

HOW PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP AND SCHOOL CULTURE SHAPE TEACHER PERFORMANCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Zefanya Hana Hartanti^{1*} Johny Taroreh² Jerry Rommy Herter Wuisang³

¹²³Universitas Negeri Manado, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: zefanyahana123@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Teacher performance is frequently treated as an individual attribute, although teachers enact professional competence within organizational conditions created by leadership and shared culture. This study explored how principal leadership and school organizational culture shaped teachers' perceived performance in an Indonesian public senior high school. A qualitative phenomenological design involved 11 participants: the principal, a vice principal, and nine homeroom teachers. Data were generated through in-depth interviews, direct observations, and analysis of school documents, then examined through iterative data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing, and cross-source verification. Five interconnected findings emerged: communicative and participatory leadership; motivational and supportive supervision; professional trust that strengthened teacher autonomy; a disciplined and collaborative school culture; and a synergistic relationship between leadership practices and cultural routines. Participants associated these conditions with stronger motivation, punctuality, instructional effectiveness, independence, work quality, and organizational commitment. The study concludes that leadership does not improve teacher performance as an isolated personal style; its influence becomes durable when communication, supervision, trust, and collaboration are embedded in everyday organizational practices. The findings benefit school leaders by identifying practical mechanisms for developmental supervision, participatory decision-making, and culture building. Future research should use multi-site, longitudinal, and mixed-method designs to test the transferability and temporal stability of the proposed leadership–culture mechanism.

Keywords: organizational culture, phenomenology, principal leadership, school improvement, teacher performance

INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, research on educational improvement has increasingly shifted from viewing teacher performance as a matter of individual competence alone to recognizing it as an organizationally situated form of professional work. Teachers plan instruction, manage classrooms, assess learning, communicate with families, participate in school development, and respond to policy demands within a social environment that can either enable or constrain their capacity. This shift is important because the quality of teaching remains one of the most immediate school-based influences on students, yet the conditions that sustain high-quality teaching are not created by teachers in isolation. They are shaped by school leadership, relationships, routines, norms, resources, and collective expectations. Contemporary reviews therefore position principal leadership as a consequential influence on teacher commitment, job satisfaction, professional practice, innovation, and work performance, while also stressing that leadership effects are largely indirect and mediated by school organizational conditions (Ahmed, 2026; Leithwood et al., 2020; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019). A recent structured review further indicates that supportive and empowering leadership, together with a positive teaching environment, is repeatedly associated with teacher well-being and retention, although the available evidence still warrants caution about causal interpretation (See et al., 2026).

The global literature has generated strong evidence that school leaders affect organizational health and teachers' work through the ways they establish direction, develop people, redesign organizational conditions, and focus attention on teaching and learning. Meta-analytic and systematic evidence indicates that principal behaviors are associated not only with student outcomes but also with teacher well-being, instructional practice, and the overall health of the

school organization (Liebowitz & Porter, 2019; Robinson et al., 2008). Successful leaders commonly combine transformational practices, which build commitment and shared purpose, with instructional practices, which orient professional activity toward curriculum, pedagogy, and learning (Day et al., 2016; Hallinger, 2011). Distributed practices can further broaden professional participation, especially when teachers are included in decision-making and collaborative problem solving (Bellibaş et al., 2021; Harris, 2008; Spillane et al., 2004). These findings suggest that the question is no longer whether leadership matters, but how particular leadership practices become meaningful in teachers' daily work. Recent studies additionally show that principal leadership can support collaboration through teachers' collective efficacy, that integrated leadership profiles are associated with stronger teacher self-efficacy and commitment, and that distributed leadership and collaboration differentiate teachers' instructional-practice profiles (Bellibaş et al., 2024; Meyer et al., 2022; Özdemir et al., 2023).

A parallel body of scholarship has emphasized school culture as a central organizational mechanism. School culture includes shared meanings, values, expectations, interaction patterns, and recurring practices that define what is considered normal, legitimate, and professionally valued within a school. Earlier models highlighted collegiality, unity of purpose, professional learning, shared responsibility, and supportive leadership as cultural features linked to school effectiveness (MacNeil et al., 2009; Schoen & Teddlie, 2008). More recent work conceptualizes culture as a dynamic configuration of formal, informal, and environmental meanings and practices rather than as a fixed set of slogans controlled exclusively by leaders (Cucchiara et al., 2025). This broader view is particularly relevant to teacher performance because formal policies may promote collaboration or accountability, while informal norms determine whether teachers actually exchange ideas, request help, respond to feedback, or take initiative.

In Indonesia, improving teacher performance remains a persistent practical priority because schools are expected to strengthen academic quality, student character, accountability, and responsiveness to changing curricular demands. These expectations are especially visible at the school level, where principals coordinate policy implementation while teachers translate institutional goals into classroom practice. In this context, performance is multidimensional. It includes the quality and quantity of work, punctuality, efficient use of resources, professional independence, and commitment to organizational goals. A teacher may possess subject knowledge and pedagogical skill, yet still experience diminished performance when communication is poor, supervision is punitive, collaborative norms are weak, or leadership support is inconsistent. Conversely, a supportive work environment can help teachers sustain discipline, confidence, responsibility, and willingness to improve. A systematic review of Indonesian school leadership research identifies continuing needs for context-sensitive leadership development and stronger attention to school-level organizational processes (Gaol, 2023). Recent multi-school evidence from Indonesia also indicates that school culture mediates the relationship between principal leadership and school-based management implementation (Sumarsono et al., 2026).

Despite the substantial literature, several unresolved problems remain. First, much educational leadership research relies on cross-sectional surveys and structural models that estimate relationships among leadership, culture, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, or instructional quality. Such studies are valuable for identifying patterns, but they often provide limited access to how teachers interpret leadership and cultural expectations in everyday situations. Second, leadership and organizational culture are frequently examined as separate predictors, even though teachers encounter them as intertwined experiences. A principal's communication style may become a cultural norm; supervision may be understood either as control or as professional support; and teacher autonomy may depend on the degree of trust embedded in school routines.

Third, teacher performance is often measured through composite scores, leaving less understanding of how teachers connect leadership and culture to specific dimensions such as punctuality, independence, effectiveness, and commitment.

It remains unclear, therefore, how teachers in a public secondary school experience the interaction between principal leadership and organizational culture, and how they attribute changes in their performance to that interaction. Existing research establishes that transformational and instructional leadership can support teacher motivation and practice (Day et al., 2016; Geijsel et al., 2003; Nguni et al., 2006), that distributed leadership can foster collaboration and satisfaction (Bellibaş et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021), and that positive school climate and culture are associated with lower stress, stronger efficacy, and greater job satisfaction (Collie et al., 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011; Toropova et al., 2021). However, these strands do not fully explain the lived organizational processes through which communication, supervision, trust, discipline, and collaboration are translated into perceived performance.

A phenomenological approach offers a specific solution to this problem because it centers the meanings participants assign to a shared experience. Rather than treating leadership and culture only as variables, phenomenology examines how they are encountered, interpreted, and incorporated into professional action. In educational settings, phenomenological inquiry is particularly useful when a study seeks to understand how individuals make sense of organizational practices that are routine, relational, and context dependent (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Moustakas, 1994). When combined with interviews, observations, and documentary evidence, this approach can reveal how formal expectations and informal practices converge in the daily life of a school.

The present study occupies this niche by analyzing teachers' experiences of principal leadership and organizational culture in relation to their work performance at a public senior high school in Tomohon, North Sulawesi, Indonesia. Its novelty lies in integrating three domains that are often treated separately: leadership practices, school cultural routines, and multiple dimensions of teacher performance. The study does not attempt to estimate causal effects or generalize statistically to all schools. Instead, it develops a contextually grounded explanation of how communicative leadership, supportive supervision, professional trust, discipline, and collaboration combine to shape teachers' motivation, effectiveness, independence, punctuality, work quality, and commitment. The purpose of this study was to explore how teachers experienced principal leadership and school organizational culture, how those experiences were connected to their perceived performance, and how leadership and culture interacted as an organizational mechanism. The scope was limited to one public senior high school and to the perspectives of the principal, a vice principal, and nine homeroom teachers.

Teacher Performance as Organizationally Situated Professional Work

Teacher performance can be understood as the enactment of professional responsibilities in ways that contribute to instructional quality and organizational goals. In this study, the concept was interpreted through six interrelated dimensions drawn from the source manuscript: work quality, work quantity, punctuality, effectiveness, independence, and work commitment. Work quality concerns the accuracy, completeness, and pedagogical appropriateness of teachers' tasks. Work quantity refers to the completion of required responsibilities, while punctuality concerns the timely execution of teaching and administrative duties. Effectiveness involves the productive use of time, facilities, information, and other school resources. Independence refers to teachers' capacity to make sound professional decisions and solve instructional problems. Work commitment is reflected in sustained responsibility, participation,

and identification with the school's educational goals. These dimensions should not be read as isolated outputs because they are connected to teachers' motivation, efficacy, working conditions, and sense of belonging (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Somech & Bogler, 2002; Toropova et al., 2021).

Principal Leadership as Direction, Support, and Professional Influence

Educational leadership research distinguishes among transformational, instructional, distributed, and relational emphases, but effective practice often combines them. Transformational leadership builds shared purpose, motivation, and commitment; instructional leadership focuses attention on teaching, curriculum, supervision, and teacher learning; distributed leadership expands participation and expertise across the organization; and relational leadership emphasizes trust, communication, and the quality of principal–teacher interaction. Evidence shows that teachers respond positively when leaders communicate expectations clearly, provide recognition and support, involve staff in decisions, and align organizational structures with instructional improvement (Bogler, 2001; Day et al., 2016; Louis et al., 2010; Price, 2012). Leadership is therefore less a fixed style than a repertoire of context-sensitive practices through which principals influence professional conditions. This integrated view is reinforced by person-centered evidence showing that leadership configurations combining multiple practices are more strongly associated with teacher self-efficacy and commitment than limiting or fragmented profiles (Bellibaş et al., 2024).

School Culture as a Mediating Organizational Infrastructure

School culture provides the interpretive and practical infrastructure through which leadership is either reinforced or weakened. Policies encouraging collaboration have limited value when teachers do not feel safe to exchange ideas, while a formal supervision schedule can become developmental only when feedback is perceived as credible and supportive. School culture thus links organizational meanings with recurring practices. Collaborative norms can reduce teacher isolation, support shared problem solving, and promote professional learning; disciplined routines can clarify expectations and protect instructional time; open communication can increase trust and reduce uncertainty (Collie et al., 2012; MacNeil et al., 2009; Schoen & Teddlie, 2008). Recent conceptual work further warns against treating culture as entirely leader-produced because informal teacher interactions and environmental pressures also shape what is enacted in practice (Cucchiara et al., 2025).

An Integrated Leadership–Culture Lens

The integrated lens guiding this study assumes that principal leadership influences performance through both direct relational experiences and indirect cultural mechanisms. A leader may directly motivate a teacher through recognition or guidance, but the durability of that influence depends on whether supportive interaction becomes an organizational norm. Similarly, teacher autonomy can grow when principals delegate responsibility, yet it is sustained only when the culture tolerates initiative, learning, and responsible risk. This logic is consistent with research showing that supportive school culture and teacher collaboration mediate relationships between leadership and teacher outcomes (Liu et al., 2021), and that professional community and shared leadership connect principal behavior with instructional practice (Louis et al., 2010; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). The study therefore examined leadership, culture, and performance as a connected experiential system rather than as independent categories. It is also compatible with evidence that collective efficacy helps connect principal leadership to teacher collaboration and that collaboration is consequential for differentiated instructional-practice profiles (Meyer et al., 2022; Özdemir et al., 2023).

METHOD

Research Design and Approach

This study used a qualitative phenomenological design to understand how school members experienced principal leadership and organizational culture in relation to teacher performance. The design was appropriate because the research focus concerned shared meanings attached to everyday organizational practices rather than the measurement of predetermined causal effects. Phenomenological inquiry seeks to describe the essential structure of lived experience while remaining attentive to context, language, and participants' interpretations (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The unit of inquiry was the experience of working within the leadership and cultural environment of one public senior high school in Tomohon, North Sulawesi.

Participants and Research Context

The study involved 11 participants who occupied roles directly connected to school leadership, coordination, and classroom practice: one principal, one vice principal, and nine homeroom teachers. The leadership participants contributed information about decision-making, supervision, communication, support, and organizational expectations. The homeroom teachers contributed accounts of how those practices were experienced in instruction, student guidance, administrative work, and collaboration with colleagues. The sample was intentionally role-diverse within the school so that the phenomenon could be examined from both organizational leadership and teacher perspectives. No demographic attributes beyond professional role were used in the analysis because the available study record did not report them.

Table 1. Participant Composition

Participant Role	Number	Primary Contribution
Principal	1	Leadership direction, communication, supervision, and organizational expectations
Vice principal	1	Coordination, implementation of school routines, and organizational support
Homeroom teachers	9	Lived experiences of leadership, culture, instruction, student guidance, and performance
Total	11	Role-diverse school-level perspectives

Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

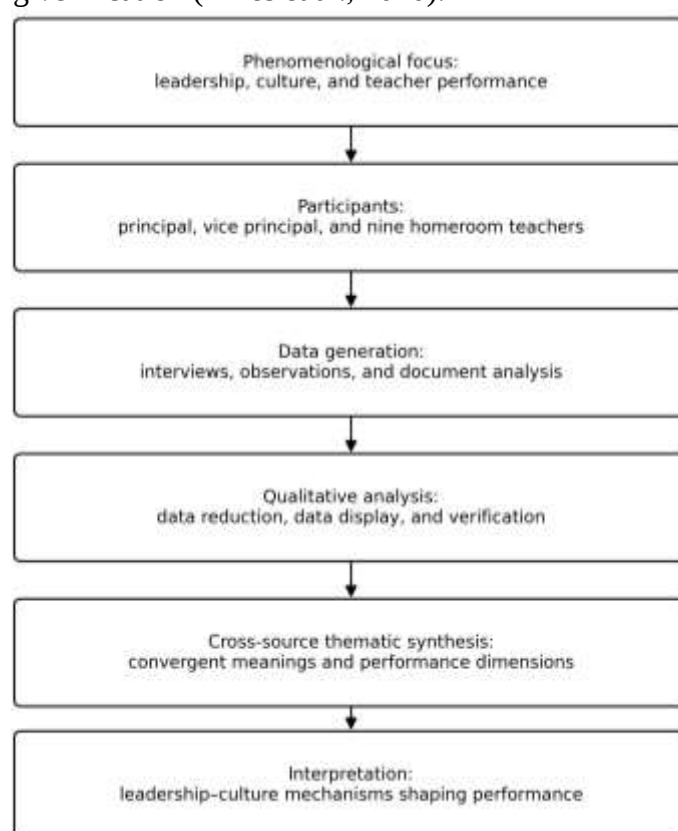
The data used for this study were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observations, and analysis of school documents. Interviews used open-ended questions that allowed participants to explain experiences of communication, decision-making, motivation, supervision, trust, discipline, collaboration, and professional responsibility. Direct observations focused on interactions among the principal, teachers, and other school members, as well as the routines through which leadership and organizational culture were enacted. Documentary analysis covered the school's vision and mission, internal rules and policies, teacher performance reports, and internal evaluation records. The combination of verbal accounts, observed practices, and formal documents made it possible to examine both the stated and enacted dimensions of the school's organizational life.

Table 2. Data Sources and Analytic Purposes

Data Source	Focus	Analytic Purpose
In-depth interviews	Experiences of leadership, communication, supervision, trust, culture, and work	Identify participants' meanings and perceived performance mechanisms
Direct observations	Interactions, routines, coordination, and enacted leadership/cultural practices	Compare reported experience with observable organizational practice
School documents	Vision and mission, policies, performance reports, and internal evaluations	Examine formal expectations and institutional evidence

Data Analysis Procedures

Analysis followed the interactive stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing with ongoing verification (Miles et al., 2020).

**Figure 1. Methodological Workflow of the Study**

First, interview, observation, and document material was condensed into meaning units related to leadership practices, cultural patterns, and teacher performance. Second, related meaning units were organized into categories and displayed in analytic matrices so that similarities, contrasts, and cross-source convergence could be examined. Third, provisional interpretations were repeatedly compared with the available evidence before being consolidated into themes. The thematic logic was compatible with reflexive qualitative analysis, in which patterns are developed through sustained engagement with the data rather than treated as mechanically discovered entities (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The final synthesis connected the themes to the six performance dimensions identified in the source study.

Trustworthiness, Reliability, and Ethical Considerations

Credibility was strengthened through methodological triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents, as well as through the inclusion of participants from leadership and teaching roles. Cross-source comparison reduced reliance on a single account and allowed claims to be retained only when they were supported by convergent evidence or coherent contextual explanation. Dependability was supported by the explicit reduction–display–verification sequence and by maintaining a clear link between the research questions, analytic categories, and reported themes. Statistical reliability coefficients were not applicable because the study did not use a psychometric instrument. Confidentiality was protected in the report by identifying participants only by professional role and by presenting synthesized meaning statements rather than personally identifying quotations. The available source manuscript did not specify an institutional ethics approval number or detailed consent procedure; these items must be verified and inserted by the authors before journal submission.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis produced five interconnected themes explaining how leadership and culture were experienced as conditions of teacher performance. The themes were not independent. Communicative leadership supported trust; trust enabled autonomy; supervision clarified standards; and collaborative cultural routines converted individual effort into coordinated school practice. Table 3 summarizes the themes and their relationship to the performance dimensions emphasized in the study.

Table 3. Thematic Findings and Performance Connections

Theme	Core Evidence	Performance Dimensions
Communicative and participatory leadership	Open communication, teacher involvement, collaborative decisions	Motivation, commitment, acceptance of responsibility
Supportive supervision	Continuous oversight, clear rules, encouragement, and guidance	Punctuality, work quality, effectiveness
Professional trust and autonomy	Delegated responsibility and discretion in learning decisions	Independence, responsibility, instructional adaptation
Disciplined and collaborative culture	Cooperation, information sharing, mutual support, and consistent routines	Commitment, quantity and timeliness of work, coordination
Leadership–culture synergy	Leadership practices reinforced through shared routines and norms	Integrated improvement across all dimensions

Teacher Performance Developed Across Multiple Dimensions

Participants described teacher performance as developing positively across quality, effectiveness, punctuality, independence, and commitment. The improvement was visible in teachers' ability to organize learning, complete responsibilities, use school resources, guide students, and participate in school activities. Performance was not portrayed as a sudden outcome or as the product of one intervention. It was understood as a cumulative result of repeated expectations, support, supervision, and collaboration. Teachers connected work quality with better preparation and classroom management, effectiveness with more purposeful use of available facilities and time, and commitment with consistent involvement in instructional and organizational activities. The evidence also suggested that teachers linked professional performance to student character formation, not only to academic delivery.

Communicative and Participatory Leadership Strengthened Motivation

The principal's leadership was experienced as communicative, collaborative, and accessible. Open communication reduced uncertainty about expectations and made teachers more willing to discuss problems. Participants associated two-way communication with stronger motivation because guidance was perceived as relevant to their work rather than as a distant administrative instruction. The principal also involved teachers in decisions affecting school activities, which increased acceptance of collective agreements and reinforced a sense of professional responsibility. These practices resembled democratic and transformational leadership because they combined participation, shared direction, and encouragement. Authoritarian behavior was reported as minimal, although firmness remained visible in the enforcement of agreed rules.

Supportive Supervision Combined Accountability with Development

Supervision was experienced as an organized process that contributed to discipline and instructional improvement. Continuous monitoring and clear expectations helped teachers understand the standards attached to punctuality, task completion, and learning management. At the same time, supervision was not described only as inspection. The principal's support, motivation, and willingness to provide direction made oversight more acceptable and professionally useful. This combination of accountability and assistance was important because discipline was strengthened without eliminating collegial relations. Teachers interpreted punctuality and completion of assignments as professional obligations embedded in a shared school routine.

Professional Trust Enabled Teacher Independence

The provision of trust emerged as a distinct mechanism linking leadership to teacher independence. Teachers were given room to select learning strategies, respond to students' characteristics, and solve classroom challenges. Such autonomy did not mean the absence of standards; rather, it was autonomy within a framework of shared goals and supervisory support. Participants associated the principal's confidence in teachers with a stronger sense of responsibility and willingness to make professional decisions. Trust also encouraged teachers to take ownership of student guidance and to use their judgment when adapting instruction to classroom conditions.

A Disciplined and Collaborative Culture Sustained Performance

The school's organizational culture was characterized by discipline, cooperation, communication, continuous supervision, and mutual support. These patterns were experienced as established habits rather than occasional initiatives. Teachers described a work environment in which colleagues supported one another, information circulated, and organizational expectations were understood. Collaboration reduced professional isolation and helped teachers address instructional and student-related problems collectively. Discipline protected the continuity of learning, while communication made coordination more efficient. The cultural emphasis on cooperation also extended to engagement with parents and the wider community, which participants viewed as strengthening teachers' commitment to educational quality.

Leadership and Culture Operated as a Synergistic System

The most integrative finding was that teacher performance was shaped by the relationship between principal leadership and organizational culture. Leadership practices were influential because they were reinforced through shared routines, and cultural norms remained coherent because the principal modeled, communicated, and supervised them. Teachers' motivation,

punctuality, instructional effectiveness, independence, and commitment were therefore not attributed to leadership or culture alone. They emerged from a system in which leadership established direction and support while culture stabilized expectations through repeated interaction. The findings indicate that leadership became organizationally consequential when it was embedded in communication patterns, supervisory routines, collaborative relationships, and shared responsibility.

Leadership as a Relational and Context-Responsive Practice

The findings support the argument that effective school leadership is enacted through a context-responsive combination of practices rather than through a single pure style. The principal was experienced as democratic and transformational because teachers were included in communication and decision-making, yet the leadership also had an instructional and managerial dimension through supervision, standards, and attention to task completion. This combination is consistent with Day et al. (2016), who found that successful principals layer transformational and instructional strategies according to organizational needs, and with Leithwood et al. (2020), who emphasized direction setting, people development, and organizational redesign as recurring features of successful leadership. The present study extends those claims by showing how teachers interpret the combination in daily work: participation gives legitimacy to expectations, support makes supervision developmental, and firmness preserves the credibility of collective rules.

The relational quality of communication was especially important. Teachers did not describe communication merely as the transmission of information; they connected it with motivation, trust, and willingness to accept decisions. This interpretation aligns with Price (2012), who demonstrated that principal–teacher interactions shape satisfaction, cohesion, and commitment, and with Bogler (2001), who linked leadership style to teacher job satisfaction. Open communication can be understood as a reducing mechanism for organizational ambiguity. When teachers know why a decision is taken, how it relates to school goals, and where they can raise concerns, they are more likely to interpret leadership as supportive rather than controlling. The result is not only better interpersonal relations but also greater readiness to invest effort in organizational priorities.

The study also confirms that teacher motivation is connected to leaders' capacity to provide recognition, encouragement, and professional direction. Transformational leadership research has repeatedly associated inspirational and individualized practices with teacher commitment and extra effort (Geijsel et al., 2003; Nguni et al., 2006). However, the present findings suggest that motivation was strongest when encouragement was tied to concrete organizational practices. Teachers valued support because it accompanied supervision, decision-making, and delegated responsibility. This matters theoretically because it shifts attention from inspirational behavior alone to the alignment between relational support and the practical architecture of teachers' work.

School Culture as the Mechanism that Stabilizes Leadership

The findings indicate that organizational culture functioned as a stabilizing mechanism. Leadership messages about discipline, collaboration, and responsibility became influential when they were repeated through routines and shared interactions. This interpretation is consistent with Schoen and Teddlie's (2008) view of school culture as a multidimensional organizational phenomenon and with MacNeil et al. (2009), who linked healthy culture and climate to school effectiveness. It also resonates with Cucchiara et al. (2025), who distinguish formal and informal meanings and practices. In the school studied, formal elements included rules, supervision, vision, and performance documentation; informal elements included mutual

support, openness, and habitual cooperation. Performance improved when these elements were aligned rather than contradictory.

The role of collaboration is particularly significant. Bellibaş et al. (2021) found that distributed and instructional leadership can influence instructional quality through teacher collaboration and job satisfaction. Liu et al. (2021) similarly identified supportive school culture and collaboration as mediating mechanisms connecting leadership with self-efficacy and satisfaction. The phenomenological evidence in this study gives those statistical pathways an experiential interpretation. Collaboration helped teachers exchange support, coordinate responsibilities, and solve problems, while leadership created the conditions under which such collaboration was expected and legitimate. The finding therefore reinforces the idea that leadership effects are socially transmitted through professional interaction rather than delivered directly from principal to classroom. These interpretations are further supported by research identifying collective efficacy as a mediating mechanism between principal leadership and collaboration and by evidence connecting distributed leadership and collaboration with stronger instructional-practice profiles (Meyer et al., 2022; Özdemir et al., 2023).

A positive culture also appeared to protect teachers from isolation and fragmented work. School climate research shows that collegial support and supportive organizational conditions are related to lower stress, stronger efficacy, and greater job satisfaction (Collie et al., 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011; Toropova et al., 2021). Although the present study did not measure stress or satisfaction, participants' accounts of mutual support and harmonious working relations suggest a similar mechanism. When teachers perceive that colleagues and leaders will respond constructively, they are more willing to seek assistance, share ideas, and sustain commitment. This strengthens the organizational capacity to address instructional and student-related challenges collectively.

Professional Autonomy as Enabled Independence

One of the most important findings is that teacher independence was not produced by the withdrawal of leadership. It was enabled by trust within a structured environment. The principal provided teachers with discretion to choose strategies and respond to students, while maintaining expectations through supervision and shared goals. This can be described as bounded professional autonomy: teachers exercise judgment, but their decisions remain connected to organizational purposes and accountability. Distributed leadership theory helps explain this pattern because leadership practice can be stretched across people and situations without eliminating formal authority (Harris, 2008; Spillane et al., 2004). The principal's trust expanded teachers' agency, while the culture of responsibility reduced the risk that autonomy would become inconsistency.

This interpretation also clarifies why trust is central to performance. Trust communicates that teachers are regarded as capable professionals, which can strengthen self-efficacy and ownership. Klassen and Chiu (2010) showed that teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction are related to experience and job stress, while Liu et al. (2021) found that leadership is connected to self-efficacy through supportive culture and collaboration. The current study did not directly assess self-efficacy, but teachers' willingness to make instructional decisions and solve problems independently is compatible with an efficacy-building process. The practical implication is that principals should avoid equating supervision with micro-management. Developmental oversight should clarify standards, provide feedback, and then create space for professional judgment.

Discipline, Punctuality, and the Meaning of Accountability

Discipline and punctuality were prominent dimensions of performance, but the findings do not support a simplistic authoritarian interpretation. Rules were effective because they were communicated, supervised, and normalized within a collaborative culture. The principal's firmness gave organizational expectations consistency, while supportive relations reduced the likelihood that accountability would be experienced as arbitrary. This balance helps explain why minimal authoritarian behavior could coexist with strong discipline. Accountability was perceived as legitimate when it was attached to shared educational purposes and applied through predictable routines.

The importance of routine is also consistent with organizational perspectives on leadership. Louis et al. (2010) found that shared leadership, professional community, and instructional support are connected to teachers' classroom practices, while Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) showed that trust and shared responsibility influence how teachers experience principal leadership. In the present case, punctuality and task completion were not merely individual habits; they were collective expectations reinforced by supervision and peer norms. This suggests that efforts to improve performance should target the social organization of work, not only individual compliance. Schools can strengthen punctuality by aligning schedules, communication, monitoring, and mutual accountability rather than relying solely on sanctions.

Theoretical Contribution and Alternative Interpretations

The study's theoretical contribution is an integrated leadership–culture explanation of teacher performance. Leadership established direction, relational support, and supervisory expectations; culture translated those elements into recurring patterns of behavior; and teachers experienced the combined system as motivation, discipline, autonomy, effectiveness, and commitment. This explanation complements the indirect-effects perspective in educational leadership research (Liebowitz & Porter, 2019; Robinson et al., 2008). It suggests that culture is not merely another predictor placed beside leadership. Culture is one of the principal pathways through which leadership becomes durable and collectively enacted.

An alternative interpretation is that the positive performance described by participants may partly reflect pre-existing teacher professionalism rather than leadership or culture. Experienced and committed teachers can themselves generate collaborative norms and influence leadership practice. Recent conceptualizations of school culture caution that culture is emergent from multiple actors and environmental conditions, not simply imposed from the top (Cucchiara et al., 2025). The data support this more reciprocal reading because teachers were not passive recipients; they participated in decisions, supported colleagues, and sustained organizational routines. The relationship is therefore better understood as mutually reinforcing: principal practices shape cultural conditions, while teacher participation reproduces and modifies those conditions.

Practical and Policy Implications

Several practical implications follow. First, principals should institutionalize two-way communication through regular forums, accessible consultation, and transparent explanation of decisions. Communication should not be limited to announcements; it should enable feedback and collective interpretation. Second, supervision should be designed as a developmental process that combines clear standards, observation, feedback, assistance, and follow-up. Third, school leaders should deliberately delegate meaningful responsibilities so that teachers experience trust and develop decision-making capacity. Fourth, collaboration should be protected through scheduled opportunities for joint planning, peer problem solving, and discussion of student needs. Fifth, discipline policies should be consistent and connected to

shared educational goals, allowing accountability to be perceived as professional rather than punitive.

At the policy level, principal development programs should integrate leadership, organizational culture, and teacher performance rather than treating them as separate modules. Training often emphasizes administrative compliance or a catalog of leadership styles. The findings suggest that leaders need practical competence in building communication routines, facilitating participation, conducting supportive supervision, managing relational trust, and aligning formal rules with informal norms. School evaluation systems should likewise examine organizational conditions that support teacher performance, not only individual output indicators. This would encourage improvement strategies that address the social and cultural infrastructure of professional work. This emphasis is consistent with recent review evidence suggesting that leadership development should prioritize supportive, empowering, and professionally enabling conditions while avoiding causal claims that exceed the underlying research designs (See et al., 2026).

Limitations, Reliability, and Future Research

The findings should be interpreted within several limitations. The study was conducted in one public senior high school, so the results offer analytic insight rather than statistical generalization. The participant group was role-relevant but small, and the available record did not include demographic variation, fieldwork duration, or detailed de-identified interview transcripts. The absence of extensive verbatim excerpts limits the reader's ability to assess the full texture of participants' language, although triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents supports the coherence of the themes. The study also relied on perceptions and organizational evidence rather than independent measures of classroom quality or student outcomes. Consequently, statements about improvement indicate participants' experienced and observed patterns, not experimentally verified causal effects.

Future research should examine the proposed mechanism across schools with different performance levels, leadership histories, and cultural characteristics. Longitudinal designs could identify whether communicative leadership and collaborative routines produce stable change or depend on particular leaders. Mixed-method research could combine phenomenological accounts with validated measures of leadership, culture, self-efficacy, commitment, instructional quality, and student outcomes. Comparative studies across regions of Indonesia would be particularly valuable for examining how local context influences the meaning of authority, collaboration, discipline, and professional autonomy. Future qualitative reports should also include richer verbatim evidence and explicit reflexive procedures to strengthen interpretive transparency.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explain how principal leadership and school organizational culture shaped teachers' perceived performance in a public senior high school. The findings show that communicative and participatory leadership, supportive supervision, professional trust, disciplined routines, and collaborative relationships operated as an interconnected system that strengthened teachers' motivation, punctuality, instructional effectiveness, independence, work quality, and commitment. The principal's influence was not derived from a single leadership style; it became consequential when relational support and accountability were embedded in everyday cultural practices. The study contributes an integrated leadership–culture explanation of teacher performance, showing that culture stabilizes leadership and that teacher participation reproduces the organizational conditions through which performance develops. In practice, schools should prioritize two-way communication, developmental supervision, meaningful

delegation, collaborative work structures, and consistent professional accountability. Future studies should test this mechanism through multi-site, longitudinal, and mixed-method designs and should connect teachers' lived experiences with independent indicators of instructional quality and student outcomes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge the principal, vice principal, and teachers who contributed their time and professional perspectives to this study. The authors also thank the school community for facilitating access to organizational documents and observational settings. No external funding was reported in the source manuscript.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, E. (2026). Principal leadership and teacher outcomes: A systematic review of research. *Improving Schools*, 28(2), 355–375.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/13654802251409533>
- Alhazmi, A. A., & Kaufmann, A. (2022). Phenomenological qualitative methods applied to the analysis of cross-cultural experience in novel educational social contexts. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 785134. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.785134>
- Bellibaş, M. Ş., Gümüş, S., & Liu, Y. (2021). Does school leadership matter for teachers' classroom practice? The influence of instructional leadership and distributed leadership on instructional quality. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 32(3), 387–412. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2020.1858119>
- Bellibaş, M. Ş., Polatcan, M., & Akyürek, M. İ. (2024). Principal leadership typologies and their relationship with teacher self-efficacy and commitment: A latent profile mediation analysis. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 52(6), 1497–1518.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432221139932>
- Bogler, R. (2001). The influence of leadership style on teacher job satisfaction. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 37(5), 662–683. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00131610121969460>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Collie, R. J., Shapka, J. D., & Perry, N. E. (2012). School climate and social-emotional learning: Predicting teacher stress, job satisfaction, and teaching efficacy. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 104(4), 1189–1204. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029356>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Cucchiara, M., Golann, J. W., & Diehl, D. (2025). What is school culture? Proposing a new, integrative model. *Theory and Research in Education*, 23(2), 163–187.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/14778785251351272>
- Day, C., Gu, Q., & Sammons, P. (2016). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: How successful school leaders use transformational and instructional strategies to make a difference. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 52(2), 221–258.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X15616863>
- Gaol, N. T. L. (2023). School leadership in Indonesia: A systematic literature review. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 51(4), 831–848.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432211010811>
- Geijsel, F., Slegers, P., Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2003). Transformational leadership effects on teachers' commitment and effort toward school reform. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 41(3), 228–256.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230310474403>

- Gümüş, S., Bellibaş, M. Ş., Esen, M., & Gümüş, E. (2018). A systematic review of studies on leadership models in educational research from 1980 to 2014. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 46(1), 25–48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143216659296>
- Hallinger, P. (2011). Leadership for learning: Lessons from 40 years of empirical research. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 49(2), 125–142. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578231111116699>
- Harris, A. (2008). Distributed leadership: According to the evidence. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 46(2), 172–188. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230810863253>
- Karadağ, E., Bektaş, F., Çoğaltay, N., & Yalçın, M. (2015). The effect of educational leadership on students' achievement: A meta-analysis study. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 16, 79–93. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-015-9357-x>
- Klassen, R. M., & Chiu, M. M. (2010). Effects on teachers' self-efficacy and job satisfaction: Teacher gender, years of experience, and job stress. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 102(3), 741–756. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019237>
- Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2020). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited. *School Leadership & Management*, 40(1), 5–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2019.1596077>
- Liebowitz, D. D., & Porter, L. (2019). The effect of principal behaviors on student, teacher, and school outcomes: A systematic review and meta-analysis of the empirical literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 89(5), 785–827. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654319866133>
- Liu, Y., Bellibaş, M. Ş., & Gümüş, S. (2021). The effect of instructional leadership and distributed leadership on teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction: Mediating roles of supportive school culture and teacher collaboration. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 49(3), 430–453. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220910438>
- Louis, K. S., Dretzke, B., & Wahlstrom, K. (2010). How does leadership affect student achievement? Results from a national US survey. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 21(3), 315–336. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2010.486586>
- MacNeil, A. J., Prater, D. L., & Busch, S. (2009). The effects of school culture and climate on student achievement. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 12(1), 73–84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603120701576241>
- Marks, H. M., & Printy, S. M. (2003). Principal leadership and school performance: An integration of transformational and instructional leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 39(3), 370–397. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X03253412>
- Meyer, A., Richter, D., & Hartung-Beck, V. (2022). The relationship between principal leadership and teacher collaboration: Investigating the mediating effect of teachers' collective efficacy. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 50(4), 593–612. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220945698>
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2020). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. SAGE.
- Nguni, S., Slegers, P., & Denessen, E. (2006). Transformational and transactional leadership effects on teachers' job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior in primary schools: The Tanzanian case. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 17(2), 145–177. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09243450600565746>
- Özdemir, N., Kılınç, A. Ç., Polatcan, M., Turan, S., & Bellibaş, M. Ş. (2023). Exploring teachers' instructional practice profiles: Do distributed leadership and teacher

- collaboration make a difference? *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 59(2), 255–305. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X231159092>
- Price, H. E. (2012). Principal–teacher interactions: How affective relationships shape principal and teacher attitudes. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 48(1), 39–85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X11417126>
- Robinson, V. M. J., Lloyd, C. A., & Rowe, K. J. (2008). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: An analysis of the differential effects of leadership types. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44(5), 635–674. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X08321509>
- Schoen, L. T., & Teddlie, C. (2008). A new model of school culture: A response to a call for conceptual clarity. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 19(2), 129–153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09243450802095278>
- See, B. H., Gorard, S., El Soufi, N., Ledger, M., Morris, R., Maude, K., & Ivarsson-Keng, N. (2026). A structured review of the potential role of school leaders in making teaching more attractive. *Educational Review*, 78(2), 239–263. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2024.2392565>
- Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2011). Teacher job satisfaction and motivation to leave the teaching profession: Relations with school context, feeling of belonging, and emotional exhaustion. *Social Psychology of Education*, 14, 271–295. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-011-9154-6>
- Somech, A., & Bogler, R. (2002). Antecedents and consequences of teacher organizational and professional commitment. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 38(4), 555–577. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001316102237672>
- Spillane, J. P., Halverson, R., & Diamond, J. B. (2004). Towards a theory of leadership practice: A distributed perspective. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 36(1), 3–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0022027032000106726>
- Sumarsono, R. B., Gunawan, I., Sunarni, Kusumaningrum, D. E., & Asimiran, S. B. (2026). Does principal leadership make a difference in school-based management in Indonesia? The balanced scorecard lenses. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 21(2), 202–228. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19427751251368865>
- Thoonen, E. E. J., Sleegers, P. J. C., Oort, F. J., Peetsma, T. T. D., & Geijsel, F. P. (2011). How to improve teaching practices: The role of teacher motivation, organizational factors, and leadership practices. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 47(3), 496–536. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X11400185>
- Toropova, A., Myrberg, E., & Johansson, S. (2021). Teacher job satisfaction: The importance of school working conditions and teacher characteristics. *Educational Review*, 73(1), 71–97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2019.1705247>
- Wahlstrom, K. L., & Louis, K. S. (2008). How teachers experience principal leadership: The roles of professional community, trust, efficacy, and shared responsibility. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44(4), 458–495. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X08321502>