

Transactional Leadership and the Compression of Teaching Creativity: Evidence from Chinese High School Art Teachers

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Abstract

Creative teaching is a core component of arts education, yet it often operates under tension within performance oriented school management systems. This study explores how transactional leadership influences creative teaching practices among high school art teachers in China. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study draws on semi structured interviews with 20 art teachers from five public high schools in Shandong Province, covering disciplines including visual arts, music, dance, and calligraphy. Guided by a research framework that integrates creative teaching, transactional leadership, and teachers' perceptions and strategic responses, the data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that transactional leadership practices characterized by performance evaluation, supervision, and reward and punishment mechanisms play a significant role in shaping teachers' instructional conditions. While such practices contribute to organizational order and accountability, they may also constrain pedagogical flexibility and discourage instructional risk taking in creative disciplines. The study further reveals that art teachers are not passive recipients of leadership influence. Instead, they actively interpret leadership practices and adopt strategic responses such as selective adaptation and surface compliance to balance institutional expectations with professional values. These responses mediate the impact of leadership on creative teaching and help explain variations in instructional practices under similar management conditions. This study contributes to the literature by extending transactional leadership research into the underexplored context of secondary arts education and by foregrounding teachers' agency in mediating leadership effects. The findings offer practical implications for school leaders by highlighting the need for more context sensitive leadership approaches that better support creative teaching within performance oriented educational environments.

Keywords: Creative Teaching, Transactional Leadership, Art Teachers, Qualitative Research, Secondary Education

Introduction

In recent years, school leadership has been increasingly recognized as a critical factor shaping teachers' instructional practices and professional experiences (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). In the context of China, where educational reform and quality improvement remain central policy goals, educational leadership has increasingly been emphasized as a key driver of instructional quality and school development. Policy initiatives have placed growing responsibility on school leaders to ensure teaching effectiveness, policy compliance, and institutional performance. China's education system is characterized by strong centralized accountability, hierarchical administrative structures, and an emphasis on performance evaluation, which together influence how school leaders guide teachers and implement policy. As one of China's major education provinces, Shandong Province alone hosts over 32,000 schools and more than 1.4 million full-time teachers, reflecting a highly institutionalized and performance-oriented educational environment (Shandong Provincial Department of Education, 2025). Within this context, understanding how leadership styles influence teachers' daily teaching practices, particularly in disciplines such as art education that prioritize creativity and autonomy, is both academically relevant and practically significant.

Existing studies on educational leadership have extensively examined the relationship between leadership styles and teacher outcomes, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and instructional effectiveness (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). A substantial body of empirical research suggests that leadership practices shape teaching indirectly by structuring organizational expectations, evaluation systems, and professional norms. However, much of this literature has focused on core academic subjects, including mathematics, science, and language education, and has relied predominantly on quantitative methods. Comparatively little attention has been given to art teachers, whose instructional practices emphasize creativity, emotional expression, and contextual flexibility. Moreover, prior studies frequently treat teachers as a homogeneous group, overlooking subject-specific differences and teachers' subjective interpretations of leadership behaviors (Marks & Printy, 2003). As a result, how leadership practices are perceived, interpreted, and responded to by art teachers within highly regulated school systems remains insufficiently explored.

Transactional leadership theory provides a useful framework for addressing this research gap. Originally distinguished from transformational leadership by Burns (1978) and further developed by Bass (1985), transactional leadership is based on explicit exchanges between leaders and followers, operating through contingent rewards and management-by-exception. In school contexts, this leadership style is commonly manifested through performance evaluations, classroom inspections, and incentive-linked accountability systems. Prior research suggests that transactional leadership can effectively maintain organizational order and task efficiency, particularly in bureaucratic environments (Bass & Avolio, 1994). At the same time, scholars have questioned whether leadership approaches emphasizing control, monitoring, and compliance are well aligned with teaching domains that depend on autonomy, experimentation, and creative judgment. This tension is especially salient in art

education, where instructional quality is closely tied to teachers' professional discretion and responsiveness to students' creative processes.

Leadership influence, however, is not direct or uniform. From a constructivist perspective, leadership practices exert influence through teachers' perceptions, emotions, and professional identities. Teachers actively interpret leadership behaviors based on their prior experiences, disciplinary values, and institutional positioning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Art teachers, in particular, may adopt strategic responses such as surface compliance, selective adaptation, or passive resistance when confronted with performance-driven management expectations. These responses shape how leadership practices are translated into classroom instruction and everyday professional behavior. Integrating transactional leadership theory with teachers' perceptual and behavioral responses therefore allows for a more nuanced understanding of leadership influence in arts education.

This study makes three main contributions. First, it extends transactional leadership research into the underexplored field of secondary art education, addressing subject-specific leadership applicability within performance-oriented school systems. Second, by employing qualitative interviews, it foregrounds teachers' lived experiences and response processes rather than relying solely on outcome indicators. Third, it offers practical insights for school leaders by highlighting the limitations of rigid transactional management in creative disciplines and emphasizing the need for more context-sensitive leadership approaches. Together, these contributions advance theoretical discussions on leadership adaptability and provide empirical support for improving leadership practices in arts education.

Literature Review

Creative Teaching

Creative teaching generally refers to instructional practices that promote originality, flexibility, imagination, and meaningful student engagement in the learning process. Rather than emphasizing standardized outcomes, creative teaching values open-ended tasks, diverse forms of expression, and opportunities for exploration and experimentation. Early research conceptualized creative teaching as a combination of innovative pedagogical strategies and teachers' creative dispositions (Fryer, 1996). Subsequent studies expanded this view by framing creative teaching as a dynamic process shaped by interactions among teachers, students, subject matter, and contextual conditions (Craft, 2005; Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014). In arts education, creative teaching is widely regarded as a core indicator of instructional quality, as artistic learning inherently relies on imagination, emotional expression, and individualized interpretation. Empirical studies have shown that creative teaching is positively associated with student motivation, engagement, and higher-order thinking, particularly in creative disciplines such as visual arts and music (Beghetto, 2019).

Despite growing scholarly interest, existing research on creative teaching exhibits several notable limitations. First, many studies focus primarily on individual teacher characteristics or classroom-level strategies, paying insufficient attention to the broader organizational and leadership context in which creative teaching occurs. Second, creative teaching is often examined using quantitative survey methods, which may fail to capture teachers' lived experiences and the nuanced ways they adapt instructional practices under institutional constraints. Third, limited research has explored creative teaching within highly performance-

oriented and standardized school systems, where accountability pressures may conflict with the open and flexible nature of arts education. In particular, how school leadership practices shape teachers' capacity and willingness to engage in creative teaching remains underexplored. These gaps indicate a need for qualitative, context-sensitive research that examines creative teaching as an outcome influenced not only by individual pedagogy but also by leadership and institutional environments.

Transactional Leadership Theory

Transactional leadership was first conceptualized by Burns (1978) and later systematically developed by Bass (1985). Unlike transformational leadership, which emphasizes vision, inspiration, and value alignment, transactional leadership is grounded in exchange relationships between leaders and followers. Leaders clarify expectations, set performance standards, and provide rewards or corrective actions based on task completion. Core components of transactional leadership include contingent reward and management by exception, both of which emphasize control, monitoring, and compliance. Due to its clear structure and operational clarity, transactional leadership has been widely applied in bureaucratic and performance oriented organizational contexts, including school systems. In educational settings, transactional leadership is often manifested through performance evaluations, classroom observations, reward and punishment mechanisms, and accountability systems. These practices are particularly prevalent in contexts where policy implementation and measurable outcomes are prioritized.

Prior research has demonstrated that transactional leadership is effective in maintaining organizational order, clarifying role expectations, and enhancing short term task efficiency (Bass & Avolio, 1994). In schools, transactional leadership has been found to support curriculum implementation, compliance with institutional regulations, and performance monitoring. Large scale studies of educational leadership further suggest that leadership approaches emphasizing goal clarity and performance management can indirectly influence teaching conditions and student outcomes through organizational structures (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). However, existing studies also highlight important limitations. Excessive reliance on transactional mechanisms may reduce teachers' intrinsic motivation, narrow instructional practices, and constrain innovation, especially in disciplines that value flexibility and creativity (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Hallinger (2011) argues that leadership effectiveness in schools is highly context dependent, and leadership practices that emphasize control and accountability may produce uneven effects across different subject areas. This study adopts transactional leadership theory because it directly corresponds to the managerial practices experienced by art teachers in performance oriented school systems. By using this theory, the study examines how reward and punishment systems and monitoring practices influence teachers' instructional decisions and shape the conditions under which creative teaching is supported or constrained.

Teachers' Perceptions and Strategic Responses

From a constructivist perspective, leadership influence is not transmitted mechanically but is mediated through teachers' perceptions, interpretations, and emotional responses. Teachers are active agents who construct meaning from leadership behaviors based on their professional identities, prior experiences, and disciplinary contexts. This perspective emphasizes that the same leadership practice may generate different outcomes depending

on how teachers perceive and respond to it. Research adopting this view often focuses on teachers' sense making processes and coping strategies, such as compliance, adaptation, negotiation, or resistance. Qualitative approaches have been particularly effective in capturing these subjective and context dependent processes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Recent studies further confirm that teachers' sense making plays a central role in shaping how leadership practices are enacted in classrooms, especially under conditions of accountability and performance pressure (Liu & Hallinger, 2021).

Previous studies indicate that teachers' responses to leadership practices significantly shape how leadership influences classroom instruction (Marks & Printy, 2003). Rather than responding uniformly, teachers may strategically adjust their behaviors to balance institutional demands and professional values. Empirical research has shown that such strategic responses are often shaped by teachers' perceptions of fairness, professional trust, and autonomy within their schools (Stanescu, 2021). These strategic responses help explain why identical leadership styles can produce divergent instructional outcomes. For art teachers, whose work is closely tied to creativity, autonomy, and personal expression, leadership pressures may trigger particularly complex responses. This study therefore incorporates teachers' perceptions and strategic responses as a key analytical lens to explain how transactional leadership affects creative teaching indirectly, through teachers' interpretations and adaptive practices.

In summary, existing literature identifies creative teaching as a core yet vulnerable aspect of arts education, particularly within performance oriented and standardized school systems. While transactional leadership theory explains how institutional control and accountability mechanisms operate, it does not fully account for the variability of teachers' instructional responses. Research on teachers' perceptions and strategic responses addresses this limitation by highlighting teachers' agency and sense making processes. By integrating creative teaching as the research problem, transactional leadership as the organizational mechanism, and teachers' perceptions and strategic responses as the mediating process, this study constructs a comprehensive research framework. This framework addresses existing research gaps and provides a theoretically grounded basis for examining how leadership practices shape creative teaching in arts education contexts.

Research Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore how transactional leadership influences creative teaching among high school art teachers. Given that the research focuses on teachers' perceptions, interpretations, and instructional responses within specific institutional contexts, a qualitative approach is well suited to capturing the complexity of these experiences. Semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary data collection method, as they allow for theoretically guided inquiry while providing sufficient flexibility for participants to elaborate on their lived experiences. This approach is particularly appropriate for examining leadership practices and creative teaching, both of which are context-dependent and shaped by organizational conditions and individual agency.

The research was conducted in Shandong Province, one of China's major education provinces with a large and highly institutionalized education system. According to the official Statistical Bulletin on the Development of Education in Shandong Province (2024), the province hosts

approximately 32,800 schools, with about 21.75 million students and 1.41 million full-time teachers (Shandong Provincial Department of Education, 2025). This context provides a robust empirical foundation for investigating school leadership practices in secondary education. Within this setting, the study focused on five ordinary public high schools and employed purposive sampling to recruit 20 art teachers from disciplines including visual arts, music, dance, and calligraphy. Art teachers were selected because their instructional practices rely heavily on creativity, autonomy, and flexible classroom interaction, making them particularly sensitive to leadership and management practices.

Based on the research framework, a semi-structured interview guide was developed to examine the relationship between leadership practices and creative teaching. The interview questions addressed three core dimensions: creative teaching practices, transactional leadership mechanisms, and teachers’ perceptions and strategic responses. Table 1 presents the alignment between theoretical constructs, interview questions, and respondents. All interviews were conducted with informed consent, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step procedure, enabling the identification of recurring patterns and themes while remaining attentive to participants’ meanings and contextual conditions.

Table 1
Theoretical Constructs, Interview Questions, and Respondents

Theoretical Construct	Interview Focus	Respondents
Creative Teaching (Outcome Variable)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do you understand creative teaching in your subject area? How do you usually incorporate creativity into your classroom teaching? Have your teaching practices changed under current school management conditions? 	Art teachers (visual arts, music, dance, calligraphy)
Transactional Leadership (Organizational Mechanism)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do school leaders use performance evaluation, rewards, or supervision to influence your teaching? What role do inspections or accountability requirements play in your daily teaching? 	Art teachers
Teachers’ Perceptions and Strategic Responses (Mediating Process)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do you perceive the current leadership and management style in your school? How do you respond to performance-oriented leadership practices? Do you adopt any strategies to balance institutional requirements and your own teaching beliefs? 	Art teachers

Challenges to Creative Teaching under Transactional Leadership

Based on the semi-structured interviews, this study identifies five major challenges faced by high school art teachers when attempting to sustain creative teaching practices under

transactional leadership. These challenges reveal structural tensions between performance-oriented management systems and the pedagogical characteristics of arts education.

Standardized Evaluation and the Marginalization of Creative Teaching

A central challenge identified by participants concerns the dominance of standardized evaluation criteria in school management systems. Teachers reported that formal performance assessments primarily focus on measurable indicators, such as lesson plan compliance, classroom order, and administrative documentation. However, creative teaching—particularly in arts education—often emphasizes process, experimentation, and student expression, which are difficult to quantify. As a result, many creative instructional efforts remain invisible within formal evaluation frameworks. Several interviewees noted that when creative teaching outcomes are not explicitly recognized or rewarded, teachers may perceive such efforts as professionally risky. Over time, this misalignment leads to the marginalization of creative teaching, as teachers prioritize activities that are more likely to be acknowledged during inspections or evaluations. This challenge highlights a fundamental contradiction between standardized management logic and the open-ended nature of creative instruction.

Performance Pressure and the Emergence of Risk-Averse Teaching Practices

Another prominent challenge relates to the performance pressure generated by reward–punishment mechanisms embedded in transactional leadership practices. Participants described an environment in which teaching performance is closely monitored and linked to formal evaluations, promotions, or informal reputational judgments. Under such conditions, teachers reported becoming increasingly cautious in their instructional decisions. Rather than experimenting with innovative teaching approaches, many art teachers indicated a tendency to rely on familiar, predictable methods that minimize the risk of negative evaluation. This shift toward risk-averse teaching reduces opportunities for creative exploration in the classroom and constrains students' exposure to diverse artistic experiences. The findings suggest that performance pressure not only shapes teaching behavior but also subtly redefines what is considered “acceptable” pedagogy within the school context.

Limited Professional Autonomy in Instructional Decision-Making

Participants also highlighted restricted professional autonomy as a significant challenge. Frequent classroom observations, standardized teaching requirements, and detailed administrative reporting were described as limiting teachers' flexibility in lesson design and classroom interaction. For art teachers, whose subjects often require adaptability and responsiveness to students' creative processes, such constraints were perceived as particularly restrictive. Several teachers expressed frustration that institutional expectations left little room for adjusting teaching plans based on students' interests or creative progress. Over time, reduced autonomy may weaken teachers' sense of professional ownership and diminish their motivation to engage deeply in creative teaching. This challenge underscores the role of leadership practices in shaping not only instructional behavior but also teachers' professional identities.

Strategic Compliance and Surface-Level Adaptation

In response to leadership pressures, many teachers reported adopting strategies of strategic compliance. Rather than openly challenging management practices, teachers described

formally meeting evaluation requirements while informally modifying their teaching to preserve limited creative space. For example, teachers might prepare standardized lesson plans for inspections while implementing more creative activities outside evaluative contexts. Although such strategies allow teachers to cope with institutional demands, they also create a gap between official teaching expectations and actual classroom practice. This form of surface-level adaptation may protect teachers in the short term but can undermine long-term instructional coherence and transparency. The prevalence of strategic compliance highlights the indirect ways in which transactional leadership shapes teaching practices beyond formal policy implementation.

Insufficient Institutional Support for Arts Education

A further challenge identified in the interviews is the lack of sustained institutional support for arts education. Participants noted limited access to targeted professional development, scarce teaching resources, and comparatively low visibility of arts subjects within school leadership priorities. In some cases, arts education was perceived as secondary to examination-oriented subjects, reinforcing its marginal status within the school curriculum. This lack of institutional recognition intensifies the challenges associated with creative teaching, as teachers receive limited encouragement or guidance to develop innovative instructional practices. Without adequate support, creative teaching becomes heavily dependent on individual teacher commitment rather than organizational facilitation, raising concerns about its sustainability.

Strategies for Supporting Creative Teaching in Performance-Oriented School Contexts

Building on the challenges identified in the interview data, this study proposes five interrelated strategies aimed at supporting creative teaching among high school art teachers operating within performance-oriented leadership systems. These strategies emphasize adjustments to leadership practices, institutional structures, and professional relationships, rather than individual teachers' coping capacities alone.

Diversifying Evaluation Criteria to Legitimize Creative Teaching

To address the marginalization of creative teaching within standardized evaluation systems, school leaders should diversify evaluation criteria to better reflect the pedagogical characteristics of arts education. Existing evaluation frameworks often prioritize observable compliance indicators, such as lesson structure, classroom order, and administrative documentation, because these elements are easily monitored and quantified. However, such criteria tend to overlook core aspects of creative teaching, including instructional originality, student engagement, and the artistic learning process. As a result, creative instructional efforts may remain undervalued or invisible within formal evaluation systems. Incorporating qualitative and process-oriented indicators can help make creative teaching more visible and institutionally legitimate. For example, reflective teaching narratives allow teachers to articulate the pedagogical intentions behind creative activities, while peer observation feedback can provide context-sensitive assessments of instructional practice. Portfolios of student work can also serve as evidence of creative learning outcomes that unfold over time rather than within a single observed lesson. Together, these approaches broaden the scope of evaluation and align assessment practices more closely with the nature of arts education. Diversified evaluation criteria also carry important symbolic significance. When school leaders explicitly recognize creative teaching as a valued professional practice, they communicate

institutional support for instructional innovation. Teachers who perceive that creative efforts are acknowledged and fairly assessed are more likely to invest sustained effort in developing innovative pedagogy and experimenting with new instructional approaches. Importantly, this shift does not require abandoning accountability. Instead, it involves reframing evaluation as a developmental process that supports professional growth while remaining aligned with disciplinary characteristics and educational goals.

Rebalancing Accountability and Professional Trust

A second strategy involves moderating the intensity of performance pressure by rebalancing accountability mechanisms with professional trust. Accountability systems play an important role in maintaining instructional standards, ensuring policy implementation, and clarifying organizational expectations. However, interview findings suggest that excessive reliance on performance monitoring and reward and punishment mechanisms can generate persistent pressure on teachers, undermining their intrinsic motivation and reducing their willingness to take pedagogical risks. In creative disciplines such as art education, where innovation and experimentation are essential to instructional quality, overly rigid accountability may be particularly restrictive. School leaders can rebalance accountability and trust by shifting the emphasis of evaluation from high stakes judgment toward formative support. Reducing the frequency of high pressure inspections and incorporating developmental feedback focused on instructional growth rather than procedural compliance can help create a more supportive professional environment. Such an approach allows accountability systems to function as tools for improvement rather than instruments of control, thereby reducing teachers' fear of negative consequences associated with instructional experimentation. Rebalancing accountability and trust also requires recognizing teachers as professionals capable of self regulation and reflective practice. When school leaders signal trust in teachers' professional judgment, they contribute to a psychological climate in which teachers feel respected and valued. This sense of professional trust encourages teachers to engage in reflective inquiry, adapt instructional approaches, and experiment with new ideas without constant concern over evaluative repercussions. These conditions are especially important for creative disciplines, where innovation often involves uncertainty, iterative exploration, and the possibility of failure. Leadership practices that balance accountability with professional trust are therefore more likely to sustain creative teaching and support long term instructional development in arts education contexts.

Expanding Instructional Autonomy within Clear Institutional Boundaries

Enhancing professional autonomy is a critical strategy for supporting creative teaching in arts education, particularly within performance-oriented school systems. Rather than prescribing uniform teaching procedures or narrowly defined instructional routines, school leaders could provide flexible curricular guidelines that allow art teachers to adapt lesson content, instructional methods, and assessment approaches in response to students' creative development and classroom contexts. Such flexibility recognizes the inherently open-ended and process-oriented nature of artistic learning, which cannot be fully captured through standardized instructional templates. Importantly, instructional autonomy does not imply the absence of structure or accountability. Instead, it involves the presence of meaningful professional choice within clearly articulated institutional boundaries. School leaders can clarify overarching goals, learning expectations, and evaluation principles while allowing teachers discretion in how these goals are achieved in practice. This balance between

structure and flexibility helps maintain organizational coherence without undermining teachers' professional judgment. Expanding instructional autonomy can strengthen teachers' sense of ownership over their work and reinforce their professional identities as creative educators. When teachers feel trusted to make instructional decisions, they are more likely to invest emotionally and intellectually in their teaching, experiment with innovative approaches, and respond adaptively to students' needs. Over time, autonomy-supportive leadership practices may contribute to higher levels of professional commitment and instructional quality. In contrast, leadership approaches that rely on rigid control and detailed prescription risk constraining creativity and reducing teachers' willingness to engage in authentic creative teaching. Consequently, leadership practices that balance guidance with flexibility are likely to be more effective in supporting creative teaching within arts education contexts.

Creating Dialogic Spaces for Teacher–Leader Negotiation

To reduce reliance on strategic compliance, schools should create institutionalized spaces for dialogue between teachers and school leaders. In many performance-oriented school contexts, communication between leaders and teachers is largely one-directional, focusing on task assignment, evaluation feedback, and policy transmission. Such communication structures limit teachers' opportunities to express pedagogical concerns or negotiate instructional priorities. Establishing regular and structured opportunities for dialogue, such as collaborative planning meetings, feedback sessions, or professional learning communities, allows teachers to articulate instructional challenges and reflect on the practical implications of leadership expectations. These dialogic spaces can help align leadership objectives with the realities of classroom practice by making teachers' perspectives visible in decision-making processes. When school leaders engage in dialogue rather than solely relying on administrative directives, leadership practices become more transparent and responsive. Teachers who understand the rationale behind management decisions and who are invited to contribute their professional insights may be less inclined to engage in surface-level adaptation or symbolic compliance. Over time, dialogue-based leadership approaches can foster mutual trust and shared understanding, supporting a more authentic alignment between institutional goals and creative teaching practices in arts education.

Strengthening Structural and Symbolic Support for Arts Education

Finally, sustaining creative teaching requires both structural and symbolic support for arts education within schools. From a structural perspective, schools can invest in targeted professional development opportunities that focus specifically on creative pedagogy, interdisciplinary collaboration, and arts-specific instructional strategies. Such initiatives signal institutional commitment to arts education and provide teachers with concrete tools to develop and refine creative teaching practices. In addition, allocating sufficient teaching resources and protected time for collaborative planning can further support instructional innovation and reduce the individual burden placed on art teachers. Symbolic support is equally important in shaping the institutional status of arts education. School leaders can elevate the visibility and legitimacy of art subjects by publicly recognizing their contributions to students' holistic development, well-being, and school culture. Highlighting exemplary creative teaching practices, incorporating arts education into whole-school initiatives, and acknowledging artistic achievements in formal school communications can reinforce the value of creative disciplines. Together, structural and symbolic support mechanisms help shift

creative teaching from an individual and often marginalized effort to an institutional priority embedded within the broader educational mission of the school.

Conclusions

This study examined how transactional leadership influences creative teaching practices among high school art teachers within a performance-oriented school context in China. Drawing on semi-structured interviews, the findings indicate that leadership practices centered on performance evaluation, supervision, and reward and punishment mechanisms significantly shape teachers' instructional conditions. While transactional leadership supports organizational order and policy implementation, it may also constrain pedagogical flexibility and discourage instructional risk taking in creative disciplines. The study further shows that art teachers are not passive recipients of leadership influence. Instead, they actively interpret leadership practices and adopt strategic responses to balance institutional demands with professional values. These findings extend existing leadership research by highlighting the disciplinary sensitivity of leadership effects and the role of teachers' perceptions and agency in shaping instructional responses.

This study contributes to the literature by integrating creative teaching, transactional leadership, and teachers' strategic responses into a unified analytical framework, thereby addressing an underexplored area in arts education. Practically, the findings suggest that supporting creative teaching requires leadership approaches that go beyond rigid performance management and incorporate greater flexibility, trust, and contextual awareness. Several limitations should be acknowledged, including the localized qualitative sample and the focus on teachers' perspectives alone. Future research could expand the scope by including multiple regions, additional stakeholders, or longitudinal designs to further examine how leadership practices influence creative teaching over time.

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