

## IMPACT OF PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP STYLE ON THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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### Abstract/Izvleček

The role of the principal in developing leadership is key to improving the quality of education. This study uses a systematic review of the literature to analyse empirical studies of leadership styles exhibited by elementary and secondary school principals and to establish how different leadership styles contribute to improving the quality of education in schools. The review reveals that three dominant leadership styles, namely instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership, are most influential in improving educational quality. Effective principal leadership significantly enhances educational quality by fostering teacher development, a collaborative culture, and improved student learning outcomes.

### Keywords:

leadership styles,  
education quality,  
impact, systematic  
literature review.

### Vpliv ravnateljevega vodstvenega sloga na kakovost izobraževanja: sistematični pregled literature

### Ključne besede:

slogi vodenja,  
kakovost izobraževanja,  
vpliv, sistematični  
pregled literature.

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Vloga ravnatelja pri razvoju vodenja je ključna za izboljšanje kakovosti izobraževanja. V študiji smo uporabili sistematični pregled literature za analizo empiričnih študij stilov vodenja, ki jih kažejo ravnatelji osnovnih in srednjih šol, in kako različni stili vodenja prispevajo k izboljšanju kakovosti izobraževanja v šolah. Pregled razkriva, da imajo trije prevladujoči stili vodenja, in sicer poučno, transformacijsko in porazdeljeno vodenje, največji vpliv na izboljšanje kakovosti izobraževanja. Učinkovito vodenje ravnatelja pomembno prispeva h kakovosti izobraževanja, saj spodbuja strokovni razvoj učiteljev, krepi kulturo sodelovanja ter izboljšuje učne dosežke učencev. Iz študije izhajajo priporočila za nadaljnje raziskave za proučitev dejavnikov, ki vplivajo na stil vodenja ravnatelja, ter njihovega vpliva na delovno obremenitev učiteljev.

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## Introduction

Leadership is broadly characterized as the exercise of influence over others to shape activities, relationships, knowledge, and skills (de Jong et al., 2022). Leaders lead and provide direction to their team members or subordinates with guidance to achieve specific outcomes (Zaman et al., 2022). Indeed, leaders are the main agents in charge of determining the structure of a group or organization and function as initiators, motivators, stimulators, and innovators in the organization where they work (Wahyuddin, 2017). Leaders offer intellectual stimulation and support to employees by means of coaching, personalized attention, problem-solving, and mentoring (Scuotto et al., 2022). Leadership is a process that occurs in an organization with the goal of leading a group of people such as in a school to meet certain targets (Em, 2023). A positive, responsible character in a leader is crucial for an organization or institution. Effective leadership styles and strategies are needed to realize the goals of an organization (Kiersch and Gullekson, 2021).

Transformational leadership, viewed as an ideal model for school leaders, is known to indirectly foster student development by shaping teacher attitudes and behaviors (Berkovich and Eyal, 2017a). Transactional leadership focuses on interpersonal interactions that influence exchanges between managers such as a school principal and educators, in this case the teachers (Supriadi et al., 2020). Distributed leadership involves a leader who has a clear and compelling vision for the future of the organization which inspires and motivates employees by communicating a strategic direction and long-term goals that are innovative and forward-thinking (Du and Bao, 2023). Studies have indicated that distinct leadership philosophies, including transformational, transactional, and distributed, may cause instructors to behave differently (Hoque and Raya, 2023).

Leadership is essential to education because it is closely linked to creating effective organizations for research, school improvement, and school effectiveness (Evans, 2022). School leadership practices should aim to improve teachers pedagogical activities, especially the quality of the instructional process (Kemethofer et al., 2022) and students' learning (Leithwood et al., 2020). Classroom management, cognitive activation, and needs-based assessment are three connected aspects of the instructional process (Praetorius and Charalambous, 2023). These instructional aspects, which are most strongly linked to student learning achievements, are formed by the principal's active engagement in the school's instructional procedures, as well as the

circumstances around and aspirations for these activities. It is well known that effective leadership affects student learning and school improvement (Navaridas-Nalda et al., 2020). Indeed, the quality of education in schools is often influenced by the success of the principal's leadership (Hardono et al., 2017), which in turn influences teachers' school practices (Paletta et al., 2020). Empirical evidence also indicates that schools with stronger evaluations of leadership and management consistently demonstrate higher outcomes in innovation processes and expected educational results (Eger and Egerova, 2023).

This research is important for identifying effective leadership styles that can positively impact the quality of education (Kiersch and Gullekson, 2021). Furthermore, in the 21st century, transformative leadership among principals encompasses traits such as leadership demeanour, honesty, responsibility, effective communication, cooperation, analytical thinking, originality and inventiveness, decision-making abilities, problem-solving skills, adeptness in managing change, entrepreneurial mindset, digital competency, and emotional acumen (Kin and Kareem, 2019). Amid the challenges posed by globalization, principals serve as the leaders of educational institutions, necessitating exemplary integrity, a strong leadership ethos, and comprehensive knowledge acumen for improving an educational institutions quality and progress (Nindie, 2022).

The leadership of the school principal can have a major influence on school culture, teacher performance, student achievement, resource management, and community engagement. The principal's ability to empower teachers, demonstrate multicultural leadership, and ensure professionalism among staff members significantly impacts the overall school climate, leading to improved teacher performance and student outcomes (Wang and Dapat, 2023). Research also shows that leadership roles within schools are shaped by the attributes and experiences of those who hold them, which subsequently influences the quality and direction of the learning activities they oversee (Gregory, 2017). A proficient principal can motivate, enable, and effectively oversee the establishment of a prosperous educational setting. To guarantee excellent education, foster a supportive school climate, and assist children in succeeding academically, the principal's directions are essential in determining how well teachers work and how the school is run overall. Studies reveal that the leadership style of a principal has a substantial effect on the performance of teachers, with middle school teachers benefiting from participative leadership (Arina et al., 2023). Additionally, principal leadership influences various aspects of the school environment, including

faculty leadership, the academic atmosphere, teacher professionalism, and institutional resilience, thus directing the school's development (Hanim et al., 2023). Moreover, the effectiveness of a school's public relations and overall improvement is directly tied to the principal's leadership abilities, underscoring the importance of modern leadership skills in enhancing school outcomes (Wang and Dapat, 2023).

Incorporating principal leadership into school development is crucial for enhancing and advancing schools (Biasutti and Concina, 2021). The principal's leadership is a key factor in achieving the vision, mission, goals, and objectives of schools or educational institutions through systematically and strategically planned programs. One of the success factors of education quality begins with the principals leadership style, which greatly influences strategy and management of the school environment for enhanced learning (Cooper, 2016). As the driving force in an educational institution, the principal should play an active managerial role in human resources in related institutions such as coordinating training for teaching staff and implementing professional development programs; furthermore, the principal should mobilize existing resources effectively and comprehensively (Prestiadi et al., 2020). A school organization's success or failure is largely dependent on the leadership of the principal, who has the power to create a positive school environment and encourage excellent academic achievement (Uno et al., 2019).

Although numerous studies confirm that principal leadership plays a crucial role in improving educational quality, few studies have comprehensively examined how variations in principal leadership styles directly and indirectly affect educational quality in schools. Most previous research has focused on a single dimension, such as principal managerial effectiveness or teacher performance improvement, but has not integrated the link between specific leadership styles and the creation of a conducive learning environment and the continuous improvement of educational quality.

The novelty of this study is that it examines how principals' leadership styles influence the quality of education and strengthen the learning environment in schools. Two research questions directed the study:

1. How do principal's leadership styles contribute to improving the quality of education in schools?
2. What is the impact of the school principal's leadership in strengthening the learning environment in schools?

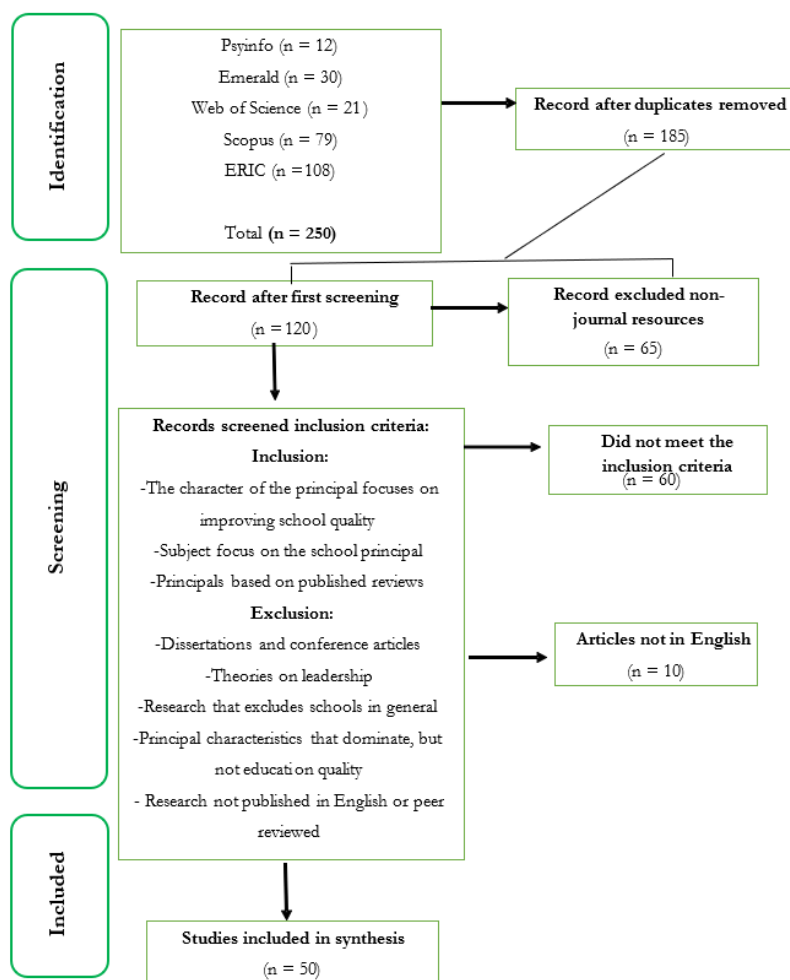
## Methods

This study employed a systematic literature review guided by the PRISMA framework (Ghamrawi et al. 2025; Moher, et al., 2010). This approach was conducted systematically and transparently to identify, select, and analyse relevant studies related to the research topic. This study is about the school principal's leadership style and leadership strategies. The steps described are as follows: Establishing relevant inclusion/exclusion criteria; Defining searching strategies; Searching and screening potential studies; assessing studies; and analysing and synthesizing topics (Rammal, 2023). Inclusion and exclusion criteria are explained in Table 1. The target time-period for searching published articles was from 2015 to 2022; this search period was chosen to ensure relevance, reflect recent developments, and limit the data volume for a more focused analysis. To conduct the search, titles, abstracts, and keywords were searched in the Psycinfo, Emerald, Web of Science, Scopus, and ERIC databases, initially, using the general term "leadership style" Subsequent searches used the keyword "principal leadership style" to focus on education. The last search keyword used was "school principal leadership style" Specific search terms such as "education" AND "school quality" were included to limit the search to studies that discussed principal leadership style to improve the quality of education.

**Table 1**  
Inclusion and exclusion criteria

| Inclusion Criteria                                                    | Exclusion Criteria                                                |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. The character of the principal focuses on improving school quality | 1. Dissertation and conference articles                           |
| 2. Subject focus on school principal                                  | 2. Theories on leadership                                         |
| 3. Principals based on published reviews                              | 3. Research that excludes schools                                 |
|                                                                       | 4. Principal characteristics that are not about education quality |
|                                                                       | 5. Research not published in English or not peer reviewed         |

The data identification and screening process is outlined in Figure 1. The search stage produced a total of 250 articles obtained from Psycinfo ( $n = 12$ ), Emerald ( $n = 30$ ), Web of Science ( $n = 21$ ), Scopus ( $n = 79$ ), and ERIC ( $n = 108$ ). From these 250 articles, duplicates were eliminated, leaving 185 articles.

**Figure 1**

*PRISMA Flow Diagram: Search, methods, inclusion, criteria, and result*

After the first screening, 65 sources such as conferences, theses, and dissertations were omitted, leaving 120 articles. Of these 120 articles, a further 60 articles were identified that did not meet the inclusion criteria about school leadership styles. A further 10 articles were excluded because the reported research was in the Indonesian language, not in English. During the second screening stage, the authors double-checked the full text of the 50 eligible articles to ascertain that they met the inclusion criteria, which can be accessed here.

Our review of eligible studies covers contextual and methodological aspects. Firstly, papers were evaluated to identify how the principal's leadership style contributes to improving the quality of education in schools through teacher collaboration, curriculum development, and teacher efficacy improvement (Research Question 1). Secondly, a review was conducted to identify the impact of improving the quality of education on the leadership of school principals, including changes in leadership styles that strengthen the learning environment in schools (Research Question 2).

## Results and Discussion

### *Research Question 1: How do principals' leadership styles contribute to improving the quality of education in schools?*

Instructional leadership has been shown to improve educational quality in several ways. Principals with a strong grasp of instruction can contribute to ensuring that the learning process is efficient and of the highest calibre, as stressed by Neumerski et al. (2018). These principals can help teachers distinguish between competences and help them comprehend the specifics of learning and instruction. Additionally, this study emphasizes the critical match of the principal with the school district's concept of high-quality instruction (Neumerski et al., 2018). According to Tan (2018), good instructional leadership increases teacher autonomy in overseeing the learning process, and modifying it to meet the requirements of the students, thereby enabling teachers to make the best instructional decisions. As demonstrated by Neumerski et al. (2018), proficient instructional leadership can boost teachers' drive to attend to the educational requirements of their students. Teachers can be inspired to innovate and raise the quality of their teaching by offering encouragement to students and acknowledging their efforts. The same study also emphasizes that it is critical to set aside enough time and funds for initiatives like teacher mentoring and training aimed at enhancing instruction (Neumerski et al., 2018).

Transformational leadership approaches have the potential to foster a positive school climate that advances the professional growth of educators and learners alike. This approach entails demonstrating and upholding standards of learning across the school, encouraging and motivating teachers (Wiyono, 2018), thereby making a substantial contribution to the school's collective efficiency (Ninković et al., 2018). Transformational leadership improves the quality of education through visionary and motivational characteristics (Bunbaban et al., 2022). Furthermore, the impact of transformational leadership on innovation in the educational setting is significantly

influenced by the principal's engagement, motivation, communication flow, communication use, and decision-making (Owusu-Agyeman, 2021). Transformational leaders are more likely to improve the organizational climate of their school, boost teachers' confidence in their ability to meet challenges, and improve student learning results (Karacabey et al., 2022). Evidence from Turkish principals supports this, showing how they contribute to an overall positive school environment (Karacabey et al., 2022). Transformational leadership practices are positively correlated with leaders' capacity to recognize emotions and be supportive of teachers (Berkovich and Eyal, 2017b).

Distributed leadership plays a crucial role in improving the quality of education by empowering teachers and encouraging collaborative decision-making processes in schools. Research by Bush and Ng (2019) highlights the emergence of distributed leadership as a popular model in educational settings, promoting teacher participation in goal-setting, and fostering collaboration, shared vision, and collective decision-making (Bush and Ng, 2019). Principals' propensity to encourage teachers is positively correlated with their emotional recognition skills (Liu et al., 2018), similar to the same trait in transformational leadership. This trust, in turn, fosters a collaborative environment conducive to improving the quality of education. Distributed leadership contributes to improving the quality of education by developing teacher leadership competences, and enhancing school improvement through prioritizing teacher training and regularly fulfilling managerial responsibilities (Galdames-Calderón, 2023).

The principal leadership styles namely, transformational, instructional, and distributed, can contribute uniquely to enhancing educational outcomes by creating supportive, empowering, and trusting school environments. Other principal leadership styles, although discussed in fewer studies, included strategic leadership (Netolicky, 2020; Tran et al., 2018), context-based leadership practices (Moorosi et al., 2018; Noman et al., 2018), and culturally relevant leadership (Arar et al., 2019; Da'as, 2017). These styles indicate that there is also attention to adapting leadership to specific situations and contexts faced by schools. Each of the less frequently discussed leadership styles such as delegated, situational, adaptive, participative, political, and crisis leadership, was identified in only a single article. Their smaller representation may suggest they are less commonly applied or studied in the educational context compared to the three main styles mentioned earlier.

*Research Question 2: What is the impact of the school principals' leadership on strengthening the learning environment in schools?*

Based on the analysis of 50 articles, the impact of school principals' leadership on improving the quality of education includes influencing teacher job satisfaction and self-efficacy indirectly through fostering a supportive school culture and teacher collaboration (Liu et al., 2021).

Instructional leadership is crucial in effective schools, focusing on direct classroom supervision, collaboration with teachers, and provision of support and training (Belibas and Liu, 2018). Instructional leadership focuses on direct classroom supervision, collaboration in school instructional programs, encouragement of problem-solving in teaching, provision of resources, and staff development. Effective instructional leadership enhances teacher autonomy and morale, contributing to student achievement, having the greatest impact on disadvantaged students, consistent with previous research (Tan, 2018). Principals actively involved in creating professional learning communities enhance their leadership skills, deepen their understanding, and encourage reflection on their school's systems and practices (Somprach et al., 2017). Implementation of instructional leadership that is well applied can have a positive impact on improving school quality because this leadership style contributes significantly to teacher performance (Yahya and Putra, 2019).

Transformational leadership by principals influences organizational performance and commitment by motivating teachers to achieve high performance outcomes (Wiyono, 2018). Principals with strong human resource management skills and personal attributes can create a positive learning environment (Noman et al., 2018). Transformational leadership has predictive power for employee organizational commitment, teacher self-efficacy, and overall organizational performance (Wiyono, 2018). Additionally, transformational leadership that supports teachers in overcoming challenges increases their job satisfaction, their performance, and their self-efficacy (Cansoy and Parlar, 2018; Wiyono, 2018). Transformational leadership applied in schools can have a positive impact on improving the quality of education because this leadership style can set high expectations, build togetherness, focus on student learning, and enhance the school culture (Sasan et al., 2023).

Distributed leadership entails dividing up leadership duties amongst administrators and teachers, which has a positive effect on the calibre of instruction and learning (Liu et al., 2018). Teachers job satisfaction and self-efficacy are indirectly impacted by distributed leadership, as well as by instructional leadership, with a supportive school culture and teacher collaboration (Liu et al., 2021). Mutual respect is a prerequisite for successful learning and is positively correlated with a distributed leadership style, which is a highly valued condition in both research and practice (Liu et al., 2018). Because it helps bring about beneficial changes in schools, distributed leadership has a positive effect on raising the standard of education in the school (Liu et al., 2023).

According to this review, a trend in school leadership aimed at raising educational quality is the use of instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership styles by principals. One key measure of effective quality education is the calibre of the schools' graduates. Principals must implement policies that improve teacher job satisfaction in order to raise graduation quality (Cansoy and Parlar, 2018). Indeed, improving school quality and graduate results is directly impacted by principals who take on management, leadership, and innovative roles (Cansoy and Parlar, 2018). To achieve learning objectives, such as for the curriculum, teaching and learning, evaluation, teacher development, and the creation of learning communities, effective principal leadership is crucial in transforming schools into professional learning communities (Somprach et al., 2017). These findings demonstrate that effective principal leadership focuses not only on administrative aspects but also on building a collaborative learning environment focused on improving teacher competency. These three leadership styles can complement each other in achieving sustainable educational quality and improving student learning outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

In this systematic review of the literature, a comprehensive analysis of empirical studies on school principals' leadership styles in enhancing educational quality was conducted over a span of eight years from 2015 to 2022. In summary, the analysis indicated that the dominant leadership styles of school principals were instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership. The findings from the first research question show that the principal's leadership style contributes significantly to improving the quality of education in schools. Principals who adopt instructional,

transformational, and distributed leadership styles can create learning-oriented environments, improve teaching quality, and motivate teachers to engage in continuous professional development. These leadership approaches enable principals to manage educational organizations effectively and ensure that policies and programs are aligned with school goals and student achievement. As educational leadership agents, principals must manage school resources to achieve better student outcomes and ensure that learning objectives are met through high levels of professionalism and effective supervision. The findings from the second research question show that the impact of the school principal's leadership in strengthening the learning environment is evident through the creation of professional learning communities that promote collaboration, reflective practice, and shared responsibility among teachers. Principals who play managerial, leadership, and innovative roles can influence the quality of the learning environment by building a positive school culture, enhancing teacher motivation, and improving classroom practices. The quality of learning is shaped by several interrelated factors, including the leadership styles of principals, the prevailing school culture, and the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. The research results also indicate that to develop quality educational institutions capable of meeting the demands of learners in the era of the educational industrial revolution, school leaders must possess strategic planning skills and the ability to anticipate change. The findings of this study have implications for enhancing educational quality through the leadership style of school principals. The role of school principals as managers, leaders, and innovators has a direct impact on improving school quality, especially on student achievement and optimizing graduation rates in educational institutions. It is recommended that future research examine the variables influencing the school principals' leadership and their impact on teacher workload, possibly by expanding the model to include additional constructs and variable.

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## **Data Availability Statement**

The article is based on research data from existing and publicly available sources (textual sources, databases) listed in the References section.

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