revolutionize the job market.

4. Conclusion

This endeavor assesses the effects of leadership style incorporation on students' classroom inclusion. To proceed, we attempted to adopt the affiliative leadership style as an approach due to its functional role. Though several styles are highlighted in this work, their norms do not match the overall aim of inclusion. The aforementioned style evaluates students solely as individuals and does not consider their flaws to be mistaken. Their inclusion was a priority in our context by which collaborative work is fostered.

This study proves that once learners estimate their inclusion in problem-solving, their creativity, innovation, and resilience are mastered. This latter could not only guarantee their full attention in class but will unintentionally fix their learned helplessness from past experiences that are still impairing their self-regulated character. In a nutshell, psychological safety is crucial to re-evaluating the adopted teaching approaches and rethinking the idea of creating a safe atmosphere where individuals feel that they are preferentially involved in their learning process.

5. Recommendations

- The process of integration is not instantaneous, passion and patience are required.
- Inclusion should be done online and on-site.
- Raising awareness vis-a-vis self-blend and flex models.
- Teachers' role is decisive in attracting learners' interest in e-learning.
- Adopting the leadership style (s) in the educational context to ensure students' inclusion.
- The psychological aspect is of importance, it should be taken considerably.
- Teachers could influence students' achievement if they play the role of leaders in the classroom context.

- Students' low performance could be associated with low or minimal engagement, the creation of an emotional bond is compulsory.
- Re-assuring reciprocation.
- Creating a flexible teaching/learning environment.
- Generalizing the applicability of affiliative leadership with teachers, parents, and administrative staff.
- Teachers should not insist on working hard after students fail, especially if a lot of effort was expended; doing so makes students skeptical about their innate abilities.
- Encourage effort via positive feedback to students who have done efforts.
- Teachers should establish positive relationships with students, especially those who do not accept failure or try to avoid it. Thus, showing interest in learners encourage them to prosper.
- Students need to take risks to improve their careers by reflecting on their failures and analyzing the reason behind their occurrence.
- When we find the problem behind failure, we need to assess it objectively.
- Our compensation from under-performance depends on 'resilience'; we need to be resilient to withstand reversal and failure.

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