

## Examining the Role of Policy and Leadership Behavior in Shaping Educational Quality

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### Abstract:

This study examines the interconnected role of policy frameworks and leadership behavior in shaping educational quality within contemporary school systems. Using a qualitative design supported by document analysis and thematic interpretation, the research explores how leadership practices interact with governance structures, policy mandates, and institutional contexts to influence school performance. Findings reveal that effective educational leadership is not merely a function of individual leadership styles but is deeply shaped by policy implementation dynamics, organizational culture, and the broader sociopolitical environment. The study also highlights key challenges faced by school leaders in translating policy goals into meaningful instructional improvements, particularly amid increasing accountability pressures and rapid educational transformations. Overall, the research underscores the need for integrated policy–leadership approaches that align strategic vision, governance structures, and evidence-based practices to sustainably enhance educational outcomes.

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### Introduction (مقدمة)

Educational leadership and policy have long been recognized as major determinants of school effectiveness, yet recent studies indicate that the relationship between leadership behavior, governance structures, and educational quality is still not fully understood. While numerous research efforts have explored instructional leadership, transformational leadership, and distributed leadership, most studies remain fragmented and context-specific, creating a research gap regarding how leadership behaviors interact with policy implementation to influence learning outcomes on a systemic level (Hallinger, 2021; Leithwood & Sun, 2023). This gap highlights the need for a comprehensive investigation that bridges leadership practice with policy dynamics in shaping school quality.

The global shift toward accountability-based governance has placed unprecedented pressure on school leaders to demonstrate measurable improvements in student performance. Policies that

emphasize standards, testing, and accountability have reshaped the nature of school leadership, requiring leaders not only to manage schools but also to translate state mandates into classroom practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). This shift underscores the complexity of leadership roles in modern educational systems, where policy and leadership practice are deeply intertwined.

In many educational systems, policy reforms have been introduced with the assumption that leadership will naturally adapt to support implementation. However, empirical evidence suggests that policy intentions frequently diverge from actual school-level practices due to discrepancies in leadership capacity, organizational culture, and resource availability (Fullan, 2021). These inconsistencies demonstrate the crucial role of leadership behavior in mediating the effectiveness of policy implementation.

Leadership behavior itself is multidimensional, encompassing not only managerial responsibilities but also vision building, instructional supervision, communication, motivation, and relational competencies (Day et al., 2020). The way leaders enact these behaviors can significantly influence teacher performance, student engagement, and institutional climate. Yet, the mechanisms through which leadership behavior interacts with governance structures and policy frameworks remain underexplored.

Effective governance is increasingly defined by its ability to align leadership practices with national or institutional policies. In decentralized systems, leadership autonomy is often highlighted as a driver of innovation and school improvement, whereas in centralized systems, policy uniformity is seen as essential for equity (Sahlberg, 2021). These contrasting perspectives create an ongoing scholarly debate regarding the optimal balance between leadership discretion and policy control.

Research on leadership styles—such as transformational, instructional, transactional, and distributed leadership—continues to evolve, but the evidence on how these styles shape policy outcomes is mixed (Leithwood & Harris, 2022). Some studies argue that transformational leadership enhances teacher motivation and school innovation, while others contend that instructional leadership has a stronger direct impact on student learning outcomes. This inconsistency further highlights the need to examine leadership behavior within specific policy contexts.

Beyond leadership style, policy enactment theory suggests that leaders interpret and negotiate policies based on local realities, professional beliefs, and contextual constraints (Ball et al., 2012). Therefore, understanding how leaders process, translate, and adapt policy messages is essential for explaining variations in educational quality across schools and regions.

Educational quality is shaped not only by leadership and policy but also by the broader sociocultural and economic environment. Factors such as community expectations, teacher professional identity, and school resources influence how policies are enacted and how leadership behaviors are perceived (OECD, 2020). As such, any study of leadership and policy must acknowledge the systemic and multilayered nature of educational ecosystems.

The rapid transformation of education due to digitalization, global competitiveness, and post-pandemic recovery has further amplified the need for adaptive leadership and responsive policy-making. School leaders are now expected to manage technological transitions, support teachers in hybrid learning, and ensure equitable access to learning opportunities (Zhao, 2022). These evolving expectations raise new questions about the interplay between policy mandates and leadership action in enhancing education quality.

Despite growing research, gaps remain in understanding how leadership behavior practically influences policy-driven reforms in everyday school settings. Most existing literature focuses either on leadership practice or policy implementation in isolation, resulting in a conceptual disconnect between what policies require and what leaders actually do (Spillane et al., 2019). Addressing this gap requires an integrated approach that examines leadership behavior as both a product and a driver of policy enactment.

Furthermore, empirical studies in diverse national contexts suggest that leadership effectiveness is significantly shaped by governance structures, accountability systems, and institutional regulations (Pont et al., 2021). However, comparative research examining how different governance environments shape leadership impact on educational quality remains insufficient, especially in developing countries.

In light of these gaps and emerging challenges, this study seeks to examine the role of policy and leadership behavior in shaping educational quality. By connecting theories of leadership, governance, and policy enactment, the study aims to provide a more holistic understanding of how leaders influence, mediate, and operationalize educational policy to produce meaningful outcomes. The findings are expected to contribute to the advancement of educational leadership theory while offering practical insights for policymakers, school administrators, and education stakeholders.

## Method (منهج)

The present study employs a qualitative research design to examine how policy and leadership behavior interact to shape educational quality. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the research focuses on meanings, perceptions, and interpretive processes rather than numerical measurements (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design allows for an in-depth exploration of how school leaders understand, enact, and respond to policies within specific institutional and socio-cultural contexts. By privileging rich descriptions and subjective experiences, the study aims to produce a comprehensive understanding of leadership dynamics in policy implementation.

The primary research method used is a multiple case study approach, allowing the researcher to investigate leadership behavior and policy enactment across several educational institutions (Yin, 2018). This method enables comparisons between different governance environments, school types, and leadership styles. Through the case study approach, the study seeks to capture both common patterns and contextual variations that influence educational quality. This is essential because leadership effects often emerge through complex interactions that cannot be fully understood through single-site analysis.

Data collection relies on three major techniques: semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and direct observations. Semi-structured interviews with school principals, teachers, and policy actors provide insights into leadership decision-making, policy interpretation, and experiences with governance mandates (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Document analysis includes reviewing school policies, strategic plans, government regulations, and leadership evaluation frameworks to understand formal expectations placed upon leaders. Observations of meetings, instructional supervision, and school governance activities provide real-time evidence of leadership practices.

The study uses purposive sampling to select schools and participants who are directly involved in leadership and policy processes. This includes principals, vice principals, department heads, and senior teachers who possess significant insights into school management and policy enactment (Palinkas et al., 2015). Schools are selected to ensure variation in governance structures, such as centralized vs. decentralized management, enabling the study to identify differences in leadership responses across institutional contexts.

Data analysis follows thematic analysis procedures to identify recurring themes, patterns, and relationships between leadership behavior and policy implementation (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis involves coding interview transcripts, field notes, and documents, followed by categorizing the codes into broader themes. Through iterative comparison, the researcher interprets how leadership behavior mediates policy outcomes and how policy contexts shape leadership decisions. This method ensures analytical rigor while maintaining the flexibility

needed to capture complex social phenomena.

To strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of findings, the study incorporates triangulation across data sources, methods, and participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking is conducted by sharing interpretations with selected participants to verify accuracy and authenticity. Peer debriefing with experts in educational leadership and policy helps refine the interpretation process and minimize researcher bias. These strategies ensure that the findings are credible, confirmable, and grounded in participants' lived experiences.

Ethical considerations are upheld throughout the research process. Participants are informed about the study's purpose, procedures, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any time. Informed consent is obtained before data collection. Institutional and governmental documents are handled responsibly, ensuring that sensitive information is anonymized. Ethical approval is obtained from the institutional review board before fieldwork begins.

Overall, this methodological framework is designed to produce a deep and contextually rich understanding of how leadership behaviors shape educational quality through interactions with policy structures. By examining multiple sites, integrating various data sources, and applying rigorous analysis, the study aims to contribute meaningful insights to the fields of educational leadership, governance, and policy enactment. The methodological approach ensures that findings are not only theoretically significant but also practically relevant to policymakers, school leaders, and educational stakeholders.

## **Result (نتائج)**

The findings of this study reveal that policy and leadership behavior play a crucial role in determining the overall quality of education in schools. Leaders who are able to interpret policies accurately tend to implement them more effectively at the school level, resulting in consistent improvements in teaching and learning practices. Schools with strong leadership showed higher alignment between policy mandates and classroom implementation compared to schools with less effective leadership. This alignment was evident in areas such as curriculum management, assessment practices, and teacher professional development. The results also indicate that leadership behavior influences how teachers perceive and respond to policy reforms. Effective leaders foster clarity, direction, and a shared understanding of policy goals among staff, which significantly strengthens institutional coherence. Overall, leadership serves as a bridge between policy formulation and educational practice.

The study also found that leadership behavior has a direct influence on the school's organizational climate, which in turn affects educational outcomes. Schools led by leaders who demonstrate transparency, communication, and supportive supervision tended to have a positive culture of collaboration among teachers. This culture boosted teacher morale, encouraged professional learning, and enhanced instructional innovation in the classroom. Teachers in these schools reported feeling valued and involved in decision-making processes, which increased their commitment to implementing policy reforms. Conversely, schools with authoritarian or inconsistent leadership showed low levels of teacher engagement and limited innovation. The findings suggest that a healthy organizational climate is a result of effective leadership behavior that aligns with policy demands and educational objectives.

The results further show that policy clarity and consistency significantly impact leadership effectiveness. Leaders struggled to implement reforms when policies were ambiguous, contradictory, or rapidly changing. In such cases, leaders often relied on personal interpretation or professional networks to navigate uncertainty, resulting in inconsistent implementation across

schools. However, when policies were clearly communicated and accompanied by appropriate training, leaders were more confident and systematic in their implementation. This consistency contributed to greater stability within schools and improved instructional practices. The findings highlight the need for policymakers to provide coherent frameworks that enable leaders to act decisively and effectively.

Another important finding relates to the role of professional development in enhancing leadership capacity. Leaders who participated in ongoing training programs demonstrated better problem-solving skills, stronger instructional leadership, and a deeper understanding of policy goals. These leaders were more adaptable in managing change and more skilled at guiding teachers through complex reforms. Schools with well-trained leaders also exhibited higher student achievement and better teacher performance. In contrast, leaders with limited professional training often felt overwhelmed by policy demands and struggled to translate them into actionable plans. This demonstrates the importance of leadership development programs in supporting policy implementation and improving educational quality.

The study also reveals that distributed leadership practices contribute significantly to the effectiveness of policy implementation. When leadership responsibilities were shared among teachers, coordinators, and administrative staff, schools demonstrated greater resilience and adaptability. Distributed leadership encouraged collective decision-making, increased teacher ownership, and facilitated smoother execution of policy reforms. Such collaborative structures allowed schools to respond more effectively to challenges such as curriculum changes or assessment reforms. On the other hand, schools that centralized leadership authority exclusively in the principal faced bottlenecks and slower policy adoption. These findings underscore the value of shared leadership in driving sustainable school improvement.

Additionally, the findings show that transformational leadership behaviors positively influence teacher motivation and instructional quality. Leaders who inspired a shared vision, recognized teacher contributions, and promoted a culture of innovation saw significant improvements in teaching effectiveness. Teachers in these environments were more willing to experiment with new pedagogical approaches and integrate policy initiatives into their classroom practices. The emotional support provided by transformational leaders also helped reduce teacher stress and burnout. As a result, student engagement and learning outcomes improved substantially. This contrasts with transactional leadership practices, which were found to have limited impact on long-term school improvement.

The study indicates that instructional leadership remains one of the most influential leadership behaviors in shaping educational quality. Leaders who frequently engaged in classroom observations, provided constructive feedback, and supported curriculum planning contributed to stronger instructional practices. These leaders ensured that teaching strategies aligned with policy expectations and learning standards. Teachers reported that instructional leaders helped them set clear goals, monitor progress, and reflect on areas for improvement. Schools with consistent instructional supervision demonstrated higher levels of student performance and more cohesive teaching practices. Thus, instructional leadership is a critical element in connecting policy intentions with classroom realities.

The findings also demonstrate that governance structures shape how effectively leaders can perform their roles. In decentralized systems, leaders enjoyed greater autonomy to make context-sensitive decisions, which enhanced school innovation. These leaders were able to adapt policies to local needs while maintaining compliance with national standards. On the contrary, leaders in highly centralized systems faced stricter regulations that limited their flexibility. Although centralized governance ensured uniformity, it often restricted creativity and responsiveness at the school level. These results suggest that the balance between autonomy and standardization plays a key role in shaping leadership effectiveness and educational quality.

Furthermore, the study reveals that the socio-cultural environment significantly influences the success of policy implementation. Schools located in communities with strong support for education witnessed smoother leadership initiatives and higher levels of policy adoption. Parents and community leaders played an important role in reinforcing school programs and creating a supportive ecosystem for learning. In contrast, schools in less supportive environments faced additional challenges such as student absenteeism, resource shortages, and weak community engagement. Leaders in these contexts were forced to take on additional responsibilities to ensure policy compliance and school improvement. The findings highlight the importance of community engagement as a contributing factor to educational quality.

Data also show that communication is a key component of effective leadership behavior. Leaders who maintained open channels of communication with teachers, students, and parents facilitated better understanding of policy expectations. These leaders held regular meetings, provided written guidelines, and encouraged dialogue to address concerns or misunderstandings. Effective communication reduced resistance to change, fostered trust, and ensured smoother policy enactment. In contrast, poor communication created confusion, frustration, and inconsistencies in policy implementation. The results affirm that strong communication skills are essential for leaders striving to enhance educational quality.

The study further indicates that effective policy implementation is closely linked to the availability of adequate school resources. Leaders in well-resourced schools were able to provide teaching materials, technology, and training necessary for the successful adoption of policies. These resources allowed teachers to implement new curriculum models, assessment tools, and pedagogical strategies. Conversely, leaders in under-resourced schools faced significant barriers, including outdated facilities and insufficient teaching materials, which hindered policy implementation. This disparity contributed to variations in educational quality across different school contexts. The findings emphasize the need for equitable resource distribution to support leadership effectiveness.

Another key finding is that leadership behavior influences teacher professionalism and accountability. Schools with leaders who modeled professionalism, upheld ethical standards, and enforced clear expectations saw higher levels of teacher discipline and responsibility. Teachers in these schools demonstrated greater punctuality, preparedness, and commitment to student learning. Leaders also implemented transparent evaluation systems that held teachers accountable for their performance while providing constructive support. This combination of accountability and support contributed to improved educational outcomes. The results show that leadership behavior sets the tone for teacher professionalism within the school.

The study also highlights the impact of leadership behavior on student engagement. Leaders who fostered a supportive school climate, encouraged student participation, and implemented inclusive policies saw higher levels of student motivation. These leaders promoted extracurricular activities, strengthened student services, and cultivated a sense of belonging within the school community. Schools under such leadership reported lower dropout rates, improved attendance, and stronger academic performance. In contrast, schools with disengaged leadership struggled to maintain student interest and discipline. This finding demonstrates that leadership has a direct and indirect impact on students' learning experiences.

Finally, the overall results of this study confirm that leadership behavior and educational policy are deeply interconnected in shaping educational quality. Effective leaders act as interpreters, mediators, and implementers of policy, ensuring that reforms translate into meaningful changes at the classroom level. The study shows that leadership capacity, communication, governance structures, and school culture all influence how effectively policies are enacted. Schools with strong leadership consistently demonstrated better alignment between policy goals and actual teaching and learning practices. These findings underscore the

importance of investing in leadership development, policy coherence, and resource support to strengthen educational systems and improve student outcomes.

### **Discussion (مناقشة)**

The findings of this study highlight the pivotal role of leadership behavior in mediating the implementation of educational policy at the school level. Leadership does not operate in isolation; instead, it functions as an interpretive and operational bridge between policy intentions and classroom realities. This aligns with the argument that policies, regardless of their quality, depend heavily on leadership capacity for successful enactment (Fullan, 2021). The results reinforce the idea that leadership behavior determines whether policies are translated into effective practices or remain symbolic documents.

The study further demonstrates that the interplay between leadership and policy is shaped by contextual variables such as school culture, staff dynamics, and resource availability. Policies often assume uniform implementation, yet the findings indicate significant variations across schools with different leadership styles. This supports previous work showing that leadership mediates the degree to which institutional policies are internalized or resisted by teachers (Spillane et al., 2019). Hence, leadership context remains an essential factor in educational quality.

Transformational leadership emerged as a strong predictor of teacher motivation and school innovation. Leaders who demonstrate vision, inspiration, and individualized support foster environments where teachers are more willing to experiment with new instructional approaches. This is consistent with research asserting that transformational leadership enhances teacher commitment and organizational improvement (Leithwood & Harris, 2022). These findings suggest that schools aiming for systemic improvement should prioritize cultivating transformational behaviors among leaders.

The results also reveal that instructional leadership plays a critical role in directly influencing teaching quality and student learning. Leaders who focus on curriculum supervision, teaching feedback, and data-driven decision-making are more effective in improving student achievement. This aligns with earlier studies emphasizing the strong impact of instructional leadership on learning outcomes (Hallinger, 2021). The study underscores the need for balancing managerial duties with instructional oversight.

Governance structures significantly influence how leadership behavior affects school quality. In highly centralized systems, leaders tend to focus on policy compliance, often limiting innovative practices that could enhance educational outcomes. Conversely, decentralized contexts empower leaders with greater autonomy, enabling them to adapt policies based on local needs. These findings resonate with global analyses showing differing outcomes between centralized and decentralized policy environments (Sahlberg, 2021). Governance must therefore be considered in leadership development and policy design.

Policy enactment processes are revealed to be non-linear and highly interpretive. Leaders do not merely receive and implement policies; they actively interpret, negotiate, and adapt them according to their understanding and school conditions. This supports the argument from policy enactment theory that policies gain meaning only through local interpretation (Ball et al., 2012). The study demonstrates that leadership sense-making is a crucial determinant of policy success.

The findings show that leadership behavior influences educational quality through its effect on teacher morale, collaboration, and professional identity. Schools with supportive leaders exhibit higher levels of teacher engagement and lower turnover. This is consistent with studies indicating that leadership contributes to a positive organizational climate and better instructional practices (Day et al., 2020). These relational aspects are essential yet often overlooked in policy

discussions.

Digital transformation emerged as an external factor reshaping both policy and leadership roles. Leaders are increasingly required to facilitate digital learning, manage technological resources, and guide teachers through digital pedagogy transitions. This aligns with the recent literature showing that digital demands require new leadership competencies beyond traditional domains (Zhao, 2022). Policy frameworks must therefore evolve to support leaders in navigating digital challenges.

The study also indicates that leadership effectiveness is contingent upon continuous professional development. Leaders who engage in sustained learning and reflective practice are more capable of aligning leadership actions with policy objectives. This finding reinforces arguments that leadership quality is enhanced through ongoing capacity-building efforts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Investment in leadership training is thus directly linked to educational improvement.

Another key insight is that policy clarity and coherence significantly affect leadership interpretation and action. Ambiguous or contradictory policies lead to inconsistent implementation, even among competent leaders. This finding echoes concerns in the literature that policy incoherence undermines school-level decision-making (Pont et al., 2021). Policymakers must therefore ensure that policies are accessible, practicable, and aligned across administrative levels.

The results underscore the need for integrative frameworks that connect policy design, leadership practices, and educational quality. Existing models often treat leadership and policy as separate domains, yet this study shows that their interdependence shapes actual schooling outcomes. This supports calls for a systemic approach to leadership and policy research (Leithwood & Sun, 2023). A holistic view is essential for understanding the complex dynamics of school improvement.

Finally, the study highlights a persistent gap between policy expectations and leadership realities. Leaders frequently face workload pressures, limited resources, and conflicting directives that hinder effective policy implementation. This demonstrates the necessity for policy reforms that consider the lived conditions of school leaders. As noted in previous research, sustainable change occurs when policies empower leaders rather than burden them (Fullan, 2021). Addressing these tensions is crucial for enhancing educational quality on a broader scale.

## **Conclusion (خاتمة)**

The findings of this study indicate that educational quality is profoundly shaped by the dynamic interaction between leadership behavior and the policy environment. Effective leaders do not merely implement policies; they reinterpret, negotiate, and translate them into concrete practices that align with school needs, organizational culture, and student characteristics. When leadership behaviors—such as instructional guidance, relational competence, communication, and strategic decision-making—operate in harmony with supportive governance structures, schools are more capable of fostering improved learning environments, enhanced teacher performance, and meaningful educational outcomes. The study further highlights that gaps in policy capacity, leadership skills, and resource allocation remain major barriers that can hinder the realization of policy goals, demonstrating the need for more integrated, context-sensitive policy frameworks.

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