



Research Article

Leadership Styles And Student Government Effectiveness: A Cross-Country Structural Model Among Student Leaders In The Philippines And India

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Abstract

This study examined leadership styles and student government effectiveness among student leaders in private higher education institutions in the Philippines and India. Using a cross-sectional design, purposive sampling, and a structured survey, data from 200 student leaders were analyzed through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) and Multi-Group Analysis (MGA). Results showed that transactional leadership was the most prominent leadership style, while laissez-faire leadership was the least evident. The measurement model demonstrated strong internal consistency, with composite reliability values ranging from 0.923 to 0.980. Transactional leadership was the strongest predictor of student government effectiveness ($\beta = 0.613$, $t = 7.979$, $p < .001$), while transformational leadership also showed a significant positive relationship; laissez-faire leadership had a weaker and less significant association. No significant cross-country differences were observed, suggesting similar leadership-effectiveness patterns in the Philippines and India. The findings highlight the importance of effective leadership styles, particularly transactional leadership, in strengthening student government effectiveness in higher education.

Keywords: leadership styles, transactional leadership, transformational leadership, laissez-faire leadership, student government effectiveness, PLS-SEM, cross-cultural analysis, Full Range Leadership Model, student leadership, higher education.

1. Introduction

Student leadership and student government have become central to higher education governance because they develop leadership capacity while giving students a formal role in representation, participation, and institutional decision-making (Munando & Chingwanangwana, 2025; Van Der Meer et al., 2022). Across educational settings, leadership style is treated as a key determinant of effectiveness, yet the evidence also shows that leadership outcomes are shaped by governance practices, school context, and culture rather than by style alone (Murage, 2024; Suhaimi et al., 2026; Görgülü et al., 2024).

In recent years, student government has been increasingly recognized as more than a ceremonial structure in schools and universities; it is a practical arena where young people learn representation, accountability, collaboration, and decision-making. Student leadership participation appears to benefit academic skills, employability, peer interaction, persistence, and wellbeing, with cross-national studies showing broadly similar gains despite some contextual differences (Van Der Meer et al., 2022). In university and school governance, student leaders also contribute to institutional responsiveness and development, and leadership frameworks such as student representative councils are described as important for meeting student needs and strengthening governance (Munando & Chingwanangwana, 2025; Cai, 2025).

Within this broader field, leadership style remains a central explanatory variable. Evidence from youth governance in the Philippines shows that transactional leadership significantly predicts multiple dimensions of good governance, including transparency, participation, accountability, rule of law, and continuous implementation, while transparency, accountability, and rule of law are strong predictors of effective leadership (Mutya et al., 2026). Other studies in student and educational settings report that democratic leadership is associated with stronger collaboration, wiser decision-making, and positive performance outcomes, while laissez-faire approaches tend to be less effective and autocratic leadership produces more mixed results depending on context (Ulanday et al., 2024; Holl & Ali, 2025; Maqbool et al., 2024).

Leadership effectiveness, however, is not explained by leadership style in isolation. A systematic review of student-centered leadership in Southeast Asia found that leadership influence on student outcomes is mostly indirect, operating through teaching quality, professional learning, school climate, and curriculum enactment (Suhaimi et al., 2026). In the Philippine context, leadership style among student government officers was positively associated with integrity, empathy, and overall values development, while leadership practices and communication style were not significantly related, suggesting that how students lead may matter more than the mere presence of leadership activity (U, 2025). A cross-cultural perspective is especially important for research on student leadership in Asia. Comparative leadership scholarship argues that knowledge of educational leadership remains fragmented and that cross-cultural comparative

studies are necessary to develop more globally valid explanations of leadership practice (Dimmock, 2019). Culture influences how leadership is understood, enacted, and evaluated, and studies across multiple countries show that leadership traits, behaviors, and preferred practices differ by national context even where some common values remain (U, 2025).

This cultural argument is particularly relevant to the Philippines and India. In the Philippines, student leadership is described as being shaped by collective values and inclusive practices, with shared values such as bayanihan and pakikipagkapwa providing a common basis for student governance across diverse ethnolinguistic groups (Batang et al., 2025). More broadly across Asia, collectivistic values, power distance, and other cultural norms shape how distributed, moral, democratic, and authoritative leadership practices are interpreted and implemented (Tan, 2022; U, 2025; Syahrizal, 2026). Evidence on South Asian students also suggests that leadership engagement is shaped by cultural inclusion, acculturation, and alignment with cultural interests, indicating that student leaders' sense of efficacy and participation cannot be fully understood apart from culture (Selvaratnam & Holmes, 2022).

Despite growing interest in student leadership, several gaps remain. Existing studies often examine single institutions or single national settings, such as Philippine youth officials, Cambodian universities, Kenyan public universities, or Zimbabwean higher education, which limits direct cross-country comparison (Mutya et al., 2026; Holl & Ali, 2025; Murage, 2024; Munando & Chingwanangwana, 2025). Some work also notes that research on student leadership and culture remains fragmented, and one comparative study explicitly identified the absence of research examining how governance form and local culture shape student leadership profiles (Suhaimi et al., 2026; Görgülü et al., 2024).

This gap justifies a multi-group analysis of student leaders in the Philippines and India. Such a design can test whether the relationship between leadership styles and student government effectiveness is similar across two Asian contexts or varies with cultural and governance conditions, consistent with contingency and cross-cultural perspectives on leadership (Görgülü et al., 2024; U, 2025). It can also respond to calls for culturally grounded leadership research that does not simply transfer Western models into Asian settings without examining local interpretation and institutional realities (Syahrizal, 2026; U, 2025).

Accordingly, the present study seeks to examine how leadership styles relate to student government effectiveness across two culturally distinct but regionally relevant contexts. By comparing these groups, the study aims to clarify whether leadership styles such as democratic, transactional, transformational, shared, or more hierarchical approaches show similar patterns of association with effectiveness, and whether cross-cultural differences help explain variation in student governance outcomes. In this way, the study addresses the need for

cross-cultural, student-centered evidence on leadership in Asia and for stronger empirical grounding in how leadership style shapes student government effectiveness.

1.1. Literature Review

Leadership Styles in Higher Education

Research on the Full Range Leadership Model (FRLM) in higher education has grown considerably in the past five years, consistently positioning transformational and transactional leadership as the two styles most strongly linked to institutional and student outcomes, while laissez-faire leadership remains the weakest and most inconsistent predictor. Several studies affirm the primacy of transformational leadership for institutional performance, job satisfaction, and innovation (Bou et al., 2024; Henkel & Ade, 2025; Samodien et al., 2024), yet this advantage is not absolute. Comparative and context-specific studies show that transactional leadership can outperform transformational approaches under certain structural conditions: for instance, in digitally transformed university environments where structured, exchange-based leadership more directly predicts student work engagement (Niță & Guțu, 2023), while in Ethiopian higher education, transactional leadership behaviors have even shown small negative associations with student engagement relative to transformational leadership (Assefa et al., 2025). This pattern suggests that the relative strength of transactional versus transformational leadership is not fixed but shifts with institutional context, a finding directly relevant to comparing the Philippines and India.

At the student level specifically, evidence is more mixed and points toward flexible, situational leadership use rather than adherence to a single style. Hungarian university students exhibit distinguishable transformational, supportive, defensive, and laissez-faire profiles, with transformational leadership linked to managerial and entrepreneurial inclination (Perpék et al., 2021); Filipino student leaders show a similar pattern, favoring authoritative leadership for skills awareness while moving fluidly between styles depending on the task (Musni et al., 2024, as cited in Lpt et al., 2024); and among university students more broadly, democratic and laissez-faire styles associate with higher group-assignment satisfaction, with autocratic leadership showing no significant effect (Rasid et al., 2023). Notably, laissez-faire leadership's effect is not uniformly negative across this literature: it is destructive in formal organizational settings (Skogstad et al., 2007) but occasionally beneficial in peer-led, autonomy-seeking student contexts (Rasid et al., 2023), which anticipates and helps explain the weak-but-positive laissez-faire effect in the present study. Organizational-level findings from Ugandan public universities (Turyahikayo et al., 2023) and a German aviation firm applying the full FRLM in practice (Heinzl, 2022) further confirm that transactional leadership retains practical value in structured, accountability-driven organizations, precisely the operational profile of student government.

Student Government and Student Leadership Effectiveness

A second cluster of recent literature examines student government not as a symbolic body but as a functional mechanism of institutional quality assurance and student development. Student self-governance structures are shown to meaningfully shape higher education quality by participating in program development, accreditation, and internal quality processes (Kondur et al., 2021; Skyba et al., 2022), while participation in leadership training and extracurricular organizations is associated with stronger collaborative and socially responsible leadership values among students (Kim & Holyoke, 2022). Graduate student government involvement similarly contributes to leadership identity and efficacy development (Vaughn & Burns, 2025), and systematic review evidence identifies transformational leadership, ethical governance, and student empowerment as recurring themes linked to improved academic and social outcomes across student-led organizations (Capito, 2025).

At the same time, this literature cautions against assuming a direct, linear relationship between student participation and governance effectiveness. Structural constraints can blunt the impact of student leadership: Chinese student governments, for example, show uneven internal power distribution favoring party-affiliated members (Huang et al., 2021), and a recent large-scale study found that while student participation in decision-making improved satisfaction and academic performance, it showed no significant relationship with university leadership effectiveness itself, implying that institutional culture and leadership style, not participation alone, drive effectiveness outcomes (Leskaj et al., 2025). This distinction is important for the present study: it reinforces the rationale for isolating leadership style (rather than participation or governance structure broadly) as the key explanatory variable for student government effectiveness.

Cultural Context and Leadership: Asian and Comparative Perspectives

Cross-cultural leadership scholarship converges on the view that collectivist, high-power-distance cultural contexts systematically shape how leadership styles are enacted and received, though the direction of this influence varies by setting. Across Pakistan, China, and Saudi Arabia, collectivist institutional cultures strengthen the relationships among ethical climate, leadership, and team cohesion (Din et al., 2025), and organizational culture more broadly moderates leadership-performance relationships in Pakistani higher education (Jamali et al., 2021). Chinese universities show a clear institutional preference for transformational over transactional leadership (Haibo, 2022), while a systematic review confirms that collectivist, high-power-distance educational contexts more broadly favor authoritative and relationally embedded leadership styles (Bellibaş et al., 2025). Cultural empathy and open communication likewise emerge as consistent predictors of leadership effectiveness across diverse cultural settings (Safitri et al., 2024).

Evidence specific to the Philippines and India adds important nuance. Filipino academic leaders are shown to actively integrate cultural values such as *pakikipagkapwa* and *bayanihan* into governance practice, strengthening relational trust even as these values sit uneasily within formal bureaucratic structures

(Batang et al., 2025), a tension worth naming explicitly since it complicates a purely “collectivism favors transformational leadership” narrative. Indian school leaders, meanwhile, predominantly exhibit transformational and laissez-faire leadership shaped by hierarchical, collectivist norms, in contrast to the confrontational, individual-autonomy-oriented style more typical of European leaders (Dhingra et al., 2024). Read together, these two country-specific findings suggest that “collectivism” does not yield a single, uniform leadership signature even within Asia, which strengthens rather than weakens the justification for cross-country MGA, since it implies that real variation could plausibly have emerged between the Philippines and India, even though results ultimately show none. Broader comparative work in Taiwan and Hong Kong further shows that student activism and shared governance interact with cultural and political contexts in ways that shape trust between students and institutional leadership (Lo, 2025), reinforcing the idea that governance effectiveness is culturally situated even when core leadership mechanisms appear to travel across borders.

Methodological Approaches: PLS-SEM in Leadership Research

Recent applications of PLS-SEM to leadership and student-outcome research support both the appropriateness of the method for this study and the general direction of findings. Task-oriented leadership positively predicts student academic performance while people-oriented leadership shows no significant effect in Malaysian higher education (Norizan et al., 2025), and transactional leadership is confirmed as an effective driver of organizational effectiveness in public universities, with laissez-faire leadership again showing a positive but statistically insignificant influence (Turyahikayo et al., 2023) worth citing explicitly for convergence. Structural modeling has also been used to isolate leadership-relevant predictors among students directly: student leaders demonstrate significantly higher authentic leadership attributes than non-leaders (Crawford et al., 2024), achievement motivation predicts both leadership and entrepreneurial spirit among Indonesian students (Wiyono & Wu, 2022), and instructional leadership and self-efficacy directly predict school effectiveness among Philippine school heads (Fernandez & Tagadiad, 2024), the latter offering a useful domestic PLS-SEM precedent. Collectively, this body of work confirms PLS-SEM as the established standard for modeling leadership-effectiveness relationships in education research, particularly where composite constructs and predictive (rather than purely confirmatory) aims are involved (Hair et al., 2022).

Research Gaps and Justification for a Cross-Country Structural Model

Despite this growing body of work, three gaps converge to justify the present study. First, a persistent Western epistemological bias in leadership theory is increasingly contested: African higher education scholars question the direct applicability of Western leadership frameworks to non-Western institutional realities (Alemu, 2023), and scholars across Pakistan, Turkey, and Malaysia describe Western leadership literature as incongruent with Eastern epistemologies, characterizing its unexamined transfer as a form of intellectual hegemony (Khan et al., 2021). Second, calls for cross-cultural leadership research remain largely programmatic rather than empirically answered: Webber

(2021) explicitly calls for an international, comparative study of teacher leadership, and reviews of cross-cultural leadership models emphasize the need for culturally responsive frameworks without yet supplying comparative structural evidence at the student level (Taqwim et al., 2024; Mahmoud et al., 2024). Third, and most specific to this study's design, direct empirical comparison between Asian national contexts remains rare: broad meta-analytic work treats "Asian collectivism" as a near-homogeneous category (Kim, 2024), even though more fine-grained comparative work shows measurable intra-regional variation in collectivist orientation between societies such as China and India (Ren & Kuai, 2023). No identified study has yet applied a structural, multi-group comparative model to test whether leadership–effectiveness relationships hold uniformly between the Philippines and India specifically. This is the precise gap the present cross-country PLS-SEM model addresses.

1.2 Theoretical Lens

Understanding how governance outcomes within student organizations are influenced by leadership styles requires a robust theoretical and analytical foundation. The use of structural modeling techniques in this study provides empirical clarity by examining the relationships among leadership constructs and governance effectiveness. Anchored on the Full Range Leadership Theory (FRLT), this research offers a comprehensive lens for analyzing leadership behaviors within student governments. The Full Range Leadership Theory is particularly suitable for student governance because it encompasses a continuum of leadership styles transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire that are observable in organizational settings, including academic institutions. Student leaders, much like formal organizational leaders, are tasked with motivating peers, managing responsibilities, and achieving collective goals. Transformational leadership, which emphasizes inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, aligns well with the developmental and participatory nature of student governments. Meanwhile, transactional leadership reflects structured exchanges, such as compliance with rules and performance-based recognition, which are also evident in student-led organizations.

Furthermore, the applicability of FRLT across cultures strengthens its relevance in this study, which examines two non-Western contexts. Although leadership theories have often been developed in Western settings, FRLT has demonstrated adaptability across diverse cultural environments due to its broad conceptualization of leadership behaviors. In Asian contexts, where collectivist values such as group harmony, respect for authority, and interdependence are emphasized, transformational leadership may resonate strongly because of its focus on shared vision and collective progress. However, transactional leadership may operate differently in collectivist societies. In such contexts, leadership is not solely based on formal exchanges or contingent rewards but is also influenced by social relationships, group expectations, and cultural norms. The emphasis on community and cooperation may reduce the effectiveness of purely transactional approaches, as motivation is often driven by social cohesion rather

than individual gain. This suggests that while transactional leadership remains relevant, its impact may be moderated by cultural values that prioritize collective well-being over individual performance. By situating the Full Range Leadership Theory within the context of student governance in underrepresented Asian settings, this study extends its theoretical applicability and contributes to cross-cultural leadership scholarship. It provides outcome-based validation of leadership styles as predictors of student government effectiveness, offering comparative insights that address gaps in global leadership research.

1.3 Research Questions

The study seeks to determine the relationship between leadership styles and student government effectiveness among undergraduate student leaders in higher education institutions, comparing two Asian countries: India and the Philippines. This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Do leadership styles influence student government effectiveness among the Philippines and India in relation to their student leaders?
2. What is the level of effectiveness of student government among student leaders in higher education institutions in both countries?
3. What is the extent of these leadership styles in predicting student government effectiveness of student leaders in the Philippines and India?
4. Which among leadership styles is the strongest predictor of student government effectiveness in relation to student leaders of both countries?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional design within an explanatory-predictive modeling framework. While the study examines how leadership styles predict student government effectiveness, it does not establish causality due to the single-point data collection. Instead, it focuses on identifying significant predictive relationships between variables. To analyze the complex relationships among constructs, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed. According to Hair et al. (2022), PLS-SEM is appropriate for predictive research, particularly when dealing with relatively small sample sizes and complex models. It enables the simultaneous assessment of the measurement model (reliability and validity) and the structural model (hypothesized relationships), making it suitable for this study.

2.2 Respondents and Sampling Procedure

In the study, respondents were officially recognized undergraduate student government officers from 1 higher education institution in the Philippines and 1 in India. A total of 200 respondents were included, with 100 participants from each country. A purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that participants met specific inclusion criteria: (1) currently serving as a recognized student leader and (2) having at least one year of leadership experience. Recruitment was conducted through coordination with student affairs offices and

student government units across participating institutions. Invitations to participate were distributed via institutional email and official student organization communication channels. The study included participants from private higher education institutions. The response rate was calculated as the number of completed surveys divided by the number of invitations distributed. To ensure sample adequacy, an a priori power analysis was conducted using G*Power. The analysis utilized an F-test for linear multiple regression with a fixed model and an increase in R^2 . Assuming a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), a significance level of .05, a statistical power of .95, and two predictors, the minimum required sample size was 107. The achieved sample size of 200 exceeds this requirement, with an actual power of .952, indicating sufficient statistical power to detect meaningful effects.

2.3 Research Instruments

Data were collected using a structured survey questionnaire consisting of three parts: (1) demographic profile, (2) Leadership Self-Report Scale, and (3) Student Government Effectiveness Scale. The Leadership Self-Report Scale was adapted from Dussault et al. (2013) and comprises 21 items that measure leadership styles based on the Full Range Leadership framework. Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Student government effectiveness was measured using an instrument adapted from Alviento (2018), which assesses five domains of effectiveness. Responses were rated on a 5-point scale from 1 (Not Effective) to 5 (Very Effective). The instruments underwent content adaptation to ensure contextual relevance for student leaders in both countries. Minor wording modifications were made to align with academic and organizational terminology used in the Philippines and India. A pilot test was conducted with a small group of student leaders to assess clarity and reliability prior to full data collection. The instruments demonstrated high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.889 to 0.978. Since English is widely used as a medium of instruction in higher education in both countries, the questionnaire was administered in English. This minimized the need for translation and helped maintain linguistic consistency across respondents.

2.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through an online survey platform. Participants provided informed consent prior to completing the questionnaire and were given sufficient time to complete the survey. Data analysis was conducted using PLS-SEM following a two-stage approach. First, the measurement model was evaluated for internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and multicollinearity. Second, the structural model was assessed by examining path coefficients, statistical significance through bootstrapping, coefficient of determination (R^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2). To compare the structural relationships between the Philippines and India, Multi-Group Analysis (MGA) was performed. This allowed the examination of potential differences in the strength and significance of relationships across the two groups.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to the National Ethical Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants established by the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board (PHREB), under the Department of Science and Technology (DOST). Ethical clearance was obtained from the appropriate institutional ethics review committee prior to data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and were required to provide informed consent before participation. They were assured that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained. No personally identifiable information was collected, and responses were used solely for academic purposes. Data were securely stored in password-protected files accessible only to the research team.

3. Results

3.1. Respondent Profile

The Philippines and India each contributed 100 respondents, for a total of 200 student leaders. All participants had at least 1 year of student leadership experience and held various positions across public and private institutions, yielding a sample relevant to measuring leadership styles and student government effectiveness in both governance contexts.

3.2. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze and summarize the results of the study as they are appropriate for quantitative research study. Through descriptive statistics the study was able to identify patterns, trends and general characteristics of leadership styles and student government effectiveness without making inferential conclusions.

3.2.1. Leadership Styles

Laissez-faire leadership was the least evident style among student leaders, while transactional leadership was the most prominent across institutions in both countries. This pattern is consistent with the structural demands of student government as an organizational form: officers operate within elected terms, defined budgets, reporting requirements, and constitutional mandates that reward performance monitoring and clear expectations over passive, non-interventionist approaches (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Northouse, 2022). The dominance of transactional leadership over transformational or laissez-faire styles is examined more closely in Section 3.4, where it is interpreted against the specific accountability structures of student governance.

3.2.2. Student Government Effectiveness

Student government effectiveness showed a moderate-to-high level across representation, program implementation, and institutional collaboration, consistent with prior work linking student leadership to institutional engagement and organizational outcomes in higher education (Astin & Astin, 2000; Komives et al., 2013).

3.3. Measurement Model Results

The measurement model was assessed for reliability and validity. Table 1 presents factor loadings, internal consistency reliability, and convergent validity, including Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE). Composite reliability values ranged from 0.923 to 0.980 and Cronbach's alpha values from 0.889 to 0.978, indicating strong internal consistency; all values exceeded the 0.70 threshold recommended by Hair et al. (2022).

Table 1. Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Laissez-Faire	0.895	0.953	0.932	0.821
Student Government Effectiveness	0.978	0.980	0.980	0.664
Transactional Leadership	0.889	0.895	0.923	0.751
Transformational Leadership	0.928	0.930	0.946	0.777

3.3.1. Convergent Validity

AVE values ranged from 0.664 to 0.821, exceeding the recommended 0.50 threshold (Hair et al., 2022).

3.3.2. Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), a widely accepted criterion in structural equation modeling. Table 2 shows all HTMT values below 0.90, indicating that constructs are empirically distinct (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 2. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Construct	Laissez-Faire	Student Government Effectiveness	Transactional Leadership	Transformational Leadership
Laissez-Faire				
Student Government Effectiveness	0.281			
Transactional Leadership	0.271	0.832		
Transformational Leadership	0.207	0.717	0.882	

3.3.3. Multicollinearity

Table 3 presents Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for each exogenous construct. VIF values ranged from 1.072 to 2.885, below the critical threshold of 5, indicating no multicollinearity concerns (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 3. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

	VIF
Laissez-Faire -> Student Government Effectiveness	1.072
Transactional Leadership -> Student Government Effectiveness	2.885
Transformational Leadership -> Student Government Effectiveness	2.812

3.4. Structural Model Results

The structural model was analyzed by examining path coefficients through bootstrapping, following the two-stage assessment approach recommended by Hair et al. (2021). Figure 1 presents the path coefficients linking the three exogenous constructs (Transformational, Transactional, and Laissez-Faire Leadership) to the endogenous construct, Student Government Effectiveness.

Transactional leadership emerged as the strongest predictor of student government effectiveness ($\beta = 0.613$, $t = 7.979$, $p < .001$). Rather than treat this as a standalone statistic, it is worth asking why a contingent, exchange-based style outperforms transformational leadership in this specific organizational setting. Student government, unlike informal peer groups, is structured around formal accountability mechanisms: elected terms, budget reporting, constitutional bylaws, and institutional oversight from student affairs offices. These structural conditions reward exactly what transactional leadership supplies: clear expectations, contingent recognition, and performance monitoring (Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

This interpretation is reinforced by recent higher education research showing that transactional leadership improves organizational effectiveness precisely where formal reporting and reward systems already exist, including in digitally structured governance environments where it outperforms transformational approaches in raising student work engagement and reducing disengagement risk (Niță & Guțu, 2023), in public university systems where it strengthens staff involvement and accountability through systematic performance structures (Turyahikayo et al., 2023; Hieng et al., 2024), and in sustainability-oriented campus initiatives where incentive-based coordination successfully manages multiple stakeholders toward defined objectives (Sulistiani et al., 2024).

Because student leaders are themselves elected and evaluated against institutional performance indicators, they may adopt transactional behaviors toward their own members for the same structural reasons: election-based authority creates an implicit reward-recognition logic, and institutional regulation imposes reporting obligations that favor monitoring over inspiration alone (Hussain, 2025). Transactional leadership, in other words, is less a personal preference among student leaders than an adaptive response to the governance architecture they operate within.

Transformational leadership also showed a positive, statistically significant relationship with effectiveness ($\beta = 0.182$, $t = 2.448$, $p = .014$), consistent with the Full Range Leadership Model's premise that transformational behaviors enhance motivation, follower development, and engagement (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Wang et al., 2011). Its comparatively smaller coefficient is plausible given that its documented benefits (vision-building, individualized consideration, long-term follower development) accrue gradually and are less directly tied to the concrete, task-bound effectiveness indicators (representation, program implementation, institutional collaboration) measured in this study. Laissez-faire leadership showed a weak but statistically significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.080$, $t = 2.233$, $p = .026$).

This result runs counter to the dominant view in the leadership literature, where laissez-faire leadership is typically framed as destructive or null (Skogstad et al., 2007; Ruth & Wanyoike Rosemarie, 2025; Mohammad et al., 2025), and it is precisely this departure from expectation that warrants closer scrutiny rather than a passing mention. The literature is, in fact, less uniform than the classical "laissez-faire is destructive" position suggests.

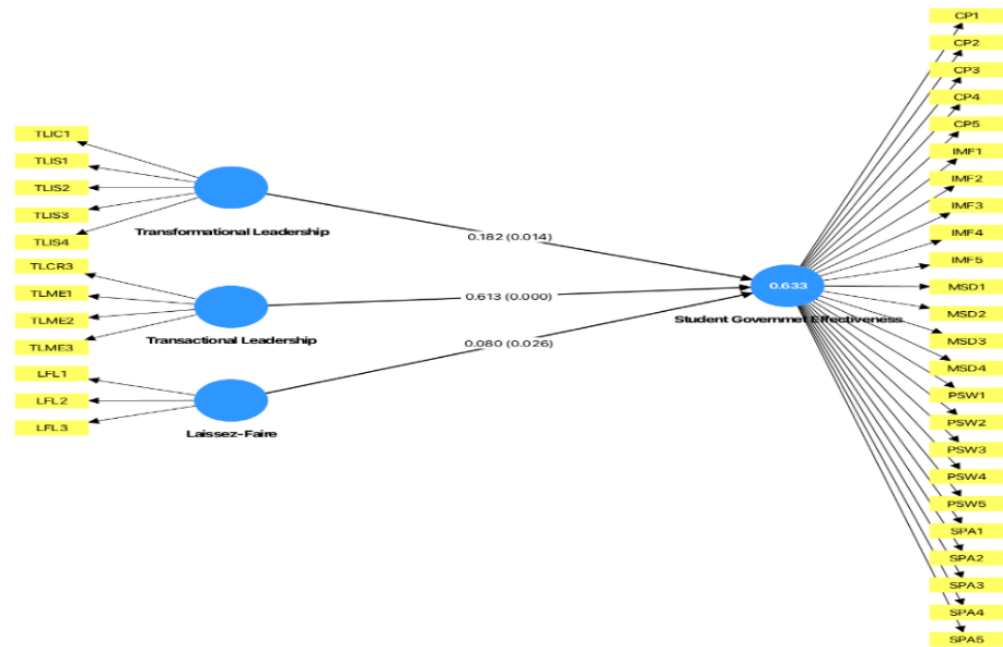
Several recent studies report positive or context-dependent effects: laissez-faire leadership has been linked to positive outcomes in academic performance and institutional effectiveness when institutional culture provides sufficient structural support (Chhom et al., 2024), shown a positive though culture-moderated effect on faculty performance (Jamali et al., 2022), and demonstrated potential to foster creativity specifically within highly skilled, self-motivated teams even while requiring judicious application elsewhere (Kamal et al., 2024). Notably, Turyahikayo et al. (2023) found the same pattern reported here, a positive but comparatively weak laissez-faire effect, in Ugandan public universities, suggesting this is not an isolated anomaly but a recurring signal in structured educational organizations specifically.

A plausible explanation for the present finding is that student leaders in this sample are not an undifferentiated workforce but an already-screened population: officers who met purposive sampling criteria of at least one year of leadership experience and formal institutional recognition. Within already-structured governance systems (constitutions, election cycles, faculty advisers, reporting lines), a degree of leader non-intervention in day-to-day peer tasks may function less as an absence of leadership and more as delegated autonomy among competent, self-directed peers, a dynamic more consistent with shared or distributed leadership than with the classic laissez-faire profile of disengaged, avoidant leadership documented in formal organizational hierarchies (Skogstad et al., 2007).

This distinction matters: laissez-faire behavior may carry different meanings and consequences in a peer-elected student government than in a top-down managerial hierarchy, and the present result should be read as evidence

of that contextual boundary condition rather than as a refutation of the broader laissez-faire literature.

Figure 1: Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)
Results Using Smart PLS 4.0



3.4.1. Model Fit

Table 4 presents model fit indices for the saturated and estimated models. SRMR was 0.053 for both models, well below the 0.08 threshold recommended by Hu and Bentler (1999), indicating good fit. The Normed Fit Index (NFI) was 0.802, below the conventional 0.90 benchmark commonly cited in covariance-based SEM. This value is reported transparently here rather than treated as unproblematic, because NFI thresholds developed for covariance-based SEM do not transfer directly to PLS-SEM. PLS-SEM is a variance-based, prediction-oriented method rather than a covariance-fitting method, and Hair et al. (2022) caution that fit indices such as NFI should be interpreted as approximate, secondary indicators in PLS-SEM rather than as strict confirmatory criteria, since the technique is not designed to minimize the discrepancy between observed and model-implied covariance matrices in the way NFI presumes. Given this, the NFI value in this study is interpreted alongside, not in place of, the model's SRMR, R^2 , and Q^2 values (Sections 3.4.2), which collectively indicate acceptable fit and strong predictive relevance.

The NFI figure is nonetheless reported as a study limitation: it falls below the threshold conventionally preferred in confirmatory contexts, and readers should weigh the model's predictive strength more heavily than its NFI value when evaluating overall model adequacy. The NFI value obtained (0.802) falls

below the 0.90 threshold conventionally applied in covariance-based SEM. Rather than treating this as disqualifying, it is addressed directly here as a limitation contextualized by methodological differences between PLS-SEM and covariance-based SEM.

PLS-SEM is fundamentally a variance-based, prediction-oriented approach, and fit indices borrowed from covariance-based SEM, including NFI, were not designed for this estimation logic; Hair et al. (2022) advise treating such indices as approximate and secondary to prediction-focused criteria such as R^2 and Q^2 when evaluating PLS-SEM models. In this study, the model's SRMR (0.053) met the recommended threshold, and its R^2 (0.630) and Q^2 (0.612) values indicated substantial explanatory and predictive strength. On balance, these prediction-oriented indicators are given greater interpretive weight than NFI in concluding that the structural model is adequately supported, while the below-threshold NFI is acknowledged as a limitation warranting caution rather than a disqualifying flaw.

Table 4. Model Fit

	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.053	0.053
d_ULS	1.904	1.904
d_G	1.553	1.553
Chi-square	1862.137	1862.137
NFI	0.802	0.802

3.4.2. Predictive Power (R^2 and Q^2)

Table 5 presents the explanatory and predictive power of the structural model for the endogenous construct, Student Government Effectiveness. The model explained 63.0% of the variance in student government effectiveness ($R^2 = 0.630$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.625$), a substantial proportion in behavioral research (Hair et al., 2022). The Q^2 value of 0.612, obtained through blindfolding, indicates strong predictive relevance.

Table 5. Predictive Power (R^2 and Q^2) of the Structural Model

Variables	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Q^2 predict	RMSE	MAE
Student Government Effectiveness	0.630	0.625	0.612	0.631	0.433

0.625 is the adjusted R^2 , and the value of 0.630 R^2 indicates the model has a substantial proportion of variance in student government effectiveness. It is considered substantial in behavioral research (Hair et al., 2022). Where the 63% percent of the variance in effectiveness was explained by the leadership styles. The Q^2 value of 0.612 of the model shows a strong predictive relevance.

3.5. Cross-Country Analysis

Table 6 presents the multi-group analysis (MGA) results, comparing structural path coefficients between the Philippines and India. The differences in path coefficients (Philippines minus India) were small and statistically non-significant across all three paths (transactional: $p = .951$; transformational: $p = .950$; laissez-faire: $p = .573$).

Table 6. Multi-Group Analysis

Multi-Group Analysis		Difference (Philippines - India)	1-tailed (Philippines vs India) p value	2-tailed (Philippines vs India) p value
Laissez-Faire	-> Student Government Effectiveness	-0.044	0.714	0.573
Transactional	Leadership -> Student Government Effectiveness	0.017	0.475	0.951
Transformational	Leadership -> Student Government Effectiveness	-0.006	0.525	0.950

This absence of significant difference should be interpreted carefully rather than read as evidence of universal leadership mechanisms. The finding indicates only that, within this sample of 200 student leaders from these two countries, the strength of the leadership-effectiveness relationships did not differ detectably between the Philippines and India; it does not establish that these relationships hold globally or even across other Asian contexts. This caution is warranted by the cross-cultural literature itself, which suggests that the Philippines and India, despite shared broadly collectivist orientations, are not culturally interchangeable. Filipino academic leaders have been shown to enact governance through relational values such as *pakikipagkapwa* and *bayanihan*, even while operating within, and sometimes in tension with, formal bureaucratic structures (Batang et al., 2025).

Indian school leaders, by contrast, have been shown to combine transformational and laissez-faire tendencies shaped by hierarchical structures that delegate authority while still prioritizing collective goals (Dhingra et al., 2024). A recent comparative analysis further argues that leadership behavior across Asian contexts must be read through context-specific cultural lenses rather than a single collectivism construct, since power distance, individualism-collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance combine differently across settings (Bellibaş et al., 2025; Sant'Anna, 2025). Taken together, this suggests a more precise interpretation of the present non-significant MGA result: the statistical pattern linking leadership style to student government effectiveness appears similarly structured in both countries, but this should not be read as evidence that the underlying cultural logic producing that pattern is the same. The finding is best framed as context-specific convergence between two particular

national samples, not as support for a universal, culture-free model of student leadership effectiveness.

4. Discussion

4.1 Why Transactional Leadership Dominates: Structural and Accountability Explanations

The strength of the transactional leadership effect is best explained by the organizational architecture of student government itself rather than by a general leadership preference. Three structural features plausibly account for this dominance. First, organizational hierarchy: student governments operate through defined officer roles, chains of reporting, and adviser oversight, conditions under which transactional behaviors such as monitoring and clear task assignment are functionally necessary (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Kızıloğlu, 2021). Second, accountability mechanisms: budget reporting, program audits, and periodic evaluation by student affairs offices create recurring checkpoints that reward leaders who set explicit expectations and track performance against them, a pattern consistent with findings that transactional leadership improves accountability and staff involvement in structured public university settings (Hieng et al., 2024; Turyahikayo et al., 2023; Hussain, 2025).

Third, election structures: because student leaders hold time-bound, electorally contingent positions, they are incentivized to demonstrate visible, measurable outcomes within a fixed term, favoring performance-based, reward-contingent behavior over the slower, relationship-building work characteristic of transformational leadership (Niță & Guțu, 2023). These three mechanisms are mutually reinforcing rather than independent: institutional regulation creates the reporting requirement, election creates the time pressure, and hierarchy creates the reporting channel, together producing an environment where transactional leadership is less a stylistic choice than a structurally induced necessity. This does not diminish the role of transformational leadership, which remained a significant, positive predictor. Consistent with Wang et al. (2011), its comparatively modest coefficient likely reflects that transformational effects (vision, inspiration, individualized development) operate over a longer horizon and are less immediately captured by effectiveness indicators tied to concrete program delivery and representation.

4.2 Interpreting the Laissez-Faire Anomaly

The weak but significant positive laissez-faire effect is the most theoretically interesting result in this study precisely because it departs from the dominant expectation in the literature, where laissez-faire leadership is typically destructive or null (Skogstad et al., 2007). Two non-competing explanations are offered. First, the finding is not without precedent: several recent higher-education studies report positive, if modest or culture-moderated, laissez-faire effects (Chhom et al., 2024; Jamali et al., 2022; Kamal et al., 2024), including a near-identical pattern, positive but weak, in another structured public university system (Turyahikayo et al., 2023). This suggests the present result reflects a genuine, if narrow, boundary condition rather than statistical noise.

Second, the sample itself may explain the pattern: because respondents were purposively selected for at least one year of leadership experience and formal institutional recognition, they represent a relatively competent, self-directed population operating inside pre-existing governance structures (constitutions, election cycles, adviser oversight). Under these conditions, a leader's non-intervention in routine peer tasks may function as delegated autonomy within an already-accountable system rather than as the disengaged absence of leadership documented in top-down managerial contexts. This reframes laissez-faire behavior in student government as potentially closer to shared or distributed leadership among capable peers than to the classic destructive laissez-faire profile, though this interpretation remains a plausible explanation rather than a directly tested mechanism, and future research with mediating variables (e.g., peer competence, structural autonomy) would be needed to confirm it.

4.3 Cross-Country Similarity: A Context-Specific Convergence, Not a Universal Mechanism

The absence of significant MGA differences between the Philippines and India should not be read as evidence of a universal, culture-independent leadership mechanism. It is more accurately described as context-specific convergence between two particular, purposively sampled populations of student leaders. This more cautious framing is supported by the cross-cultural literature itself: Filipino leadership research emphasizes relational, values-based governance rooted in pakikipagkapwa and bayanihan operating in tension with formal bureaucracy (Batang et al., 2025), while Indian leadership research emphasizes hierarchically delegated authority combined with transformational and laissez-faire tendencies (Dhingra et al., 2024). These are not identical cultural logics, even though both are broadly collectivist. It is therefore plausible that the similar statistical pattern observed here reflects convergence in the formal governance structures both countries' student governments share (elections, reporting, institutional oversight) rather than convergence in the underlying cultural meaning leaders and members attach to leadership behavior. Comparative reviews reinforce that leadership effectiveness in Asian higher education is shaped by the specific interaction of power distance, collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance rather than by a single regional pattern (Bellibaş et al., 2025; Sant'Anna, 2025), which cautions against extrapolating these findings beyond the Philippines and India, or beyond similarly structured, formally governed student organizations.

4.4. Implications

These findings suggest that leadership development programs for student officers in both countries should prioritize transactional competencies (goal setting, monitoring, accountability mechanisms) given the structural demands of elected, formally governed student organizations, while still integrating transformational elements to sustain longer-term motivation and engagement (Northouse, 2022). Given the context-specific framing established above, this recommendation is offered as relevant to similarly structured, formally governed student organizations in the Philippines and India specifically, rather than as a

universal prescription for student leadership development globally.

5. Conclusion

This study examined how leadership styles predict student government effectiveness among 200 student leaders in the Philippines and India. Three empirical conclusions follow directly from the structural model. First, transactional leadership was the strongest and most consistent predictor of student government effectiveness ($\beta = 0.613$, $p < .001$), substantially outweighing the other two styles. Second, transformational leadership showed a positive but comparatively modest effect ($\beta = 0.182$, $p = .014$), while laissez-faire leadership showed a weak, statistically significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.080$, $p = .026$) that departs from its typically destructive profile in the broader leadership literature. Third, multi-group analysis found no statistically significant differences in these relationships between the Philippines and India (all $p > .05$), indicating that the pattern linking leadership style to effectiveness held similarly across both national samples.

These findings extend the Full Range Leadership Model beyond the Western, formal-organizational settings in which it was originally developed, demonstrating its applicability to elected, peer-governed student organizations in two non-Western, collectivist contexts. The comparatively strong transactional effect nuances the assumption that transformational leadership is universally superior in collectivist cultures; in a governance structure defined by elections, reporting requirements, and institutional oversight, the model's transactional dimension does substantial explanatory work.

The unexpected positive laissez-faire effect further suggests that the model's conventional valence assumptions, where laissez-faire leadership is treated as uniformly destructive, may not fully transfer to formally structured but peer-led organizations, pointing to a boundary condition worth testing in future FRLM applications. Finally, the absence of significant cross-country differences should be read as evidence of structural, not necessarily cultural, convergence between these two specific national samples rather than as support for a universal leadership mechanism (see Section 4.4). For higher education institutions and student affairs offices in the Philippines and India, these findings support prioritizing transactional leadership competencies, such as goal setting, performance monitoring, and accountability systems, in student leadership training, given the structural demands of elected, formally governed student organizations.

Transformational elements (vision-building, mentoring, individualized support) should be integrated alongside rather than in place of these competencies, since they contribute independently to effectiveness and are likely to matter more over a leader's full term than in any single reporting cycle. Institutional stakeholders should also treat measured student government effectiveness, not just participation or activity levels, as a criterion for evaluating and refining leadership development programs.

6. Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings.

Cross-sectional design. Data were collected at a single point in time, which allows the study to identify statistically significant predictive relationships between leadership styles and student government effectiveness but does not permit causal inference. The reported path coefficients should be read as associations, not as evidence that leadership style causes changes in effectiveness; it remains possible, for instance, that student leaders in already-effective governments adopt more transactional behaviors as a result of institutional success, rather than the reverse. A longitudinal design would be needed to establish temporal precedence and directionality.

Purposive sampling. Respondents were selected because they were officially recognized student leaders with at least one year of leadership experience, a criterion necessary to ensure participants could meaningfully report on their own leadership behavior and their organization's effectiveness. This non-probability approach means the sample cannot be assumed statistically representative of all student leaders, or of student populations more broadly, in either country. Findings should be generalized cautiously, and only to similarly positioned, experienced student officers in comparable institutional settings.

Self-report bias. Both leadership style and student government effectiveness were measured through student leaders' self-assessments. Self-report measures are susceptible to social desirability bias, particularly for a construct like leadership style, where respondents may rate their own behavior more favorably, or in a more actively engaged direction, than external observers such as peers or advisers would. This is a plausible contributing factor to the comparatively low reported prevalence of laissez-faire leadership, since a passive or non-interventionist self-image may be less socially desirable to report than an active, structured one.

Common method bias. Because leadership style and effectiveness were measured using the same respondents, the same instrument, and the same point of data collection, the study is subject to common method bias, which can artificially inflate the strength of the observed relationships between constructs. While the measurement model showed strong discriminant validity via the HTMT criterion (Table 2), which offers some reassurance that the constructs are empirically distinct, this does not fully rule out shared-method variance as a contributor to the magnitude of the structural path coefficients, particularly the strong transactional leadership effect.

Limited country scope. The comparative design included only the Philippines and India. This scope allowed for a focused, resource-feasible cross-cultural test using multi-group analysis, but it cannot establish whether the

observed leadership-effectiveness pattern, or the absence of significant cross-country differences, extends to other Asian, Southeast Asian, or collectivist higher education contexts. As discussed in Section 4.4, even the similarity found between these two specific countries should not be read as evidence of a universal or region-wide mechanism.

Inability to infer causality. Taken together, the cross-sectional design, non-probability sampling, and reliance on self-report data mean that this study establishes predictive association between leadership styles and student government effectiveness, not causation. The strength and direction of these relationships should inform hypothesis generation and practical leadership development priorities, but claims about leadership style producing effectiveness, or vice versa, would require experimental or longitudinal designs capable of isolating temporal and causal order.

7. Recommendations

Building on these limitations, future research should pursue three specific directions rather than a general call for more longitudinal work. First, a multi-country ASEAN comparison, extending the present two-country design to include additional Southeast Asian higher education systems, would test whether the observed leadership-effectiveness pattern reflects a broader regional structure or is specific to the Philippines and India. Second, longitudinal leadership development research, tracking the same student leaders across their full term or across successive cohorts, would allow researchers to assess whether transformational leadership's comparatively modest effect strengthens over time, as its theorized long-term mechanisms would predict, and would help establish the directionality that the present cross-sectional design cannot. Third, mixed-method leadership studies, pairing the structural model tested here with qualitative interviews or focus groups with student leaders and their constituents, would help explain the mechanisms behind the unexpected laissez-faire finding and clarify whether cross-country statistical similarity reflects shared governance structure, shared cultural logic, or both.

Supplementary Details

Supplementary Materials & Data availability statement:

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The data are not publicly available to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the research participants and comply with applicable ethical and institutional guidelines.

Author Contributions:

The authors confirm their respective contributions to the manuscript. Mr. Antony Samy John Bosco Sebastin contributed to the conceptualization, data curation, investigation, methodology, project administration, resources, validation, visualization, original draft preparation, and review and editing; Dr. Brandon Nacua Obenza contributed to formal analysis, software, supervision, and review

and editing; Dr. Emagulate Rani contributed to investigation, project administration, and validation; and Mr. Jaed Brian Cantiga contributed to methodology, resources, and original draft preparation. All authors affirm that they have made substantial contributions to the work, participated in drafting or critically revising the manuscript, approved the final version for publication, and accept accountability for the accuracy and integrity of the research.

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