EFFECT OF INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP (IL) ON INNOVATIVE WORK BEHAVIOR (IWB) OF SCHOOL TEACHERS: A PARALLEL MEDIATION ANALYSIS IN PLS – SEM

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the innovative work behaviour of school teachers who practice inclusive leadership, with mediating roles of workplace friendship and psychological safety. Drawing on data from 308 school teachers, PLS-SEM revealed that inclusive leadership positively impacts innovative work behavior, workplace friendship, and psychological safety. Furthermore, both workplace friendship (WF) and psychological safety (PS) significantly influence innovative work behavior and serve as mediators in the relationship between IL and IWL innovative work behavior. The results accentuate the importance of fostering inclusive leadership to enhance innovative work behavior among educators, highlighting how workplace friendships and psychological safety contribute to creating an environment conducive to innovation. The study provides practical implications for educational institutions to prioritize inclusive leadership practices and cultivate a supportive work atmosphere. By exploring these dynamics, the research offers valuable insights into strategies for enhancing innovation in schools.

Keywords: investigates, environment, fosters

INTRODUCTION

The dynamic educational landscape, while addressing challenging modern pedagogy demands, fosters innovation among school teachers. Innovative work behaviour (IWB)—their ability to generate, implement, and adapt creative ideas—plays a critical role in improving educational outcomes and ensuring long-term institutional success. Leadership practices within schools significantly influence teachers' innovation, with IL emerging as a key factor.

IL emphasizes a collaborative environment with openness and easy accessibility, resulting in a setting where teachers feel appreciated and encouraged. Previous studies suggest that inclusive leadership enhances innovative work behavior by fostering trust, collaboration, and creativity. Additionally, workplace friendship

and psychological safety have been identified as crucial mediators in this relationship. Workplace friendships encourage collaboration and a sense of belonging, while psychological safety is observed when an individual freely expresses ideas in the absence of fear of judgment or reprisal.

Despite these insights, limited research has examined the interplay between innovative work behavior, workplace friendship, psychological safety, and inclusive leadership in the educational sector. This study addresses this gap by exploring these relationships among school teachers, utilizing PLS-SEM to test the proposed hypotheses. By investigating these dynamics, the research seeks to provide actionable recommendations for promoting innovation in schools through inclusive leadership and supportive workplace environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

(Wang, Huang, Huang, Deng, & Zhang, 2024) Teachers are the most pivotal agents in implementing IE reforms. Teachers' inclusive teaching behaviour (TITB) addresses learners' diverse needs and supports the participation and achievement of all the students. TITB is evidently related to the academic performance of students in specific subjects (e.g., reading and mathematics) and overall school performance.

INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP (IL)

(Çelik, Polat, & Esen, 2024) mentioned that the IL is characterized by openness, approachability, and accessibility, enabling leaders to foster an environment of mutual respect and trust among team members (Carmeli et al., 2010). It emphasizes recognizing and valuing the unique contributions of each individual, integrating them into the decision-making process, and consistently supporting their efforts (Hollander, 2012). By being attentive to the emotional and professional needs of team members, inclusive leaders create a sense of belonging and ensure that no one feels excluded, addressing the ambitions and potential of all employees (Bortini et al., 2018). This empathetic approach encourages employees to share ideas and perspectives, enhancing their engagement and creativity (Muchtar et al., 2021). Furthermore, IL fosters both a sense of belonging and the recognition of individuality, helping employees feel respected and integral to the team (Randel et al., 2018). This leadership style cultivates a collaborative and innovative workplace culture.

(Aryani, Widodo, & Susila, 2024) states that creativity involves the generation of innovative ideas and products, emphasizing originality and novelty (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2019). It represents the application of knowledge to produce unique or original outcomes (Corazza & Lubart, 2021) and reflects the ability to develop fresh concepts or formulate innovative ideas (Carter, 2014). Miao and Cao (2019) describe creativity as the capacity to devise new ideas and methods, often integrating advanced technologies and processes to achieve specific objectives. In the educational context, creativity is demonstrated through a teacher's ability to design and implement novel approaches, strategies, techniques, and styles that enrich the learning experience (Widodo

& Gunawan, 2021). Bessant and Tidd (2018) identify various forms of creativity, such as pattern recognition, divergent and convergent thinking, making associations, and engaging in both incremental and radical innovation.

WORKPLACE FRIENDSHIP BEHAVIOR

(Zainal Badri, Yap, & Ramos, 2020) Workplace friendships (WF) foster a positive organizational environment, contributing significantly to employee engagement and overall organizational effectiveness. Numerous studies have emphasized the significance of positive interpersonal relationships at the workplace, highlighting their ability to enhance outcomes in both professional and personal spheres (Parasuraman et al., 1996; Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). While the precise definition of friendship varies, common characteristics such as trust, emotional support, mutual respect, and shared values are frequently associated with strong and lasting workplace friendships (Gates et al., 2019). These relationships are typically voluntary, built on mutual support, and reflect shared interests/goals (Hartup and Stevens, 1997; Craig and Kuykendall, 2019). FW or Friendship at work is instrumental in enhancing performance by shaping employee attitudes and ultimately boosting job satisfaction. They serve as critical social and emotional resources, fostering collaboration, exploration, and effective communication among colleagues. Sias (2005) highlights that individuals lacking workplace friendships often face limited access to quality organizational information, while those with robust interpersonal connections experience greater satisfaction and commitment. For millennial employees, workplace friendships also provide vital support for career growth and mentoring, enhancing their overall well-being and engagement (Gates et al., 2019). These connections offer encouragement, shared learning, and mutual support, contributing significantly to workplace happiness and flourishing (Dutton and Ragins, 2007; Dutton and Heaphy, 2003; Colbert et al., 2016).

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY (PS)

(Carmeli, Brueller, & Dutton, 2009) Psychological safety in the workplace pertains to the extent to which employees feel comfortable taking risks, voicing their opinions, and addressing challenging issues without fear of any negative repercussions.

(Newman, Donohue, & Eva, 2017) Psychological safety originated from the pioneering work of Schein and Bennis (1965) on organizational change (OC), where they defined PS as the sense of security which individuals feel, enabling them to navigate and adapt to change. Over time, this concept has been further explored in workplace contexts. Decades after Schein and Bennis's research, Kahn (1990, p. 708) revitalized interest in psychological safety by defining it as an individual's perception of being able to express and employ themselves at work without fearing negative repercussions to their self-image, status, or career. He emphasized that trust and supportive relationships among colleagues are crucial for fostering such a sense of safety. More recently, Edmondson (1999)

redefined psychological safety as a team-level construct, explaining it as the "shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking" (p. 350). Unlike Kahn's individual-focused definition, Edmondson's approach centers on the collective perception of safety within teams. The study developed and validated a 7-item scale to measure team psychological safety, which captures shared beliefs about mutual respect, care, positive intentions, and recognition of competence among team members.

Over the past 25 years, 78 empirical studies have investigated the factors contributing to PS and its outcomes. Of these, 74 relied on quantitative survey methods, while the remaining employed qualitative interviews. Qualitative studies have provided rich insights into the mechanisms by which PS emerges and influences workplace dynamics, often serving as a foundation for subsequent quantitative research. Meanwhile, quantitative studies have clarified the degree of relationships between psychological safety and its various antecedents and outcomes, significantly advancing the field.

INNOVATIVE WORK BEHAVIOR (IWB)

(Agarwal, 2013) defined innovative behavior as the deliberate generation and application of new ideas in an individual's work role, team, or organization to improve performance and achieve organizational goals (Janssen, 2000, p. 202). Increasingly, both scholars and practitioners recognize individual employee innovation as a crucial driver of organizational success (e.g., Van de Ven, 1986; Smith, 2002). With continuous innovation now regarded as essential for organizational survival, businesses are placing greater emphasis on identifying the causes that promote innovative behavior in the workplace. This study contributes to the existing literature by establishing the relationship between work engagement and innovative work behavior, aiming to provide deeper insights into the importance of employee engagement in fostering innovation.

A study conducted by Wu and Li (2023) on the impact of inclusive leadership on employees' innovative work behavior involved 263 leaders in service and employees through convenience sampling in six cities of China. The results of the study reveal that inclusive leadership has a significant positive impact on employees' innovative behavior. The results of the study are supported by the study conducted by Lütfi et al. (2023), which aimed to determine the effect of innovative work behavior on inclusive leadership. For the purpose of this study, data was gathered from 459 employees of a Turkish telecommunication company through convenience sampling. The results of the study reveal that inclusive leadership has a positive effect on innovative work behavior. On the basis of the evidence from the above studies, the researcher proposes the hypothesis.

Hypothesis H1: Inclusive Leadership has a positive effect on the innovative work behavior of school teachers.

The association between inclusive leadership and innovative work behavior is not found in the literature; however, studies conducted by Randel et al. (2018) and Chung et al. (2019) state that inclusive leadership is a more appropriate leadership behavior to improve the well-being

of employees in the workplace. Inclusive leadership encourages belongingness among team members and makes use of their strengths through behaviors. Inclusive leadership has great importance in fostering workplace friendships by promoting an environment of trust, respect, and open communication. When leaders actively recognize and appreciate diverse perspectives, employees feel seen and valued; this encourages them to engage authentically with their colleagues. This sense of belonging and psychological safety allows individuals to form deeper connections and collaborate without fear of exclusion or judgment. Inclusive leaders also set the tone by modeling empathy and fairness, which helps cultivate mutual respect and camaraderie. Ultimately, such leadership promotes stronger interpersonal bonds and a more positive, cohesive work culture. Therefore, the researcher proposes the hypothesis.

Hypothesis H2: Inclusive Leadership has a positive effect on workplace friendship.

Inclusive leadership creates psychological safety by ensuring that all employees perceive themselves as valued, respected, and heard. Leaders who prioritize inclusivity actively listen to diverse perspectives and encourage individuals to express their ideas without fear of judgment. This fosters trust and openness, key components of psychological safety. When employees feel safe from discrimination or bias, they are more likely to engage in authentic communication, take risks, and contribute creatively. Inclusive leaders set a tone of fairness and empathy, which helps build a supportive and non-threatening environment. Ultimately, inclusive leadership strengthens the foundation of psychological safety, driving employee engagement and well-being. The above discussion leads to the hypothesis:

Hypothesis H3: Inclusive leadership has a positive effect on psychological safety.

Workplace friendships can significantly enhance innovative work behavior by fostering a collaborative and supportive environment. When colleagues form strong interpersonal bonds, they are more open to sharing ideas, taking risks, and offering constructive feedback without fear. These friendships create an environment of psychological safety, where individuals can experiment with new approaches and solutions. Furthermore, close relationships at work often lead to better communication and teamwork, enabling the exchange of diverse perspectives, which is essential for innovation. This leads to a more motivated and creative workforce and a culture of continuous improvement and innovation. Hence, we can formulate a hypothesis in this regard:

Hypothesis H4: Workplace friendship has a significant positive impact on innovative work behavior.

Psychological safety is essential for fostering innovative work behavior because it creates an environment where employees are open to expressing themselves and taking risks without the fear of judgment or failure. When individuals are not afraid of making mistakes, they are more likely to experiment, which is crucial for innovation. This sense of safety encourages open communication and collaboration, allowing diverse perspectives to merge and drive creativity. Furthermore, employees are more motivated and engaged

when they trust that their ideas will be valued, leading to greater problem-solving and continuous improvement. Ultimately, psychological safety empowers teams to think outside the box and push boundaries, driving organizational innovation. Therefore, we can arrive at a conclusion that:

Hypothesis H5: Psychological safety has a significant positive impact on innovative work behavior.

Workplace friendship can play a crucial role in mediating the association of inclusive leadership and innovative work behavior. Inclusive leadership refers to leaders who promote diversity, ensure equal opportunities, and create a supportive environment where all employees feel valued and included. When employees perceive their leader as inclusive, they feel more comfortable and supported, which can lead to stronger interpersonal relationships, including workplace friendships. Therefore, the researcher can propose -

Hypothesis H6: workplace friendship mediates the association of inclusive leadership and innovative work behavior.

Psychological safety mediates the association of inclusive leadership and innovative work behavior by providing a work environment where employees are open to sharing new ideas. Inclusive leadership fosters diversity and inclusion, ensuring that all employees feel respected and valued, which directly contributes to a sense of psychological safety. When employees perceive a psychologically safe environment, they are engaged in innovative behavior, such as proposing new ideas or experimenting with novel solutions. The supportive and open atmosphere, encouraged by inclusive leaders, allows employees to take creative risks, collaborate more effectively, and contribute to the organization's innovation. Ultimately, psychological safety strengthens the association of inclusive leadership and the generation of innovative work behaviors. Hence, the researcher proposes the hypothesis -

Hypothesis H7: Psychological safety mediates the association of inclusive leadership and innovative work behavior.

On the basis of the review of literature, the researcher proposed a model.

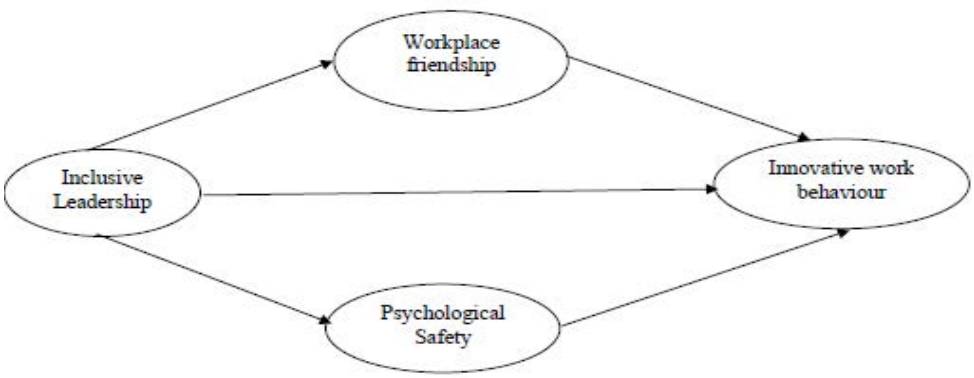


Figure 1: Hypothetical Model

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

For the purpose of this study, school teachers teaching in government and private schools in Delhi NCR were selected as research subjects. The primary data were collected through standard questionnaires consisting of items to measure inclusive leadership (independent variable), innovative work behavior (dependent variable), workplace friendship (mediating variable), and psychological safety (mediating variable). A total of 320 questionnaires were given to the respondents, out of which only 308 responses were found to be suitable for the analysis. The data were collected from July 2024 to December 2024.

MEASUREMENT

The independent variable, IL, was measured on a nine-item scale given by Carmelli et al. (2010). The scale comprised nine items, e.g., "My boss is open to hearing new ideas" or "My boss is available for consultation on problems." The responses were obtained on a 5-point Likert scale. To measure the dependent variable, IWB, a 9-item scale given by Jansen (2000) was used. The scale measures the IWB reflected by an employee on three dimensions: idea generation, idea promotion, and realization. Each item was measured on a 7-point Likert scale. The mediating variable, WF, is measured on a six-item scale developed by Nielson et al. (2000).The scale consists of statements like "I have formed strong friendships at work" and "I can confide in people at work," etc. To measure the mediating variable, Psychological Safety, a scale _____. All the responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 – "Strongly Disagree" to 5 – "Strongly Agree."

The reliability and validity of each scale were calculated in IBM SPSS 20 and IBM AMOS. The demographic profile of the respondents is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

Sample Size N = 308			
Gender		Highest Qualification	
Male	19.20%	Graduate	15.80%
Female	80.80%	Post Graduate	72.40%
		Ph.D.	11.80%
Age in Years		Length of Service in the Present School in Years	
20 - 30	9.20%	Less than 2	26.30%
31 - 40	30.30%	2 – 5	17.10%
41 - 50	39.50%	5 - 10	14.50%
> 50	21.10%	More than 10	42.50%
Monthly Income		Type of School	
15 k - 25 k	21.10%	Private	76.30%
25 k - 35 k	15.80%	Government	23.70%
35 k - 45 k	9.20%		
45 k - 55 k	15.80%		
55 k - 65 k	6.60%		
Above 65 k	31.60%		

Source: Primary Data

The result of the study stated that out of a total of 308 respondents surveyed, 19.20% were males and 80.80% were females. With regard to the age level of the school teachers, 9.20% of the teachers were in the age group of 20–30 years, 30.30% of the teachers were 31–40 years, 39.50% of the school teachers were from 41–50 years, and 21.10% of the teachers were more than 50 years of age. The majority of the teachers were postgraduates (72.40%), followed by graduates (15.80%) and Ph.D. holders (11.80%). The majority of the school teachers were from private schools, and the majority of the respondents had a monthly income of more than 65k, followed by the categories of teachers with a monthly income between 15k to 25k and between 25k and 35k. It is also observed from Table 1 that 42.50% of the respondents had more than 10 years of work experience, 26.30% of teachers had less than 2 years of work experience, 17.10% of the respondents had work experience of 2 to 5 years, and 14.50% of the respondents had 5 to 10 years of work experience.

Table 2: Measurement Model

Calculation of Outer Model					
Statements		Loading	AVE	CR	Alpha
IL					
	IL1	0.909	0.853	0.972	0.971
	IL2	0.902			
	IL3	0.915			
	IL4	0.952			
	IL5	0.957			
	IL6	0.919			
	IL7	0.909			
	IL8	0.467	deleted		
	IL9	0.392	deleted		
IWB					
	IWB1	0.640	0.678	0.949	0.920
	IWB2	0.798			
	IWB3	0.829			
	IWB4	0.866			
	IWB5	0.886			
	IWB6	0.912			
	IWB7	0.806			
WF					
	WF1	0.841	0.667	0.921	0.901
	WF2	0.851			

	WF3	0.809			
	WF4	0.802			
	WF5	0.86			
	WF6	0.732			
	PS1	0.898	0.815	0.904	0.886
	PS2	0.935			
	PS3	0.874			

Source: Primary Data

Several metrics, like composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and Cronbach's alpha, were calculated in SmartPLS 4 to assess the reliability and validity of the measurement model, and results are displayed in Table 2. It is observed from Table 2 that AVE, CR, and alpha for all scales used in this study to measure the independent variable - IL, the dependent variable – IWB, and the mediating variables WF and PS are more than the cutoff values, and the factor loadings of all scale items are good. This indicates that the scales have composite reliability, internal consistency, and convergent validity. The IL scale has AVE = 0.853, CR = 0.972, and alpha = 0.971; the IWB scale has AVE = 0.678, CR = 0.949, and alpha = 0.920; the WF scale has AVE = 0.667, CR = 0.921, and alpha = 0.901; and the scale to measure PS has AVE = 0.815, CR = 0.904, and alpha = 0.886.

DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY ANALYSIS

In this study, discriminant validity was calculated by two matrices - cross loadings and Fornell-Larcker criteria, and the results are displayed in Tables 3 and 4. As shown in Table 3, each latent variable item's loading (bolded) is greater than the cross loadings (items of other scales). Table 4 also indicates that the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each latent variable exceeds the correlation coefficients between that variable and all other variables, as recommended by Hair et al. (2012). The square roots of the AVE are displayed along the diagonal of the table. Since these diagonal values are higher than the corresponding off-diagonal correlation coefficients, this confirms that all latent variables exhibit adequate discriminant validity.

Table 3: Cross Loading

	IWB	IL	PS	WF
IL1	0.398	**0.909**	0.549	0.442
IL2	0.402	**0.902**	0.535	0.462
IL3	0.365	**0.915**	0.559	0.563
IL4	0.407	**0.952**	0.531	0.518
IL5	0.367	**0.957**	0.57	0.53
IL6	0.382	**0.919**	0.552	0.454
IL7	0.356	**0.909**	0.557	0.457
IWB1	**0.645**	0.226	0.143	0.219
IWB2	**0.799**	0.283	0.266	0.231
IWB3	**0.828**	0.394	0.275	0.257
IWB4	**0.863**	0.427	0.448	0.32

IWB5	**0.885**	0.343	0.357	0.295
IWB6	0.912	0.337	0.35	0.323
IWB7	0.809	0.332	0.243	0.279
WF1	0.255	0.374	0.505	0.841
WF2	0.344	0.502	0.538	0.851
WF3	0.145	0.309	0.534	0.809
WF4	0.272	0.39	0.656	0.802
WF5	0.36	0.539	0.719	0.86
WF6	0.197	0.408	0.486	0.732
PS1	0.297	0.527	0.898	0.679
PS2	0.437	0.582	0.935	0.689
PS3	0.275	0.499	0.874	0.546

Source: Primary Data

Table 4: Fornell-Larcker Criteria

	IWB	IL	PS	WF
IWB	**0.824**			
IL	0.414	**0.923**		
PS	0.38	0.596	**0.903**	
WF	0.338	0.532	0.711	**0.817**

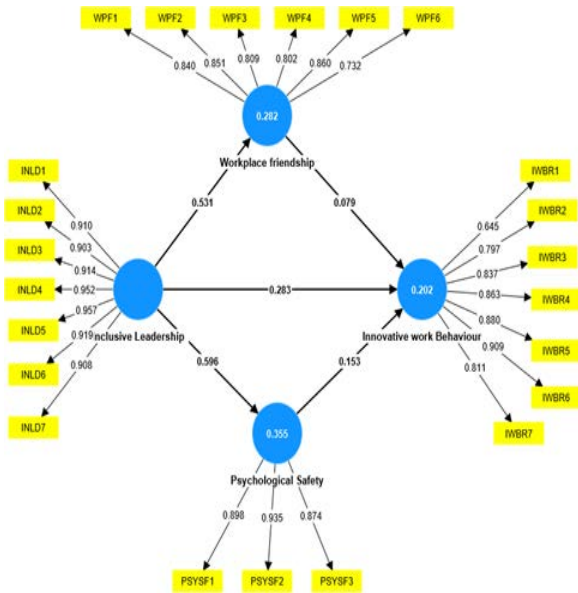
Source: Primary Data

Table 5: Hypothesis Testing

Direct Path Coefficients	β	t-value	P-values
H1: IL ----> IWB	0.28	2.81	0.01
H2: IL ----> WF	0.53	8.30	0.00
H3: IL ----> PS	0.60	9.43	0.00
H4: WF ----> IWB	0.07	2.10	0.03
H5: PS ----> IWB	0.15	2.14	0.02
Specific Indirect Effect	β	t-value	P-values
H6: IL ---> WF ---> IWB	0.32	5.11	0.00
H7: IL ---> PS ---> IWB	0.39	5.33	0.00
Total Effect	β	t-value	P-values
H8: IL ---> IWB	0.42	5.63	0.00

IL – inclusive leadership, IWB – innovative work behavior, WF – workplace friendship, PS – psychological safety

Evaluation of Structure Model



Hypothesis Testing

In this paper, we examine the mediation effect of WF and PS on the association of IL practiced by the school teachers with their IWB. The results of Table 5 reveal that there exists a significant positive relationship between IL and IWB (β = 0.28*). Therefore, it can be inferred that high inclusive leadership in school teachers may lead to increased innovative work behavior (hypothesis H1 is accepted).

To analyze the mediating impact of the third variable WF on the association of IL and IWB, the researcher has analyzed the relationship between the independent variable (IL) and the mediating variable (WF). It is observed from Table 5 that there exists a positive and significant relationship (β = 0.53**) between IL and WF, and the R square value signifies that IL explains 53.1% of the variation in WF

reflected by the school teachers (hypothesis H2 is accepted). It shows that the school teachers who practice inclusive leadership more reflect better workplace friendship. It is also observed that the independent variable IL has a positive association with the second mediating variable psychological safety ($\beta = 0.60$, $p = 0.00$). The mediating variables workplace friendship and psychological safety are found to be significantly associated with the dependent variable innovative work behavior ($\beta = 0.07$ and $\beta = 0.15$, respectively) (hypotheses H4 and H5 are accepted). The standardized indirect effect of IL of school teachers on innovative work behavior via workplace friendship is also statistically significant ($\beta = 0.32^{**}$). That supports hypothesis H6, which states that the friendship at the workplace of school teachers mediates the association of IL and IWB. The beta coefficient of the indirect effect indicates that for the teachers having strong workplace friendship, the impact of practicing IL will be higher on IWB compared to teachers having no workplace friendship. However, as both direct and indirect effects of IL on IWB are found to be significant, we can say that workplace friendship mediates the IL and IWB partially. The standardized indirect effect of IL of school teachers on innovative work behavior via psychological safety is also statistically significant ($\beta = 0.39^{**}$). That supports hypothesis H7, which states that the safety perceived by the school teachers at their workplace mediates the association of IL and IWB. The positive coefficient of the indirect effect indicates that for the teachers who perceive themselves as safe, the impact of practicing IL will be higher on IWB compared to teachers having a low perception of psychological safety. However, as both direct and indirect effects of IL on IWB are calculated to be significant, we can say that PS mediates the IL and IWB partially.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant role of inclusive leadership in improving innovative work behavior among school teachers, with workplace friendship and psychological safety identified as key mediators in this relationship. The results indicate that IL fosters a supportive and collaborative environment where teachers feel respected and motivated to engage in creative practices.

WF and PS further strengthen the connection between IL and innovation, emphasizing their importance in creating a positive work atmosphere. Teachers who experience PS and build strong professional relationships are more likely to contribute innovative ideas and implement creative solutions in their roles.

The findings highlight the need for educational institutions to promote inclusive leadership practices that prioritize openness, accessibility, and responsiveness. By doing so, schools can cultivate a culture of trust, collaboration, and innovation. The study also underscores the value of investing in leadership training programs that focus on emotional intelligence and inclusivity to empower teachers to achieve their creative potential.

Future research could expand on these findings by examining these relationships across diverse cultural or organizational contexts

and exploring additional factors that may influence the dynamics between leadership and innovation. Overall, this study contributes to an understanding of how inclusive leadership can drive innovation in education, benefiting both teaching practices and overall institutional success.

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