


The Role of Principal Leadership Style in Improving the Performance of Public and Private Elementary School Teachers in Bandung Regency

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A B S T R A C T

The performance of elementary school teachers is the foundation of learning quality, but various competency improvement programs are often not optimal because performance issues are also influenced by organizational factors at the school level. The literature still shows a gap in explaining how school principal leadership works through daily "work channels" such as communication and collaboration, especially when comparing public and private elementary schools. This study aims to analyze the role of principal leadership styles in improving the performance of public and private elementary school teachers in Bandung Regency. The study uses a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews with principals and teachers, analyzed through thematic coding and cross-school source triangulation. The results show that leadership patterns tend to be combinative, with democratic practices dominating in the aspect of communication, which is most strongly related to increased collaboration and consistency in teacher work, while authoritarian practices emerge in certain situations for control purposes. It is concluded that strengthening communication and collaboration are key leadership mechanisms for improving teacher performance.

Keywords: *Leadership Style, Principal, Teacher Performance, Communication, Collaboration, Bandung Regency*

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INTRODUCTION

Teacher performance in elementary schools is the foundation of learning quality because it determines the quality of learning planning, implementation, and evaluation, including classroom management, selection of methods and media, use of technology, and assessment practices accompanied by feedback (Afloubun et al., 2025; Agustian et al., 2025). Although policies to improve teacher competence continue to be rolled out, many elementary schools still face problems that cannot be fully resolved through pedagogical training alone, because the source of the problem is often organizational at the school level (Agustina & Rozali, 2020). In practice, both in public and private elementary schools, issues such as ineffective internal communication, inconsistent work coordination, and unstable collaboration among teachers can fragment teacher performance: teaching tools are organized, but the quality of classroom practice is not always encouraged to improve; assessments are conducted, but follow-up actions are not uniform due to a lack of collective work. This condition emphasizes that efforts to improve the quality of learning need to view schools as professional organizations, where teacher performance is shaped not only by individual abilities but also by the work climate that governs how teachers work together (Birney, 1998; Freed, 2020a; Lloyd-Zannini, 2001).

In this context, school leadership is a key factor, because principals are not only administrators, but also actors who shape the daily work climate – how information flows, how decisions are made, how conflict and discipline are managed, and the extent to which teachers feel safe to take initiative and responsibility (Chang, 2004; Freed, 2020b; Wetherell,

2002). The issue raised in this article is that improving teacher performance is often discussed as a matter of individual competence, when in fact at the school level the main problem often arises in the "workflow" that connects these individuals. Therefore, this article focuses on explaining how the leadership style of the principal plays a role in shaping teacher performance in public and private elementary schools, particularly through the two most decisive organizational mechanisms in everyday school life. With this focus, teacher performance is understood as a practice influenced by how the school organizes work – not merely the result of administrative compliance or independent pedagogical ability.

The literature on leadership styles in the tradition of group dynamics asserts that leaders' behavior shapes the social climate, norms, and patterns of member participation, which ultimately impact motivation and productivity. Lewin, Lippitt, and White classify three main patterns—authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire—that are relevant for reading leadership in schools as relationship-based organizations and professional practices (Lewin, 1931, 1942, 2020). The authoritarian style tends to emphasize control, one-way instruction, and compliance; the democratic style emphasizes member involvement in discussions and decision-making with more open two-way communication; while laissez-faire provides a high degree of freedom with minimal leader involvement. In educational leadership, this distinction is important because schools need not only procedural order but also a collaborative work culture and reflection-based learning improvement. (Lewin & Gold, 1999b; Lewin & Grabbe, 1945; Lewin & Lippitt, 1938) From this point, this article frames the relationship between leadership and teacher performance as a more specific series of processes: leadership style shapes the quality of communication; the quality of communication determines whether meaningful teacher collaboration occurs; and collaboration becomes the pathway that makes pedagogical practices more consistent, monitored, and developed.

The gap that this article seeks to fill is that many discussions of principal leadership and teacher performance still stop at the general claim that "leadership influences performance," but do not sufficiently explain *the connecting mechanisms* in daily school practice, and rarely examine public and private elementary schools as two institutional environments that have the potential to generate different dynamics of communication, participation, and coordination. The core argument of this article is that the influence of principal leadership style on teacher performance works primarily through the creation of a communication climate that encourages collaboration as the most strategic dimension of performance in elementary schools. When communication is built in an open and participatory manner (a characteristic of democratic style), collaboration tends to increase – for example, in the alignment of learning planning, sharing teaching strategies, handling classroom obstacles, and discussing follow-up on assessment results – so that teacher performance does not run independently, but moves as a professional community. Conversely, predominantly one-way communication can result in administrative compliance, but risks weakening a sense of ownership and initiative, so that performance improvements become insubstantial. By focusing the analysis on communication-collaboration pathways in two school contexts (public and private), this article offers a more nuanced understanding of how variations in leadership styles "work" in shaping teacher performance, while providing practical direction that school quality interventions need to target strengthening leadership communication that makes teacher collaboration consistent and focused.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method with a multi-case approach to examine the leadership styles of school principals in building teacher performance at public and private elementary schools in Bandung Regency.

Respondents

There were four informants in this study, selected to represent two types of primary education institutions, namely public and private elementary schools, thus enabling a comparison of the leadership context and teacher performance in two different types of school

organizations. The four informants consisted of one private elementary school teacher (Al-Fatih Elementary School), one public elementary school teacher (Cilampeni 2 Public Elementary School), one private elementary school principal (Al-Fatih Elementary School), and one public elementary school principal (Cilampeni 2 Public Elementary School). This composition was designed to capture two main perspectives in school practice, namely the perspective of school leaders as policy makers and performance coaches, and the perspective of teachers as the main implementers of learning and direct recipients of leadership practices.

The research population included public and private elementary schools in Bandung Regency. The research sample was set at two schools selected purposively, namely SD Negeri Cilampeni 2 and SD Al-Fatih. The selection of this sample took into account the research need to obtain in-depth data on the leadership practices of school principals and their relationship with teacher performance, especially in terms of communication and collaboration in the daily work of the school. By involving informants from both schools and from two different roles, this study applied source triangulation to increase data reliability, namely by comparing the narratives of the principal and teachers and observing the consistency of information between informants on the same theme.

Instruments

The sub-methods of this research are aimed at explaining how the research obtained, organized, and interpreted data so that the relationship between the principal's leadership style and teacher performance could be understood as a process, not just a category label. The main focus of the research was placed on leadership practices evident in daily school activities, particularly in the mechanisms of communication and collaboration, as these two aspects are the most tangible entry points connecting the principal's actions with teacher work behavior. In the context of elementary schools, leadership communication is not only about conveying information, but also includes how principals build dialogue, respond to input, provide direction, and ensure clarity of tasks. Collaboration is understood as professional cooperation among teachers and between teachers and principals in planning, implementing, and evaluating learning programs and school activities. To maintain data depth, the study positioned the principal as a key informant who explained policy logic, coaching strategies, and ways of leading in different situations. Meanwhile, teachers were positioned as primary informants who described their concrete experiences in receiving direction, coordinating, solving learning problems, and collaborating with colleagues.

Procedures

The collected data can reveal similarities and differences in perception between leaders and implementers, which is important for assessing leadership effectiveness at the practical level. The conceptual framework of leadership styles refers to three main patterns—democratic, authoritarian, and *laissez-faire*—as analytical tools for grouping leadership behavior tendencies that emerge in informants' narratives. However, the study does not assume that these styles are singular and permanent; rather, the analysis accommodates the possibility that principals display a combination of styles depending on the purpose of the activity, the level of urgency, and the need for control. Teacher performance in this sub-method is understood as a series of professional practices that include lesson planning, lesson delivery, classroom management, use of media and technology, assessment and follow-up, work discipline, and cooperation with others. Because the study emphasizes the influence of leadership, special attention is given to the performance dimension that intersects directly with work relationships, namely collaboration. Collaboration is treated as an important indicator because it shows whether leadership builds a culture of mutual support and coordination, or conversely, makes teachers work independently and only comply administratively.

Data Analysis

In collecting data, semi-structured interviews were conducted so that the researchers had consistent questions for all informants while still allowing them to explain examples of events, contexts, and reasons for their actions. The questions were designed to elicit evidence of

practices, such as examples of meetings, task distribution methods, feedback mechanisms, forms of supervision, and ways of resolving conflicts or learning problems. The interview results were then analyzed by organizing the data, coding relevant segments, grouping codes into themes, and drawing cross-informant meanings. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from principals and teachers at each school, then comparing patterns between public and private schools. In this way, the sub-method allowed the article to explain how leadership works through communication and collaboration to shape teacher performance, while also showing the nuances of contextual differences between Cilampeni 2 Public Elementary School and Al-Fatih Elementary School.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Principal Leadership Style on Teacher Performance in Public Elementary Schools in Bandung Regency

The principal's leadership style on teacher performance at public elementary schools At public elementary schools, the analysis combines the perspectives of teachers and principals to strengthen source triangulation. On the theme of Communication, the findings show that the most prominent leadership patterns are democratic and authoritarian.

"In my opinion, good teacher performance includes clear lesson planning, such as preparing lesson plans, selecting relevant methods and media, and managing a conducive classroom. (Interview with the Principal of a Public Elementary School)

Findings on the theme of Communication show the dominance of democratic leadership patterns over authoritarian ones, and their strongest correlation with the dimension of teacher performance, namely collaboration. This situation can be interpreted as a "force field" in which communication leadership practices act as driving forces and have the potential to become restraining forces against changes in teacher behavior (Lewin, 1942; Lewin & Lippitt, 1938) . In terms of communication, a democratic style can open up two-way information flow and build trust, making it easier for teachers to coordinate and align their perceptions in carrying out their duties. Decision-making is also most strongly influenced by a democratic style, with a strong impact on collaboration.

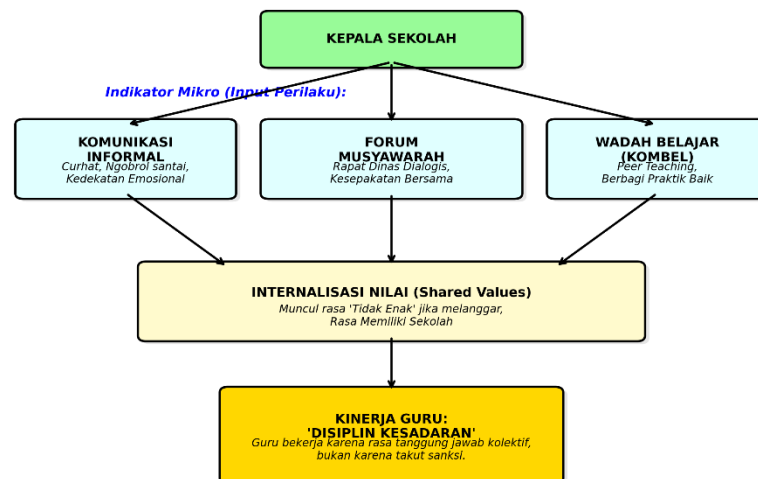


Figure1 . Leadership Style of Public Elementary School Principals in Bandung Regency

The involvement of public elementary school teachers in Bandung Regency in meetings, deliberations, and discussions made teachers feel that they had a say in decisions, thereby fostering a sense of ownership that encouraged more consistent implementation of decisions. Supervision was found to be predominantly democratic and had implications for coaching and planning. Supervision, understood as coaching and joint reflection, made it easier for teachers to develop their competencies, evaluate their practices, and improve their learning tools (Interviews with Teachers and Principals of Public Schools, 2026). Supervision played a

role in the change phase because it provided technical and psychological support for implementing change. On the theme of discipline, an authoritarian style is more prominent and has implications for work discipline (Grabbe, 1945). The mechanism involves external control and compliance with regulations, which in practice can maintain order, punctuality, and compliance with rules. However, if too dominant, this approach has the potential to reduce comfort, so it needs to be used proportionally (Darawi, 2025; Rif'an & Widjanarko, 2024; Sida, 2022; Sungu et al., 2014).

Autonomy is dominated by a democratic style and has an impact on the implementation of learning, with a mechanism of trust that increases teacher initiative in the classroom. Teachers who are given autonomy tend to be more adaptive and creative, as well as more responsible for the learning process and outcomes. Innovation is also dominated by a democratic style, impacting innovation and implementation (Interview with Public School Teachers, 2026). The mechanism that emerges is psychological safety to try new things, which makes teachers dare to experiment with learning, use media, and adjust methods (Lewin et al., 2014). Standards and monitoring appear infrequently but strategically because they touch on assessment/evaluation, implementation, and SOP/standardization. Standards and monitoring are understood as "quality assurance" tools to ensure that learning practices are not only creative but also consistent, measurable, and accountable. Standards and monitoring are closely related to refreezing, which is stabilizing new behaviors into work norms so that changes do not revert to old habits (Grauwe & Naidoo, 2004; Mahinay, 2024; Widodo, 2016).

Overall, the combination of democratic and authoritarian styles in the context of public elementary schools appears to be situational. The democratic style effectively encourages collaboration, coaching, planning, implementation, and innovation through trust, ownership, and psychological safety. The authoritarian style is more relevant to aspects of discipline that require firmness and certainty of rules. Thus, improvements in teacher performance will be more sustainable when the unfreeze process is encouraged by communication and participation, the change stage is reinforced by coaching supervision and innovation support, and the refreeze stage is maintained through standards, SOPs, monitoring, and consistent discipline.

Principal Leadership Style on Teacher Performance in Private Elementary Schools in Bandung Regency

In the context of private elementary schools, the leadership style of the principal plays an important role in shaping the direction of work and the quality of teacher performance. Findings from interviews with principals show that teacher performance is greatly influenced by how principals manage school policies consistently, including how decisions are made, how communication is built, and how school culture is directed to remain in line with the institution's goals (Interview with Private Elementary School Principals, 2026). In private elementary schools, this role tends to be even more prominent because schools usually have specific service standards and quality targets, making leadership the main driver for maintaining the quality of learning. In addition, reality also shows that principals function as teacher managers and guarantors of school standards.

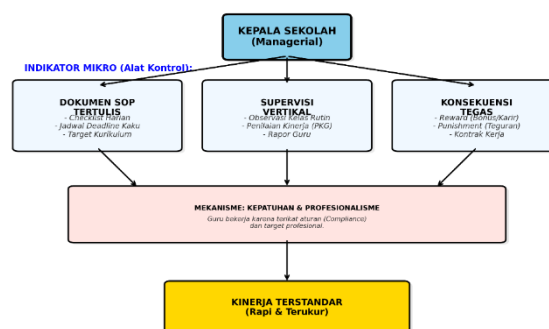


Figure2 . Leadership Style of Principals of Private Elementary Schools in Bandung Regency

Effective leadership style is evident when the principal is able to balance firmness towards standards with a nurturing approach, for example through monitoring, evaluation, and strengthening mutual commitment. Thus, the leadership style of principals in private elementary schools can be understood as a factor that connects school policy, teacher management, and strengthening standards, which ultimately shapes the quality of teacher performance in a more focused and measurable manner. The experiences of private school teachers reinforce that democratic practices do not stop at the leadership level () but are present in everyday decision-making mechanisms (Interview with Private Elementary School Teachers, 2026).

This kind of two-way communication tends to strengthen the dimensions of teacher performance related to collaboration and coordination, because teachers feel safe to convey learning obstacles and agree on common standards. Communication in private schools in these findings also acts as an instrument for performance development, not just a channel of information. This shows a combination of professional autonomy (teachers' creative space) and normative control (vision-mission/curriculum) which in practice can give rise to elements of situational authoritarianism—not as a dominant style, but as a quality control when there is a deviation from the standard (Lewin, 1943, 1947; Lewin et al., 2014) . The key criticism lies in the phrase "in accordance with": if the standard of "in accordance with the vision and mission" is not translated in an operational and transparent manner, it is prone to becoming subjective control; but if the indicators are clear, this pattern can become an effective leadership design—democratic in process, firm on standards—that supports improving teacher performance while maintaining the consistency of school service quality. Decision-making in the private sector in your findings shows a dual pattern: there is democracy (participatory, discussion/deliberation-based) but also authoritarianism (high assertiveness, stronger control) that emerges situationally when issues demand decisive action (Garcia, 2023; Nadeem et al., 2026; Sholeh, 2021; Soyombo, 2023) .

The narrative finding that the most prominent patterns are democratic, authoritarian, and most closely related to teacher performance in the dimension of collaboration is relevant to Lewin, because democratic styles tend to activate group work and the exchange of ideas, while authoritarian styles tend to accelerate decision-making but risk suppressing participation if they become habitual (Lewin & Lippitt, 1938) . At the same time, the principal also demonstrated a clearly participatory and authority-sharing decision-making mechanism—this is very close to Lewin's democratic style because decisions are made through deliberation and involve the work structure (division) so that collaboration becomes a "way of working" rather than just a slogan (Lewin et al., 1939) .

The link with teacher performance—especially collaboration—seems logical: when decisions are made through deliberation and two-way communication, teachers tend to be more prepared to work across roles, help each other, and implement decisions as mutual agreements, rather than simply "instructions from superiors" (Lewin, 1947) . The challenge is to ensure that "firmness" does not stifle the discussion space that is actually the engine of collaboration. Ideally, schools should set clear boundaries: technical matters that need to be decided quickly can be decided firmly, but principles, standards, and evaluations should be returned to the deliberative forum so that the democratic culture remains alive and the collaborative performance of teachers continues to improve. In the dimension of Supervision, the most prominent leadership pattern in the private context is democratic, and this is in line with the findings that its impact is most often related to the dimensions of teacher performance supervision/mentoring and planning (Acocella, 2002) .

The formation of these learning groups is important because professional norms (teaching standards, learning strategies, evaluation methods) are more easily formed when teachers interact regularly in relevant groups (Lewin et al., 1939) . The principal also showed that supervision was used as a performance-based coaching tool that included rewards and reinforcement: This is interesting because it shows a democratic combination (clear schedule, coaching process) with elements of control that can feel more authoritarian when sudden visits

are made without predictability (Lewin & Gold, 1999b) . This is consistent with Lewin's democratic approach because supervision is practiced as dialogue and coaching (Lewin & Lippitt, 1938) .

"Checking devices" and "feedback" have a direct impact on the supervision/ mentoring dimension and help strengthen planning (quality of lesson plans/ modules, assessments, and teaching readiness). In the Discipline dimension, findings show a combination of equally strong authoritarian and democratic leadership styles, with the most frequent correlation in the dimension of teacher discipline performance(Mahinay, 2024; Petersen, 1980) . Authoritarian styles usually emphasize strict rules, control, and direct correction; while democratic styles emphasize dialogic coaching and the creation of shared norms so that members "regulate themselves" because of group agreement, not merely fear of sanctions (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939).

This mixture is quite logical for the school context: discipline requires clear standards (authoritarian), but long-term compliance is usually more stable when teachers feel that the procedures are fair and understandable (democratic). The principal's quote shows that this highly SOP-oriented and hierarchical disciplinary mechanism is close to Lewin's authoritarian character because there is an emphasis on rules and consequences. A routine evaluation structure can shape group norms: when what is "considered normal" is complying with SOPs and being ready for checks, disciplinary behavior more easily becomes a habit of working together (Acocella, 2002; Agustian et al., 2025) . From the teachers' perspective, the data points to an understanding of discipline as part of professional performance linked to lesson planning and implementation. Teachers mention: "neat planning, active and disciplined learning implementation, cooperation" (Interview with Private School Teachers, 2026). When leaders enforce SOPs (authoritarian) while also providing space for guidance (democratic), discipline has the potential to become a work norm that spreads through collective habits – especially when consistently supported by routine evaluations and clear standards(Mahinay, 2024) . Since specific statements from teachers about "reprimands/rewards" have not yet emerged in the excerpts we found, the sub-theme of discipline is still stronger from the perspective of school structure (SOPs, checks) than from the detailed experiences of teachers about how reprimands are perceived; but the foundation of the analysis is sufficient: discipline is built through a combination of formal control + tiered coaching. Reality depicts the most prominent leadership pattern as democratic and related to the dimensions of teacher innovation and implementation performance.

Comparison of Principal Leadership Styles and Teacher Performance in Public and Private Elementary Schools in Bandung Regency

The difference between public and private elementary schools in this text is not positioned merely as a difference in rules or facilities, but as a difference in the social climate that shapes the "field" in which teachers' work behavior moves. Teacher performance arises from the push and pull of driving forces and restraining forces shaped by norms, power relations, communication patterns, and the control and support mechanisms that teachers experience every day. Therefore, comparing public and private elementary schools means comparing the configuration of this field: who makes decisions, how corrections are made, to what extent innovation is "permitted," and whether supervision is perceived more as guidance or control (Lewin & Grabbe, 1945) .

Table1 . Comparison of Principals' Leadership Styles and Their Implications

| Dimension | DEMOCRATIC Approach (Dominant) | AUTHORITARIAN Approach (Balancing) |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Main Function | Building <i>Engagement</i> & Process Quality. | Ensuring <i>Compliance</i> & Basic Standards. |
| When to Use | When discussing curriculum, learning innovation, and problem solving. | When enforcing time discipline, administrative deadlines, and personnel rules. |
| Impact on Teachers | Teachers feel valued, have autonomy, and are motivated to innovate. | Teachers become organized, administratively tidy, and compliant with regulations. |
| Risks of Overdoing It | Slow decision-making ("Meetings without results"). | Creativity dies, a culture of "just to please the boss" emerges. |

| | | |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Thesis Findings | Very strong in the aspects of Collaboration & Innovation. | Strong in the aspects of Discipline & Order. |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|

Public elementary schools demonstrate strong articulation of democratic practices, particularly through deliberation in academic decisions. Principals are described as involving teachers in discussions, opening up space for input and even criticism, and encouraging decisions that are understood as collective outcomes. The implications for teacher performance are evident in dimensions such as planning and implementation of learning: teachers tend to be more prepared to adopt changes and more consistent in implementing decisions because they feel they "own" those decisions. However, reality also confirms that democracy is not automatically effective if the deliberation process is too long and the decision-making process is not decisive; too much leeway in terms of control can add restraining forces in the form of unclear priorities and vague standards of success, thereby slowing down implementation (Widodo, 2016).

Meanwhile, private elementary schools are more clearly defined as contexts that usually have more explicit service standards and quality targets. Therefore, the leadership of the principal is more apparent as a quality assurance mechanism that demands consistency in policy, monitoring, and evaluation. The effectiveness of leadership in private elementary schools is described not merely as "firm," but as capable of balancing firm standards with a nurturing approach, for example through targeted evaluation, strengthening teacher professionalism, and clear quality control. In other words, the emphasis on standards, evaluation, and consistency is more prominent as a characteristic of management in private elementary schools, compared to public elementary schools, which place more emphasis on participation as a gateway to change (Oliver-Barceló et al., 2025).

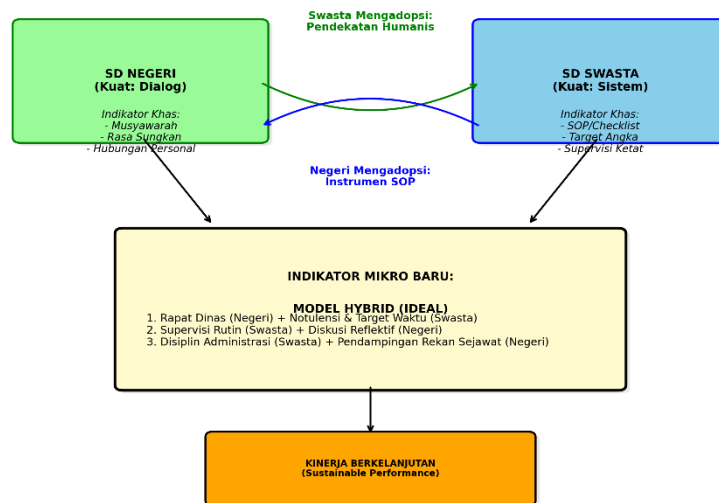


Figure 3 . Synthesis of the Ideal Leadership Model

In this narrative, public elementary schools are relatively strong in the unfreeze and change phases through two-way communication, teacher involvement, and coaching, while private elementary schools are relatively strong in the refreeze phase of through standardization, monitoring, and evaluation to stabilize work behavior in line with school quality targets. Even so, both need a combination of situational styles: a democratic approach to build engagement and process quality, and an authoritarian approach as a counterbalance to ensure compliance with basic standards (e.g., time discipline and administrative deadlines). The risks of each are also emphasized: excessive democracy can turn into "meetings without results," while excessive authoritarianism can stifle creativity and give rise to a culture of "just to please the boss."

CONCLUSIONS

The performance of teachers in elementary schools—both public and private—is essentially determined not only by individual competence, but also by the quality of school organizational management. The findings in this article confirm that the principal's leadership plays a major role in shaping the work climate, especially through the way leaders direct, make decisions, manage discipline, and create a sense of security for teachers to take initiative. Thus, improving the quality of learning cannot rely solely on pedagogical training but must be accompanied by strengthening leadership that is capable of organizing collective work processes at the school level. Furthermore, this article emphasizes that the influence of leadership style on teacher performance works strongly through the intermediary mechanisms of communication and collaboration. When internal communication is clear, open, and consistent, coordination becomes more organized, work expectations are better understood, and feedback can be followed up uniformly. Well-established collaboration also encourages alignment in teaching practices, exchange of learning strategies, and strengthening of a culture of shared responsibility—so that teacher performance is not fragmented between learning administration and classroom practice quality. This implies that schools need to prioritize the development of principal leadership that goes beyond administrative functions and focuses on creating a productive *working climate*. Principals need to direct school policies and routines to strengthen communication forums, coordination systems, and sustainable collaboration spaces among teachers. With this strengthening, both public and private elementary schools have a greater opportunity to maintain consistency in improving teacher performance and ultimately encourage real improvements in the quality of learning.

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