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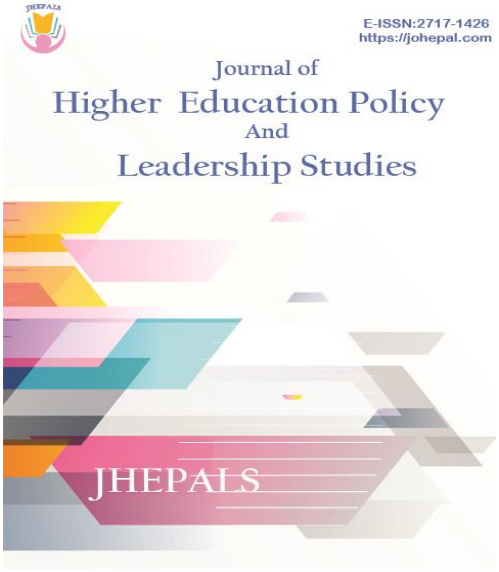


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## Abstract

Although there are several studies which explore learner variation, little research has been conducted to investigate how different preferences for classroom leadership are linked to the use of technology. Fifty-seven Korean university students were given two surveys to examine preferences for both classroom leadership and the use of technology. After collecting responses, data was then compared using the non-parametric Spearman Rho formula for Likert-scale data. Results revealed distinctly different perspectives on technology, which appeared to be influenced by learner preferences for either autocratic or transformational leadership. Whereas learners with autocratic leadership preferences favored using technology to make knowledge transmission easier, learners with democratic or transformational leadership preferences favored the individualistic use of technology for knowledge creation and discovery. In addition to this distinction, leadership preferences also appeared to impact expectations for communication. Whereas learners who preferred autocratic leadership styles desired using technology to connect with other students, learners who preferred democratic-transformational and transformational leadership also desired close connections with teachers via technology, reflecting expectations for more egalitarian social relationships.

**Keywords:** Transformational Leadership; Autocratic Leadership; Democratic Leadership; Classroom Leadership; Technology

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## Introduction

Whether it be tablets, smartphones, gaming consoles, or computers, today's students are inundated with a slew of digital devices, fundamentally changing how we learn. In the light of such changes, educators have been forced to reconceptualize the learning process, working to accommodate an all-pervasive digital context. In the field of language education, technology has transformed how students learn. Research has revealed a positive influence on reading skills through increasing motivation, presenting information in multiple modalities, and promoting collaborative learning (Yang et al., 2018). Technology has also been used to improve reading for low performing learners in the areas of comprehension, reading speed, and accuracy. In a recent study of 144 primary school children, for example, participants were given technology according to their preferred modality of learning, leading to gains that researchers suggest should "be considered a strong ally in educational environment to promote a greater cognitive enhancement in childhood" (Di Giacomo et al., 2016, p. 1125). As for writing, meta-analysis reveals equivalent gains, suggesting that technology-mediated writing instruction helps students to design, present, and produce digital texts that promote critical thinking of literary and contemporary issues; the use of technology also increases student engagement and social interaction when completing writing tasks (Williams & Beam, 2019).

While there are many potential ways to enhance language education through using technology, it is important to acknowledge that using technology does not always equate to unilateral, massive gains. Studies of middle school computer-assisted reading interventions, for example, have yielded only moderate effect sizes (Bippert, 2019; Pearson et al., 2005). One major problem appears to rest with the fact that contextual variables and learner background are not properly considered. Concerning reading, for example, concentration on learners with reading problems limits understanding of how technology benefits other learners (Di Giacomo et al., 2016; Huang, & Hong, 2016). Additional exploration of students with different intellectual and cultural backgrounds is needed. In Kenya, a randomized control study of non-remedial elementary learners tested three interventions, namely, e-readers for students, tablets for teachers, and tablets for a program with instructional supervisors; the study revealed that information and communications technology "do not improve literacy outcomes significantly more than the base non-ICT instructional program" (Piper, et al., 2016, p. 204). As this study suggests, the potential for increased efficacy does not always equate to higher learning gains, which may explain some lackluster results of past studies which explore the use of technology to enhance reading (McDermott & Gormley, 2016).

Because students have diverse needs, consideration of individual learner characteristics is essential when technology is implemented. Recently, some studies have begun to analyze the relationship between individual contextual factors and technology use. In a recent study of readiness to adopt e-books, the factors of age, gender, and experience were all shown to be mitigating factors in a survey of 1,013 Brazilian respondents (Martins et al., 2018). Such study helps us to understand that just as we cannot use the same education for every student, we cannot use the same technology and expect equally beneficial results. Various cultural and experiential factors determine how effective a particular technological intervention will be (Bippert, 2019; Gallivan & Srite, 2005).

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## Learning Styles, Classroom Leadership, and Technology

As revealed from review of technology enhanced language learning, the implementation of new forms of educational technology may be effective, yet such innovation may also fail if individual learner differences are not carefully considered. Learner preferences may vary considerably, impacting how technology is used and perceived. Some learners, for example, may prefer more autonomy, whereas others may rely heavily on teachers to set up the learning environment and control how technology is used (Gambo & Shakir, 2021).

Due to differences in individual preferences for classroom learning, the adaption of new technologies may lead to variable results. This perspective is supported from research of individual preferences and learning styles, which are confirmed to be closely linked to different outcomes from technological interventions (Cheng & Chau, 2016; Chung & Ackerman, 2015; Collins, 2009; Popescu, 2010). The importance of individual learner styles and preferences is further illustrated by a study of online participation and learning achievement, which required 78 undergraduate students to participate in four different types of online activities: information access, interactive learning, networked learning, and materials development. Results of the study found that degree of online participation was directly related to learning styles. Participation, in turn, was directly correlated with achievement and course satisfaction (Cheng & Chau, 2016). Other studies using learner platforms like Moodle also found that use of technology is related to learning style (Chung & Ackerman, 2015). Such research suggests that learner preferences must be carefully considered when designing instruction, ensuring that all learners benefit from technological adaptations.

As with learning styles, research confirms that preferences for different forms of classroom leadership impact student behavior and learning outcomes (Astin et al., 1996; Bolkan & Goodboy, 2009; Bolkan et al., 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; McDowell et al., 2018; Milton & Meade, 2018). This research is insightful, yet it does not adequately explore potential influences of leadership preferences on the use of instructional technology. Different leadership preferences may have a large impact on how technology is used in the classroom. For example, students who want more control of the learning process via a democratic form of classroom leadership may prefer using technology to promote freedom of expression, innovation, individual goal setting, or assessment. Students who favor direct teacher oversight via an autocratic leadership approach may prefer technologies that provide guided tasks and carefully designed input. Finally, students who prefer some degree of individual freedom, coupled with strong oversight, may prefer innovative means to use technology only when direct guidance is provided. Such a blending of individual freedom with top-down guidance appears to reflect a transformational approach to classroom leadership. Via this approach, a teacher becomes an agent of change, promoting student autonomy while serving as a strong role model for individual student development (Northouse, 2021; Pounder, 2008, 2013). Since transformational learners are more highly motivated to try novel approaches (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2009; Bolkan et al., 2011), these learners may also prefer unique forms of technology in the classroom.

Despite a potential link between learner preferences for classroom leadership and the use of technology, little research has been conducted to date. Through further investigation, educators may finally gain the insights needed to tailor instructional technology and

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leadership strategies to learner needs, thereby maximizing student involvement and achievement.

### Research Questions

To further investigate the relationship between classroom leadership and educational technology, the following questions were posed:

1. How are classroom leadership preferences related to attitudes or habits for using educational technology?
2. What implications may these correlations have for pedagogical strategies that use technology?

## Research Methodology

### Instruments

To examine leadership preferences, a 27-item assessment, called the Vannsimpco Leadership Survey (VLS) was utilized (Vann et al., 2014). Using this survey, a comprehensive view of leadership strategies may be obtained through examination of nine categorical types: transactional, democratic, autocratic, autocratic-transformational, autocratic-transactional, democratic-transformational, democratic-transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership. To focus on the implementation of democratic, autocratic, and transformational styles in the classroom, other forms of leadership (transactional, autocratic-transactional, democratic-transactional, and laissez-faire) were eliminated from the survey. Survey questions were also modified to reflect a classroom environment, rather than the organizational environment of a business or educational institution. As an example, the word "supervisor" was changed to "teacher" and the words "staff" or "followers" were changed to "students." Resulting modifications of the survey resulted in 15 questions for participants (See Appendix A). Each survey question employed a five-item Likert scale with the following potential answers: *strongly disagree* (value of 1), *disagree* (value of 2), *neutral* (value of 3), *agree* (value of 4), and *strongly agree* (value of 5). Questions examined feelings about leadership behaviors, which were related to group interaction, goal setting, and decision-making. Research suggests that the instrument is a reliable measure, yielding a test/retest value of $r[108] = .91$, $p < .001$ (Vann et al., 2014).

To examine perceptions of technology, Part C from "Perceptions of Use of Technology-Enabled Learning" was used from the *Questionnaire on Learner Use of Technology* (Das & Mishra, 2016). This survey was adapted to the present study by selecting 22 of the survey questions. The first seven questions ask for opinions about how technology will help the learner in class and future endeavors. The next 15 questions ask about how technology affects class behavior, concentration, and connection with others (See adapted version of the survey in Appendix B). Each survey question employed a five-item Likert scale with the following potential answers: *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *neutral*, *agree*, and *strongly agree*. Each of the 22 questions was coded with values from 1 to 5 based on respective responses.

### Participants

Fifty-seven South Korean learners were surveyed for analysis. These learners were undergraduates at a U.S. university located in South Korea. Ages ranged from 19 to 27 years.

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As for gender, 28 participants were female, and 29 participants were male. All learners reported Korean as their L1. Of the 57 participants, 63.16% (*n* = 36) reported having lived abroad. Time spent living in foreign countries ranged from 4 months to 9 years, with the average time reported being between 3 to 5 years. The countries in which learners lived were almost exclusively Western countries like the United States, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and Australia (*n* = 24). The remainder of participants resided in countries such as the Philippines (*n* = 7), China (*n* = 2), and Uzbekistan (*n* = 1). Two learners did not report what other countries they lived in.

### Procedure

After approval was obtained from the university's Internal Review Board (IRB), all learners were given information about the study and a consent form. The researcher then orally explained information contained in the consent form and answered any questions. No pressure was given to participate in the study and learners were informed that they could opt out of the study at any time. If students agreed to fill out the consent form and participate, they were given access to a Google survey.

After learners read and gave consent to continue with the study, they were given the surveys for leadership preferences (Vann et al., 2014) and technology (Das & Mishra, 2016) through one Google survey. Subheadings listing each category of leadership (e.g., autocratic) were excluded from the survey to reduce bias when answering the questions. The following demographic information was also gathered at this time:

- Age
- Gender
- Nationality
- Language Spoken
- Experience living in a foreign country (number of times and period of stay)

Following the collection of data, responses for each survey were statistically evaluated. For the Vannsimpco Survey, responses for each leadership category (democratic, autocratic, autocratic-transformational, democratic-transformational, and transformational) were averaged. Next, data was prepared to answer the research questions. Student responses for each category of the Vannsimpco survey were statistically correlated to each response on the technology survey. Because data used to calculate each category came from ordinal Likert scales, the non-parametric Spearman rho formula was used. This formula does not assume that differences between two variables are linear, making it ideal for identifying monotonic (non-linear) relationships within ordinal data.

## Results and Discussion

### Leadership Preferences

Student preferences for classroom leadership were significantly linked to 9 of the 22 technological preferences explored in the study (Table 1). Analysis of the correlations revealed different attitudes about how technology should be used, which appear to have been influenced by leadership preference. Students who preferred autocratic leadership tended to support using technology to affirm a teacher's authority and control. For example, there was a negative correlation of autocratic leadership to "I was adequately prepared to

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use technology in my courses" ($r_s$ = -.274). As revealed by this negative correlation, a desire for additional training and guided practice affirms autocratic control, making the teacher an authority over knowledge transmission. Albeit insignificant at the .05 level, autocratic-transformational preferences were also negatively correlated to the idea that more preparation was needed ($r_s$ = -.227; $p$ = .092). A need for more top-down technological training is evident among learners who prefer autocratic leadership in the classroom. These preferences for autocratic control, which retain a form of power distance between teacher and student, may reflect Confucian values in South Korean education. The Confucian philosophy maintains strict hierarchical roles between a superior and subordinate. Via this system, teachers are often conceptualized as content experts, whereas students are regarded to be passive recipients of knowledge. With this perspective on education, learners may feel that it is the teacher's job to provide training, rather than a student's responsibility to understand how to use new technology.

Students who favored autocratic leadership styles also focused on using technology to make knowledge transmission or education more efficient. Autocratic-transformational leadership preferences were significantly correlated to desires for educational technology that is more convenient ($p$ = .394) and easier to use ($p$ = .290). These correlations may reflect a traditional Confucian perspective on education, whereby schoolwork and goals are transmitted via a top-down classroom structure. If teachers are regarded to be authorities responsible for transmission of class content, learners may seek efficiency over technological strategies which promote self-discovery and innovation.

In contrast to autocratic and autocratic-transformational leadership preferences, democratic-transformational and transformational preferences were correlated with desires to use technology for increased involvement and achievement. Democratic-transformational leadership preferences were significantly correlated to views that technology will improve IT/ information skills ($r_s$ = .309) and increase involvement ($r_s$ = .332). Transformational leadership was also correlated to the use of technology for exploration of many topics ($r_s$ = .281). These findings appear to suggest that forms of transformational and democratic-transformational leadership promote use of technology for individual development. Learners who prefer these leadership styles may be more highly motivated by learning environments that are less restricted.

Autocratic vs. democratic or transformational leadership preferences appeared to impact student expectations for technology in relation to how knowledge is to be obtained. Whereas autocratic learners tended to prefer ease of knowledge transmission, democratic-transformational or transformational learners preferred more individualistic forms of knowledge creation and discovery. In addition to this distinction, leadership preferences also appeared to differ in relation to expectations for communication. Whereas learners who preferred autocratic-transformational leadership styles desired the use of technology to connect with other students ($r_s$ = .277), learners who preferred democratic-transformational leadership needed technology to maintain close relationships with both students ($r_s$ = .406) and teachers ($r_s$ = .364). The desire to develop closer connections with teachers reflects a more egalitarian perspective concerning relationships in the classroom. This perspective is also reflected in transformational leadership preferences, which also correlated to the desire to maintain closer connections with teachers through technology ($r_s$ = .311).

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Table 1.
Correlations of Classroom Leadership Preferences to Attitudes about Technology

| | | Democratic | Autocratic | Autocratic-Transformational | Democratic-Transformational | Transformational |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Using technology makes completing work in my subjects more convenient. | $r_s$ | .117 | .013 | .394* | .131 | .082 |
| | *p* | .389 | .924 | .003 | .334 | .547 |
| Using technology motivates me to explore many topics I may not have seen before. | $r_s$ | .000 | .039 | -.009 | .139 | .281* |
| | *p* | .999 | .777 | .949 | .309 | .036 |
| Using technology allows me to collaborate with others easily. | $r_s$ | .187 | -.211 | .290* | .252 | .148 |
| | *p* | .169 | .119 | .030 | .061 | .275 |
| Using technology will improve my IT/information management skills in general. | $r_s$ | .034 | .116 | .123 | .309* | .223 |
| | *p* | .805 | .396 | .367 | .021 | .098 |
| I get more actively involved in courses that use technology. | $r_s$ | .007 | .228 | .098 | .332* | .197 |
| | *p* | .960 | .092 | .473 | .012 | .146 |
| When I entered college, I was adequately prepared to use the technology needed in my courses. | $r_s$ | .237 | -.274* | -.227 | .011 | .159 |
| | *p* | .079 | .041 | .092 | .935 | .242 |
| Technology makes me feel connected to other students. | $r_s$ | .147 | .113 | .277* | .406* | .134 |
| | *p* | .276 | .405 | .037 | .002 | .322 |
| Technology makes me feel connected to teachers. | $r_s$ | .133 | .022 | .133 | .364* | .311* |
| | *p* | .323 | .873 | .325 | .005 | .018 |

## Implications for Pedagogy

Students who preferred autocratic classroom leadership favored more technological training and closer connections with peers through technology. In contrast, students who preferred democratic-transformational and transformational leadership strategies preferred using technology for active involvement and exploration of class content. Not only did transformational learners desire close communication with students via technology, but they also desired closer communication with teachers, which appears to reflect a predilection for more egalitarian social relationships.

Findings appear to have distinct implications for use of technology in the classroom. To improve language instruction, for example, a teacher may need to accommodate learners with autocratic preferences by providing direct oversight of technology through training and

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supervision. Teachers may also use technology which provides discreet directions and guidance. Programs such as Duolingo or Rosetta Stone, for example, which provide carefully designed input and prompts, could help such learners understand expectations for performance. Regarding learners who prefer democratic-transformational or transformational leadership styles, teachers may utilize technology that allows for more academic freedom, exploration, and communication. As an example, WebQuests or other forms of internet research could be used to make investigation of class concepts more autonomous.

## Conclusion

Whereas students who favored autocratic classroom leadership desired more technological training for closer connections with peers, students with a predilection for democratic-transformational and transformational leadership strategies preferred to use technology for active involvement and exploration of class content. These results suggest that an understanding of students' leadership preferences is needed before technological interventions can be effectively implemented. To improve instruction, a teacher may need to accommodate learners with autocratic preferences by providing direct oversight of technology through training and supervision. Regarding learners who prefer democratic-transformational or transformational leadership styles, teachers may need to utilize technology that allows for more academic freedom, exploration, and communication.

The present study has yielded new insights concerning potential influences of leadership preference on the use of educational technology. While this information is insightful, more research is needed to firmly establish what types of technology are most effective with students who prefer different forms of leadership. Further study may result in more effective means to utilize educational technology, which are tailored to the unique needs of diverse learners.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declares that he has no competing/ conflicting interests.

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## Human Participants

IRB approval was obtained from the university in which this study was conducted.

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Appendix A

Survey of Classroom Leadership
(Adapted from Vannsimpco Leadership Survey)

Democratic Questions

_____1 Teachers should give students authority to make important decisions.
_____2 Teachers should seek input from students when formulating policies and procedures for implementing them.
_____3 To solve problems, teachers should have meetings with students before correcting issues.

Autocratic Questions

_____4 It is the teacher's ultimate responsibility for whether the student achieves his or her goals.
_____5 Teachers should make quick decisions in times of urgency and be more deliberate in making decisions during times of less urgency.
_____6 Teachers should assign specific tasks to key students in order to achieve specific goals.

Autocratic-Transformational

_____7 Teachers should provide the goal and allow students to work towards achieving the goal, making sure to offer them feedback concerning their efforts.
_____8 Teachers should retain control of decision-making, but they should encourage high morale so students can more effectively implement change in the classroom.
_____9 Teachers are responsible for the operation of the class, which includes the development of competencies and commitment of students.

Democratic-Transformational

_____10 Teachers should provide opportunities for students to be involved in decision-making while serving as mentors during times of change.
_____11 Teachers should be open to others' ideas, yet he or she should guide students to become stronger workers.
_____12 Teachers should be highly concerned about developing students' ability to contribute to making important decisions in the class.

Transformational

_____13 Teachers should rely on personal influence and relationship building rather than on position or title to get students to do work tasks.
_____14 Teachers should develop strategies to develop the students' competence and commitment.
_____15 Teachers should look for ways to develop the strengths of students.

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Appendix B

Questionnaire on Learner Use of Technology

1. It will help me get better results in my subjects.
2. It will help me understand the subject material more deeply.
3. It makes completing work in my subjects more convenient.
4. It motivates me to explore many topics I may not have seen before.
5. It allows me to collaborate with others easily, both on and outside of the campus.
6. It will improve my IT/information management skills in general.
7. It will improve my career or employment prospects in the long term.
8. I get more actively involved in courses that use technology.
9. I am more likely to skip classes when materials from course lectures are available online.
10. When I entered college, I was adequately prepared to use the technology needed in my courses.
11. Technology makes me feel connected to what's going on at the college/ university.
12. Technology makes me feel connected to other students.
13. Technology makes me feel connected to teachers.
14. Technology interferes with my ability to concentrate and think deeply about subjects I care about.
15. I am concerned that technology advances may increasingly invade my privacy.
16. I am concerned about cyber security (password protection and hacking).
17. In-class use of mobile devices is distracting to me.
18. In-class use of mobile devices is distracting to my teacher.
19. Use of tablets/laptops in class improves my engagement with the content and class.
20. Multitasking with my technology devices sometimes prevents me from concentrating on or doing the work that is most important.
21. When it comes to social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn), I like to keep my academic life and social life separate.
22. I wish my teachers in the university would use and integrate more technology in their teaching.

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Dr. Andrew Schenck conducted this research while working as an assistant professor at the State University of New York (SUNY), Korea. In addition to teaching English for over 20 years, he has served in various leadership capacities to include the director of SUNY Korea's English program and associate dean of admissions. His experience, along with study to obtain an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership, has cultivated a keen interest in developing new techniques that maximize leadership potential in Confucian contexts. His research has revealed a need for differentiation of leadership styles based upon cultural beliefs and personal preferences.

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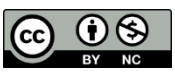 This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) which allows reusers to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon the material in any medium or format for non-commercial purposes only, and only so long as attribution is given to the creator.