

Principal Leadership Style and Teacher Performance in Improving Learning Quality

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ABSTRACT

School improvement efforts often failed to translate policy expectations into consistent classroom practice, making leadership style a practical concern for learning quality. This study examined how principal leadership styles related to teacher performance and how that relationship supported the improvement of learning quality. A qualitative library-based design was used, relying on secondary sources from peer-reviewed scholarship on instructional leadership, transformational leadership, accountability practices, supervision and feedback, professional development, and school climate. The analysis synthesized recurring mechanisms that connected leadership to teacher work and classroom processes. The findings indicated that leadership influenced learning quality primarily through teacher performance by clarifying instructional direction, strengthening supervision and feedback, supporting professional capacity, and shaping a school climate that encouraged accountability and collaboration. Instructional leadership provided the most direct pathway to improving teaching practice, while transformational and democratic elements strengthened motivation and shared commitment when aligned with clear standards. Transactional elements supported baseline discipline but were insufficient as a dominant approach for instructional improvement. The study concluded that a balanced leadership profile anchored in instructional priorities was most consistent with sustained improvements in learning quality.



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INTRODUCTION

School improvement debates rarely fail because of a lack of policy language or program labels. They fail when daily teaching routines do not change in a direction that improves what students actually experience in the classroom. In most basic accounts of educational management, the principal is positioned as the formal leader who connects policy demands, institutional resources, and classroom practice. Yet the most consequential influence of a principal is not the existence of authority as such, but the leadership style through which authority is exercised. Leadership style shapes how expectations are communicated, how support is provided, how performance is monitored, and how professional norms are reinforced. For teachers, these are not abstract managerial matters. They determine whether lesson planning is treated as a meaningful professional obligation, whether feedback is received as developmental or punitive, and whether collaboration becomes a real practice rather than a ceremonial slogan. Because teaching quality is the main driver of learning experiences, the relationship between the principal's leadership style and teacher performance becomes a strategic point of analysis for any effort aimed at improving learning quality (Elfira et al., 2024).

Teacher performance, however, cannot be reduced to visible classroom behavior alone. It includes preparedness, instructional design, assessment literacy, responsiveness to student needs, and consistent professional conduct. In many schools, teacher performance is strongly shaped by the organizational climate created by leadership (Akgöz et al., 2024). A leadership style that is clear in direction but also respectful in interaction tends to encourage stronger accountability without provoking

defensive resistance. Conversely, leadership that relies heavily on command and control may generate compliance on paper while weakening intrinsic motivation and pedagogical creativity. Another style may be highly collegial yet too permissive, producing a culture where standards are negotiated downward. These practical tensions explain why leadership style deserves close attention. The same principal role can produce very different results depending on whether leadership is instructional in focus, transformational in motivation, transactional in reward and sanction, or democratic in decision processes (Efendi et al., 2023). Each style carries distinct mechanisms that can strengthen or weaken teacher performance, and through it, the quality of learning.

Learning quality is the central output of schooling and the most legitimate benchmark of school management. It is reflected in the coherence of instructional goals, the alignment between curriculum and classroom implementation, the appropriateness of teaching methods, the use of assessment to support learning, and the extent to which students are meaningfully engaged. In everyday school life, learning quality is often discussed through exam scores or accreditation indicators, but those metrics are only endpoints. The more operational question concerns what leadership does to influence the conditions of teaching and learning. Principals can use leadership to set instructional priorities, organize professional development, ensure fair distribution of teaching loads, and create routines of supervision that actually help teachers improve. In this sense, leadership style is not a decorative trait. It is a managerial instrument that shapes how the school's human resources are mobilized toward learning outcomes (Yada et al., 2023).

This study is anchored in the idea that leadership style affects learning quality primarily through its effect on teacher performance. The logic is straightforward but demands careful articulation. Leadership establishes the normative and operational environment in which teachers work. When leadership clarifies expectations, provides credible support, and builds a culture of professional responsibility, teachers are more likely to plan lessons carefully, implement instruction consistently, and engage in reflective improvement. When leadership is inconsistent, overly coercive, or disengaged from instruction, teacher performance may become fragmented, and classroom quality becomes uneven. The relevance of this analysis is especially strong in settings where schools face pressures of curriculum change, teacher workload intensification, and varying levels of teacher competence (Meidelina et al., 2023). Under such conditions, leadership style can either stabilize professional practice or amplify organizational uncertainty. A focused examination of leadership style and teacher performance is therefore relevant for educational management, particularly when the main objective is learning quality rather than administrative compliance.

Based on these considerations, the study addresses two main questions. First, how do different principal leadership styles conceptually relate to teacher performance as a professional and managerial construct. Second, through what mechanisms can leadership style influence learning quality by shaping teacher performance, especially in the domains of instructional planning, classroom practice, and assessment. These questions are intended to structure an argument rather than to merely compile statements. The objective is to produce a coherent explanation that links leadership theories to the realities of teaching work, and to draw implications for how principals can direct improvement efforts more effectively. Accordingly, the study aims to clarify key concepts, map the pathways of influence, and synthesize findings from relevant scholarly discussions in order to provide a grounded understanding of the leadership–performance–quality relationship.

The practical value of the study lies in providing an analytical basis for leadership development in schools. For principals, the discussion can serve as a guide for reflecting on leadership practices that directly touch teaching and learning, including supervision, communication of standards, and professional support. For teachers, the analysis can clarify how organizational conditions shape performance and what forms of leadership tend to create enabling environments for instructional improvement. For education administrators and policymakers, it can help in designing training programs and evaluation frameworks that emphasize learning quality as the final benchmark. In academic terms, the study contributes by integrating leadership style concepts with a performance-based view of teaching and by positioning learning quality as the central outcome that gives managerial meaning to school leadership.

To maintain conceptual clarity, several key terms are defined within a manageable scope. Principal leadership style refers to a relatively consistent pattern of behavior used by a school principal in directing, influencing, and supporting teachers and school processes. The term includes common

typologies such as instructional leadership, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and democratic leadership, treated as analytic categories rather than rigid labels. Teacher performance refers to the quality and consistency of teachers' professional work, particularly in planning, implementing, and evaluating instruction, as well as fulfilling professional responsibilities that support effective learning. Learning quality refers to the extent to which classroom processes, instructional design, and assessment practices support meaningful student learning, reflected in coherence, engagement, and pedagogical effectiveness rather than in test outcomes alone. The scope of discussion centers on the relationship among these concepts in a school context, with emphasis on the mechanisms by which leadership style may shape teacher performance and, consequently, learning quality.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a qualitative library-based design. The data consisted exclusively of secondary sources drawn from recent peer-reviewed journal articles that discuss principal leadership styles, teacher performance, and learning quality, with emphasis on studies explaining how leadership practices such as goal-setting, supervision and feedback, professional development, and school climate relate to teachers' instructional work. Sources were selected based on relevance to these constructs and were synthesized through qualitative thematic analysis by extracting key concepts, grouping recurring mechanisms linking leadership to teacher performance and learning quality, and integrating them into a coherent explanatory narrative aligned with the focus of the discussion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Mechanism of Influence of Leadership on Teacher Performance

Principal leadership influenced teacher performance first through the way instructional direction was translated into operational expectations. When leadership clarified what counted as effective teaching, teachers were more able to align lesson planning, classroom delivery, and assessment routines with shared standards (Nisa et al., 2025). This direction-setting function worked best when expectations were stable and framed around learning processes rather than administrative completeness. Instructional-oriented leadership tended to specify classroom-relevant priorities such as coherence between objectives, methods, and assessment, while transformational practices reinforced the meaning of those priorities by connecting them to collective purpose. In contrast, direction that relied mainly on rules and compliance checks encouraged teachers to focus on visible outputs and paperwork rather than on instructional refinement (Elfira et al., 2024). Participation-oriented leadership strengthened commitment when teachers were involved in goal formation, but it required clear boundaries so that instructional standards did not become negotiable through convenience-based compromise.

Teacher performance was also shaped by how leadership regulated motivation and accountability. Transformational leadership strengthened commitment by building trust, recognizing effort, and sustaining a sense of shared responsibility for improvement (Karim et al., 2025). Instructional leadership supported motivation when supervision was experienced as developmental and when leaders demonstrated competence in teaching and learning issues. Transactional mechanisms could stabilize minimum discipline, especially in punctuality, task completion, and baseline compliance, yet they tended to produce limited instructional improvement if used as the dominant pattern. Teachers were more likely to invest cognitive and emotional effort in teaching when accountability was paired with support and fairness, not when performance signals were primarily punitive or inconsistent. Democratic practices contributed by increasing ownership and internalized responsibility, but only when autonomy was paired with non-negotiable instructional expectations.

Leadership credibility affected whether teachers interpreted expectations as legitimate professional standards or as bureaucratic pressure. When leadership behavior was consistent with stated priorities, teachers were more likely to accept supervision and feedback as part of professional practice. Integrity was expressed through fair workload distribution, consistent application of standards, and transparent decision-making. In low-credibility conditions, teachers often protected autonomy by treating improvement initiatives as symbolic and by restricting effort to what was formally demanded. In higher-credibility conditions, teachers were more open to feedback, more willing to collaborate, and more likely to adjust instructional routines, all of which strengthened performance in ways that mattered for classroom learning quality.

The credibility-based mechanism described above became even more visible in how teachers responded to evaluation and appraisal routines. When performance conversations were anchored in observable instructional practice and applied consistently across staff, teachers tended to interpret evaluation as a professional standard rather than as a personal judgment. This interpretation reduced avoidance behavior, such as producing documentation only for inspection days or restricting innovation to prevent criticism. In contrast, when appraisal criteria were vague or unevenly applied, teachers often redirected effort toward self-protection, which weakened the continuity of improvement work and fragmented instructional routines across classrooms (Tóth & Csapó, 2022).

Leadership style also shaped the distribution of instructional responsibility within the teacher community. Where leaders cultivated peer accountability through structured collaboration—such as shared planning, peer observation, and joint review of student work—teacher performance was less dependent on individual dispositions and more supported by collective routines. This arrangement mattered because instructional quality is sustained through repeated practice, not isolated effort. Leadership that normalized professional dialogue about teaching reduced the social cost of seeking help and made improvement a shared expectation, which strengthened performance consistency across different teacher experience levels (Mydin et al., 2024).

A further extension of this mechanism concerned the stability of organizational signals over time. Teachers adjusted practice more reliably when leadership messages, supervision priorities, and resource decisions pointed in the same instructional direction across a sustained period. Mixed signals—such as emphasizing learning quality rhetorically while rewarding only administrative compliance—created strategic ambiguity that teachers quickly learned to navigate. In such situations, the most rational teacher response was to optimize for what leadership visibly monitored, which typically produced short-term compliance rather than durable instructional improvement.

2. Instructional Leadership as a Lever for Learning Quality

Instructional leadership affected learning quality most directly through structured supervision that focused on pedagogy. Classroom observation became productive when it was paired with specific feedback linked to instructional practice rather than to general impressions. Feedback supported improvement when it translated observed issues into actionable steps, such as refining questioning techniques, strengthening formative assessment, or improving lesson structure. When supervision was framed as inspection, it tended to generate defensive compliance and short-term performance displays. When supervision was framed as coaching, it encouraged reflection and incremental improvement (Glover et al., 2023). This distinction mattered because learning quality is built through repeated adjustments in teaching practice rather than through one-time evaluation events.

Teacher performance improved more reliably when professional development was tied to identified instructional needs. Instructional leadership strengthened this alignment by using classroom evidence and performance signals to prioritize training topics and coaching. Transformational elements contributed by creating a growth climate where learning was valued and experimentation was legitimized. Development programs that were mandatory but not clearly relevant tended to produce low transfer into classroom practice. Where teacher learning was treated as part of daily work—through peer sharing, focused workshops, and reflective dialogue—teachers had more opportunity to refine instruction, which supported learning quality (Buchari et al., 2025).

Instructional leadership also operated by protecting instructional time and reducing organizational distractions that fragmented teaching routines. Learning quality depended on stable scheduling, fewer non-essential interruptions, and leadership attention to the conditions that enable planning and consistent delivery. When leaders prioritized teaching time and established routines that supported orderly learning environments, teachers were better positioned to implement coherent instruction. This did not require rigid control; it required disciplined prioritization so that the school's organizational energy remained anchored to learning processes (Gümüş et al., 2024).

The protection of instructional time also needed to be paired with the disciplined organization of professional time. Teachers often experienced planning and reflection as “leftover work” conducted outside formal hours, which reduced quality and consistency. Instructional leadership addressed this by formalizing collaborative planning windows and ensuring that meetings were instructional in substance rather than ceremonial. When professional time was structured around concrete outputs—lesson sequences, formative assessment tools, or agreed classroom routines—teachers were more able to

translate general goals into operational teaching practice, supporting learning quality in a measurable way at classroom level.

Another practical implication concerned the alignment between supervision feedback and professional development content. In effective instructional leadership patterns, coaching feedback did not end as a conversation; it became an input into the design of targeted learning sessions and follow-up support. This closed-loop process reduced the common gap where teachers attend training that is detached from observed classroom needs. By maintaining continuity between observation, feedback, and development opportunities, leadership strengthened the probability that teacher learning would transfer into classroom practice rather than remain as abstract knowledge.

Instructional leadership also benefited from differentiating support without lowering standards. Teachers varied in pedagogical skill, confidence, and readiness to adopt new methods. A uniform supervision approach could either overwhelm less prepared teachers or bore more advanced teachers, reducing engagement. Differentiated coaching—while keeping shared instructional expectations stable—helped teachers progress at an appropriate pace and reduced resistance, which in turn supported consistent improvement in learning quality across classrooms rather than concentrated gains among a limited subset of teachers (Nawas, 2023).

3. Transformational Leadership, School Climate, and Performance-Supportive Conditions

Transformational leadership influenced teacher performance by shaping school climate—particularly trust, psychological safety, and collegial support. Teachers were more willing to acknowledge instructional difficulties and seek help when they felt feedback would not be used to humiliate or punish unfairly. Trust strengthened openness to coaching and willingness to coordinate practice with colleagues. Democratic leadership reinforced this climate when participation was genuine and transparent, because teachers felt ownership over improvement directions. When climate was weak and trust was low, teacher work often shifted toward surface compliance, limiting meaningful instructional change and weakening learning quality.

A growth-oriented climate supported teacher readiness to adopt new methods and refine practice. Transformational leadership encouraged persistence during reform pressures by strengthening collective efficacy and by framing improvement as achievable through shared effort. This mattered because learning quality improvement requires sustained attention and willingness to iterate. However, innovation was most productive when connected to instructional routines and clear expectations. Motivation without operational guidance risked producing enthusiastic rhetoric with limited classroom-level change (Nurrizayani et al., 2024).

Communication patterns functioned as a performance condition. Leadership that managed conflict fairly and communicated expectations consistently reduced uncertainty and protected professional relationships (Firmansyah et al., 2022). In schools, conflict often arises from workload allocation, evaluation perceptions, and change demands. When leaders handled disagreements transparently and maintained respect in communication, teachers were less likely to disengage and more likely to collaborate. This supported performance not as an abstract virtue, but as a practical basis for coherent instructional work that students experience as stable learning quality.

Communication and conflict management further influenced performance by shaping whether teachers experienced change as legitimate or imposed. When leaders explained the instructional rationale behind decisions, teachers were more likely to accept new routines even when they increased workload temporarily. This acceptance did not require unanimous agreement; it required procedural fairness, clarity, and respect in interaction. In schools where communication was opaque, teachers often interpreted change as arbitrary, which encouraged informal resistance, reduced collaboration, and weakened the practical implementation of improvement initiatives that were necessary for learning quality (Mérida-López & Extremera, 2022).

The performance-supportive climate described earlier also depended on how leaders handled mistakes and variability in classroom results. Teachers were more willing to innovate when setbacks were treated as learning signals rather than as grounds for blame. Transformational practices helped by reinforcing growth norms and recognizing incremental progress, while instructional practices ensured that reflection remained connected to teaching evidence rather than drifting into generalized morale talk. This balance mattered because a permissive climate without instructional discipline risked

normalizing low standards, whereas a strict climate without psychological safety risked suppressing experimentation and honest diagnosis of instructional problems.

Finally, the interaction between climate and coherence determined whether collaboration translated into aligned classroom practice. A collegial environment could still produce inconsistent learning experiences if teachers worked in parallel without shared instructional anchors. Leadership supported coherence by turning collaboration into structured work—agreeing on learning targets, common assessment cues, and minimum instructional routines—while maintaining respectful professional relationships. In this way, climate and alignment reinforced each other: trust enabled difficult instructional conversations, and instructional anchors ensured that those conversations produced coordinated action that students experienced as improved learning quality .

4. Implementation Barriers and Context Variation

Leadership influence was moderated by constraints such as administrative overload and limited resources. Even leaders with strong instructional intentions could be pulled into reporting routines and compliance obligations that reduce time for supervision and coaching. Teachers also faced constraints that affect performance, including limited learning materials and time pressure. Leadership mattered when it managed constraints strategically—delegating non-instructional tasks where possible, simplifying routines that did not add instructional value, and protecting time for planning and professional learning. Under resource limitations, improvement often depended less on new programs and more on how effectively leadership mobilized existing human capacity (Tao et al., 2024).

Variation in teacher competence and differences in readiness to change shaped how leadership practices translated into performance (Grimm, 2024). In contexts where teachers were unevenly prepared, leadership needed to combine clarity of expectations with differentiated support. Resistance often emerged when changes were perceived as unfair, unclear, or disconnected from classroom realities. Democratic participation could reduce resistance by increasing ownership, but participation alone did not close competence gaps. The practical implication is that improvement required leadership to pair relational strategies with technical instructional guidance, keeping expectations stable while building capacity over time.

Across the discussion, leadership style was most coherently understood as shaping learning quality through teacher performance. Leadership affected performance through six connected mechanisms: setting instructional direction, structuring supervision and feedback, regulating motivation and accountability, enabling professional capacity building, forming a trust-supportive climate, and strengthening instructional alignment across classrooms. Teacher performance then shaped learning quality through more coherent planning, stronger instructional delivery, more meaningful assessment, and more stable classroom learning conditions (Bianconi & Larwin, 2025). The synthesis suggests that instructional leadership provided the technical core for improvement, transformational and democratic behaviors sustained motivation and collaboration, and transactional elements supported baseline order. Learning quality improvement was most consistent when these elements were integrated under clear instructional priorities and enacted through fair, developmental, and evidence-oriented routines.

CONCLUSION

Principal leadership style shapes learning quality most powerfully through its influence on teacher performance. When leadership provides clear instructional direction, credible supervision, and consistent feedback, teachers are more likely to improve planning, instructional delivery, and assessment practices that directly affect what students experience in classrooms. Instructional leadership offers the most direct pathway because it targets the technical core of schooling, while transformational leadership strengthens motivation, trust, and collective efficacy that sustain improvement over time. Transactional leadership can stabilize baseline discipline and compliance, yet it rarely produces deeper instructional growth when it becomes the dominant approach. Democratic leadership strengthens ownership and collaboration when participation is structured around evidence and clear instructional standards. Overall, learning quality improves when leadership behaviors are integrated in a way that balances clarity of expectations, developmental support, and professional accountability.

Recommendations focus on aligning leadership practice with mechanisms that improve teaching. Principals should prioritize instructional routines, including regular classroom observation

with specific coaching feedback, and protect time for collaborative lesson planning and targeted professional learning. School leadership should also build a fair performance environment by applying standards consistently, recognizing teacher effort, and reducing administrative burdens that distract from instructional work. Where participation is used, decision-making should be guided by evidence from classrooms and student learning, so collaboration strengthens coherence rather than diluting standards. Finally, leadership development programs should emphasize hybrid competence, combining instructional expertise with relational skills that build trust and sustain teacher motivation.

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