



Teacher Perceptions of Principal Leadership in State and Private Primary Schools in the Bogor Region

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ABSTRACT

Principal leadership is a critical factor influencing organizational quality, work climate, and teacher performance. However, there remains a gap in understanding how leadership practices differ between state and private schools operating within distinct institutional contexts. This comparative qualitative study aims to describe and compare the core leadership practices of both school types, based on survey data collected from 26 teachers across six primary schools in the Bogor area. Thematic analysis using ATLAS.ti was conducted to explore the patterns of leadership behavior. The results demonstrated that the institutional context significantly determines leadership stability. State school principals display high consistency in providing formal support, consensus-based communication, and maintaining stable work structures. Conversely, private school principals face limitations on autonomy due to foundation intervention, resulting in behavioral inconsistency, uneven professional support, and the risk of destructive leadership caused by poor emotional management. This research concludes that the failure of emotional control and structural limitations are key factors damaging the work climate in private schools. This finding emphasizes the need for context-sensitive leadership development, either through strengthening bureaucratic systems in state schools or increasing autonomy and role stability in private schools.



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1. Introduction

School leadership is widely understood as a highly crucial variable in determining organizational quality, work climate, and teacher performance within the formal education context (Veletić et al., 2023). Several studies indicate that the principal's leadership style has a positive correlation with improved teacher performance and the strengthening of their professional capacity in executing classroom learning tasks (Parveen et al., 2022). Furthermore, school leaders play an important role in fostering the formation of collective efficacy, defined as the shared belief among teachers that they are capable of achieving optimal learning goals (Voelkel, Jr et al., 2024). Supportive leadership is also proven to increase teachers' individual self-efficacy, particularly through mentoring, empowerment, and providing space for innovation (Kiliñç et al., 2023). Effective leaders are capable of building trust, encouraging initiative, and creating a work environment that supports teacher motivation and job satisfaction (Zhang & Wu, 2025). Moreover, strong leadership is a primary driver in improving school quality and ensuring the successful implementation of curriculum reforms (Ralebese et al., 2025). School leadership effectiveness is even linked to increased student learning outcomes, as it influences organizational stability, teacher collaboration, and sustained school culture (Even & Bendavid-hadar, 2021). In the Indonesian context, the school leadership situation becomes more complex due to the existence of two institutional tracks state schools and private schools which have structural organization, regulation, and resource differences that substantially influence leadership styles and practices (He et al., 2024).

In the Indonesian education system, state and private schools operate in parallel and present different operational contexts, leading to principals in each track facing non-identical challenges (He et al., 2024). State school principals tend to work within a strict bureaucratic framework with standardized government procedures, meaning their leadership style is often more formal, structural, and regulatory-bound (Ahmadi & Tiro, 2025). Conversely, private school principals operate under the influence of the foundation that oversees the school, which often limits their managerial autonomy in strategic decision-making (Fortuna et al., 2024). This divergence suggests that leadership practices in the two types of schools cannot be assumed to work identically, especially concerning the leader's character, communication patterns, provision of professional support, and their impact on teacher motivation and work climate. This structural diversity creates an urgent need to understand how the institutional context shapes leadership effectiveness and organizational stability in schools. Without a clear understanding of these differences, strategies for strengthening principal competency risk being ineffective, particularly if based on the assumption that the challenges faced by state and private school principals are similar. The main problem addressed by this research is the presence of a comparative knowledge gap regarding how core leadership dimensions, including communication, character, emotional management, and professional support, are defined and impact school outcomes differently in state and private schools (Komariyah et al., 2025).

To address this gap, this study employs a comparative qualitative approach that allows for an in-depth analysis of leadership practices based on empirical data from two distinct institutional contexts. This approach provides flexibility for researchers to identify the patterns, mechanisms, and impacts of leadership more comprehensively without being confined to descriptive generalizations (Kiliñç et al., 2023). Furthermore, through this analysis, researchers can examine how principals play a role in building teachers' collective efficacy, facilitating collaboration, and maintaining the stability of the work climate (Voelkel, Jr et al., 2024). The main purpose of this research is to critically describe and compare the practices, challenges, and implications of principal leadership in state and private schools, thereby providing a clearer picture of the factors that either support or inhibit leadership effectiveness (Even & Bendavid-hadar, 2021). Practically, the results of this study are

expected to serve as a foundation for formulating policies and development strategies for leadership that are adaptive to their respective institutional contexts, either through strengthening bureaucracy in state schools or increasing autonomy and leadership capacity in private schools (Ralebese et al., 2025). Additionally, this research is relevant to the national education transformation agenda, as it provides an in-depth understanding of how the strengthening of organizational culture and teacher professionalism can be tailored to the needs and characteristics of the institutions where they work.

2. Methods

Methods should be described with sufficient details to allow others to replicate and build on published results. New methods and protocols should be described in detail while well-established methods can be briefly described and appropriately cited.

This research employs a qualitative approach with a comparative design to analyze and compare teacher perceptions of principal leadership in state and private primary schools in the Bogor region. This approach was selected due to its capacity to provide an in-depth description of the meaning, experiences, and views of teachers regarding principal leadership practices within their differing contexts.

Research data were collected via a questionnaire utilizing Google Form, which was distributed online through the WhatsApp application to six primary schools, comprising three state schools and three private schools. It is important to note that the researchers separated the questionnaire link into two distinct versions: one specifically designated for state school teachers and one for private school teachers. This division was implemented to facilitate comparative analysis and streamline data grouping, as well as to enhance the comfort and candidness of the audience in expressing their answers, although the questions asked in both versions of the questionnaire were identical.

The total number of respondents participating was 26 individuals, consisting of 16 state primary school teachers and 10 private primary school teachers, with a distribution period from November 3rd to November 11th. The selection of respondents was conducted openly without the determination of specific individuals (non-probability sampling), using the criterion that they must be class teachers or subject teachers who have taught at the respective school for a minimum of one year. The questionnaire was designed to explore teacher perceptions regarding key aspects of principal leadership, covering the dimensions of instructional leadership, transformational leadership, communication, and decision-making. The research respondent profile is presented in the following table.

Table 1 Profile of research respondents

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Presentation
Gender	Woman	21	80.77%
	Man	5	19.23%
	Total	26	100.00%
Type of School	State	16	61.54%
	Private	10	38.46%
	Total	26	100.00%
Long time teaching	1-5 years	15	57.69%
	6-10 years	4	15.38%
	>10 years	7	26.92%
	Total	26	100.00%

The collected qualitative data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (Sirajuddin, 2017), which was carried out through three simultaneous stages: (1) Data Reduction was carried out by applying the coding process (open, axial, and selective) to teacher statements and comments using ATLAS.ti software; (2) Data Presentation (Data Display) was carried out through comparative thematic analysis and visualized in the form of a network view using ATLAS.ti; and (3) Conclusion Drawing and Verification was carried out comparatively to identify thematic patterns, as well as similarities and differences in perception patterns that emerged between the two school contexts.

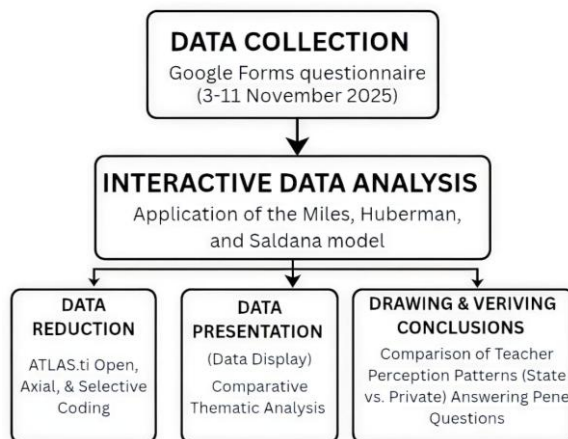


Figure 1 Qualitative data analysis flowchart

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

Qualitative analysis of the interview data (Q1 to Q5) revealed fundamental differences in the leadership characteristics of principals between public and private school contexts. These differences are presented as critical findings, where narratives and the essence of the findings from both contexts are grouped according to the five main research dimensions. This comparative summary is presented in full in Table 2.

Table 2 Comparison of central leadership findings based on research dimensions (Public vs. Private)

No	Core Dimensions (Based on Q Research)	Results in Public Schools (Critical Core Findings)	Results in Private Schools (Critical Findings Core)	Critical Comparative Implications
1	Characters & Interactions (Q1 and Q5)	Firm and disciplined character balanced by warmth and exemplary work ethic. Problem: Principal's limited time	A firm and warm character balanced by weaknesses in self-management (emotions) and inconsistency. Problem: Risk of destructive leadership due to personal factors.	State characters are more stable (structural/time issues). Private characters are high-risk (emotional/personal issues).
2	Communication and Decision Making (Q2)	Deliberation is dominant, with a focus on the principle of	Dominant Openness and Two-Way, but vulnerable to one-way interactions and	State: More bureaucratic/procedural. Private: More flexible

		consensus. Communication tends to be procedural and structured.	uneven implementation with a focus on Freedom of Expression and polite criticism	but inconsistent and discriminatory
3	Professional Support (Q3)	Dominant Structural/Formal Support (KKG, Certified Training, Routine Supervision and Guidance).	The dominant thrust of innovation and special guidance of the Foundation (Tahsin, Ketauhidan), is often hampered by the Foundation's power of execution and has uneven application of support.	Public: External and standardized facilitation. Private: Internal and spiritual guidance.
4	Influence on Work Climate (Q4)	Leadership creates an orderly, harmonious and professional atmosphere through firmness and example.	Leadership creates an atmosphere of family and team cohesion, but this climate is vulnerable to damage due to inconsistent leadership attitudes and hinders intrinsic motivation.	The public climate is more stable and orderly. The private climate is more dynamic but fragile.
5	Areas for Improvement (Q5/Challenges)	Need to improve Interpersonal Closeness and Warmth of Communication	Need to improve Principal Accessibility and Consistency of Direction due to dual role (foundation worker)	The focus of public improvement is the quality of relationships. The focus of private improvement is the quantity of time and the stability of leadership behavior.

Based on the collected qualitative data, further thematic analysis was conducted to identify and map the main patterns of teachers' perceptions of principal leadership. After data reduction and selective coding using ATLAS.ti, the emerging core themes were visualized to reveal their structural and hierarchical relationships. Figure 2 presents these thematic findings comprehensively in the form of a Network View. This visualization represents the Data Display resulting from the comparison of data between public and private school teachers.

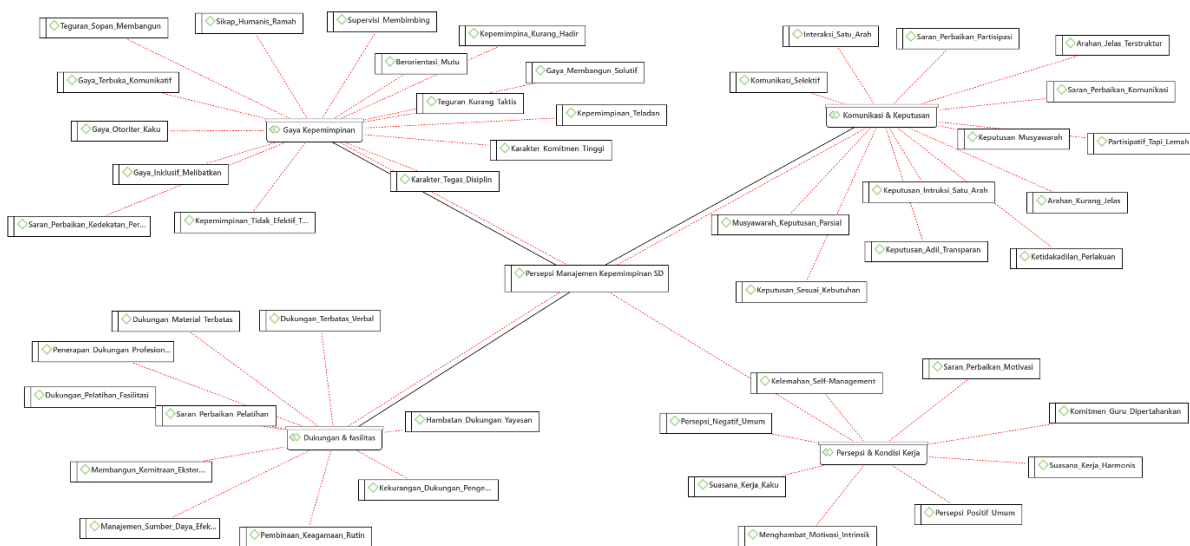


Figure 2 Data visualization of teachers' perceptions of elementary school principal leadership management

To ensure transparency and provide visual evidence of the methodological validity of the findings, the qualitative data coding process that links respondents' original narratives directly to the identified themes (e.g., Inclusive Engaging Style or Communication Improvement Suggestions) is comprehensively illustrated in Figure 3.

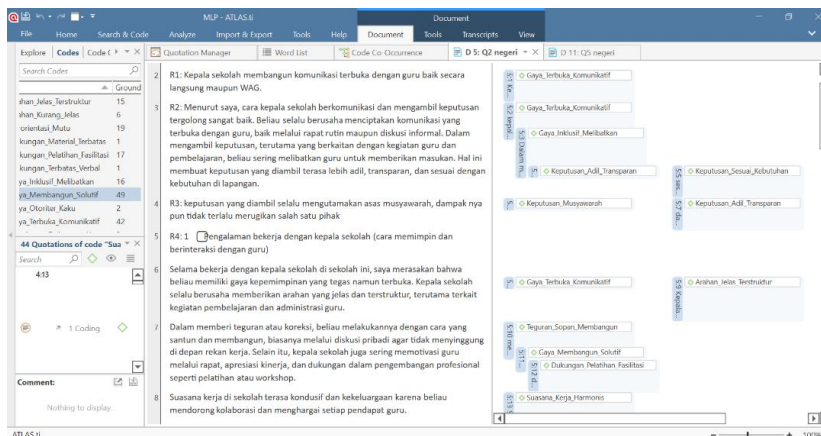


Figure 3 Illustration of the interview data coding process

3.2 Discussion

This section aims to present an analytical interpretation of the key findings presented in the Results Sub-chapter, moving beyond a mere description of the data. Through a comparative thematic approach (refer to Table 2), the study's findings are further elaborated to explore the empirical implications of principal leadership (headmaster) dynamics, linking them to relevant theoretical frameworks and previously published studies. The analysis fundamentally demonstrates that the institutional context (State School versus Private School) significantly influences the autonomy, interaction style, and leadership consistency experienced by teachers. Therefore, the discussion will focus on four crucial issues representing the polarity and stability of leadership found in both types of schools.

3.2.1 Polarity of Private Elementary School Leadership: Foundation Intervention and Limits of Principal Autonomy

The leadership of private elementary school principals (Principals) is characterized by extreme polarity and high levels of inconsistency in managerial attitudes, a unique and critical finding in this study. This polarity refers to the existence of two polarized, sharply contrasting perceptions among teachers: on the one hand, the principal is viewed as morally supportive, possessing a firm yet warm character. This is evidenced by teacher narratives describing the principal as "wise and open" (R5, Q1 Private) and explicitly implementing an Inclusive and Involving Style that "always supports programs or ideas proposed by teachers, and if they are for the advancement of the school, they are always appreciated" (R10, Q3 Private). However, on the other hand, the principal is simultaneously criticized for his inability to execute policies and inconsistent attitudes. This phenomenon indicates a fundamental conflict between the leader's personal intentions and his structural capacity.

This fundamental inconsistency is deeply rooted in the dual hierarchical structure specifically experienced by private school principals. Based on field findings, teachers explicitly view the principal as a "foundation worker" (R1, Q5 Private) and realize that the principal "does not have the power of execution" to follow up on teachers' ideas, because all important decisions "all depend on the foundation" (R1, Q1 Private). This limited autonomy is a major structural barrier that causes KS support to be limited to moral aspects and ideational involvement (R10) alone. The structural pressures and role conflicts experienced by these private KS can significantly hinder the leader's ability to apply emotional intelligence and attitudinal stability in daily practice (Mthanti & Lesole, 2025). This substantial limitation is reinforced by the finding regarding the Unequal Implementation of Professional Support. When asked about opportunities for guidance or career development, respondents simply stated that "not everyone" (R12, Q3 Private) received such support. This fragmented access to career development suggests personal bias or non-universal structural constraints, which exacerbate role conflict among principals.

The direct impact of these autonomy limitations and uneven implementation is evident in the inconsistent communication styles of principals. Interactions shift drastically between a supportive, Inclusive, Engaging Style, to a One-Way (Instructive) Interaction Style and Unclear Communication. Principals sometimes employ unilateral instructional practices (R13, Qx Private). These instructive practices align well with the critique of "lack of communication" (R9, Q1 Private), which is reinforced by the observation that interactions only involve certain parties, and "some communication is purely instructional" (R3, Q2 Private). This pattern indicates a shift from Transformational Leadership (inclusive and supportive of ideas) to Transactional Leadership (based on instruction and compliance). This unequal treatment and instructive communication undermines trust and structurally undermines teachers' sense of ownership over school policies. This imbalance is a key factor in triggering highly polarized perceptions of teachers.

3.2.2 Consistency of Public Elementary Schools: Participatory Stability and Facilitative Support

In fundamental contrast to the context of private elementary schools, which exhibit high levels of polarity, the leadership of public elementary school principals is characterized by high consistency in managerial attitudes, communication, and leadership behavior. This consistency is a key determinant in successfully creating a stable, predictable, and positive organizational climate within the school environment. Based on respondents' responses, the principal is perceived as a wise, communicative, and open-minded leader. Furthermore, the

principal demonstrates a firm and disciplined character, yet always accompanied by a humanistic and exemplary attitude (R14, Q1 Public).

The stability of the principal's character is strongly reflected in the way he interacts and makes decisions. Teachers collectively reported that the principal always prioritizes the principle of deliberation to create fair and transparent policies (R3, Q2 Public). This participatory decision-making process has proven highly effective, with teachers feeling "involved in decision-making, especially those related to learning activities" (R2, Q1 Public). This aligns with the findings of (Duraku & Hoxha, 2021), This indicates that teacher involvement and active participation in decision-making significantly increases motivation and a sense of fairness. The principal's communication is also emphasized as being mentoring and conducted privately. Even when shortcomings or errors are identified, teachers report that reprimands are delivered politely and constructively, as expressed by a respondent: "If there is something that needs to be corrected, he/she reprimands them politely and constructively, usually through private communication so as not to offend colleagues" (R4, Q1 State).

Furthermore, the consistency of the public school principal is reinforced by his/her active role as a facilitator of teacher professional development. The support provided is characterized as active and planned structural/formal support. Teachers reported that the principal routinely encourages, facilitates, and sends them to training, seminars, Teacher Working Groups (KKG), and Subject Teacher Conferences (MGMP). One respondent stated: "Very supportive, involving teachers in developing both internally and externally, such as KKG and other training" (R1, Q3 State). This support is concrete, planned, and aims to continuously improve the quality of teacher competency. This structured and participatory support is a strong characteristic of transformational leadership, which focuses on developing human capital within the organization (Aarons, 2006). With clear and structured support from the government bureaucracy, public school principals are able to fulfill their role as agents of change focused on improving school quality. The impact of this consistent leadership has resulted in a work environment collectively described as comfortable, harmonious, enthusiastic, and supportive.

3.2.3 Character Implication: Emotional Control and Teacher Well-being

Aspects of a principal's personal character, particularly in the context of emotional intelligence, have been shown to have significant and direct implications for teacher well-being and workplace harmony. A leader's emotional intelligence, the ability to manage and regulate one's own emotions, is considered a key variable influencing the overall organizational culture (Estrellan & Loja, 2021). Field findings confirm that this factor is a sharp distinction between public and private elementary schools.

In private elementary schools, a sharp contradiction was found between the ideal character and behavior of the principal, which occurred under certain circumstances. Teachers reported that the principal strives to maintain team cohesion, but the principal's failure to manage his or her personal emotions can damage the overall work atmosphere. This phenomenon creates a climate that actively inhibits teachers' intrinsic motivation, with the principal perceived as "unmotivating" (R11, Q4 Private) and explicitly making teachers feel "unenthusiastic about carrying out activities" (R3, Q5 Private). Furthermore, reports that "familial relationships between teachers are sometimes disrupted simply because of the principal's attitude" (R7, Q4 Private) further confirm that a leader's failure to control their emotions can function as a destructive variable that undermines the family climate. The negative emotional impact of the leader directly affects teaching enthusiasm, creating a feeling of "underappreciation" and reducing teacher motivation. This phenomenon is a manifestation

of a lack of Self-Management within the Emotional Intelligence framework (Mthanti & Lesole, 2025).

In contrast, the principals of public elementary schools consistently demonstrated adequate emotional management skills. Based on data findings, teachers reported that the principals routinely provided reprimands in a polite and constructive manner, always through personal communication and approaches (R4, Q1 Public). The ability of public school principals to maintain a stable, constructive, and ethical attitude is clear evidence that they possess an adequate level of emotional intelligence to lead. The emotional stability of leaders at these public elementary schools facilitated the creation of a supportive work environment. Thus, this study confirms that the personal integrity and emotional management of principals are key variables that have the strongest influence in determining the creation of a supportive and professional work environment.

3.2.4 Comparative Dynamics: Formal Standardization Versus Visionary Internal Coaching

Another significant implication is seen in the way central leadership provides professional support (Dimension 3), which influences human capital development in both institutions. In public elementary schools, support is characterized as Structural/Formal Support, including facilitating Teacher Working Groups (KKG), certified training, and regular supervision. This support model is top-down and standardized, aligning with the education bureaucracy's need to improve teacher competency equitably and measurably (He et al., 2024). The consistency and clarity of this development path is directly positively correlated with increased teacher self-efficacy due to the availability of guaranteed resources and opportunities (Kilinç et al., 2023).

In contrast, professional support in private elementary schools is more characterized by the Foundation's Innovation Drive and Special Guidance (e.g., Tahsin, Ketauhidan). This support is vision-driven and internal, aimed at strengthening the school's identity and core values. Although private elementary school leaders are supportive in intention (as evidenced by R10), findings indicate that this support is often constrained by the Foundation's power of execution (Fortuna et al., 2024). This limitation in managerial autonomy is exacerbated by the Unequal Implementation of Professional Support (R12), which indicates that not all teachers receive the same support. The role conflict experienced by private school principals fundamentally limits their capacity to provide concrete and planned support, leading to frustration among teachers when their ideas cannot be acted upon. Thus, the public model focuses on curriculum output through standardization, while the private model focuses on character input, leaving gaps in the guaranteed development of professional skills.

3.2.5 Differentiation of Professional Support: Formal Standardization Versus Visionary Internal Coaching

Another significant implication is seen in the way central leadership provides professional support (Dimension 3), which influences human capital development in both institutions. In public elementary schools, support is characterized as Structural/Formal Support, including facilitating Teacher Working Groups (KKG), certified training, and regular supervision. This support model is top-down and standardized, aligning with the education bureaucracy's need to improve teacher competency equitably and measurably (He et al., 2024). The consistency and clarity of this development path is directly positively correlated with increased teacher self-efficacy due to the availability of guaranteed resources and opportunities (Kilinç et al., 2023). This structural support is an important element of effective instructional leadership, which aims to ensure teachers have adequate skills for curriculum implementation (Ralebese et al., 2025).

In contrast, professional support in private elementary schools is more characterized by the Foundation's Innovation Drive and Special Guidance (e.g., Tahsin, Ketauhidan). This support is vision-driven and internal, aimed at strengthening the school's identity and core values. While private elementary school leaders are supportive in intention, findings indicate that this support is often constrained by the Foundation's power of execution. This limitation in managerial autonomy (Fortuna et al., 2024), This causes the Principal's support to be limited to moral aspects or encouragement alone, which is not enough to continuously improve teachers' technical pedagogical competence (Siregar et al., 2023). The conflicting roles experienced by private school principals (as foundation agents and school leaders) fundamentally limits their capacity to provide concrete and planned support, leading to frustration among teachers when their ideas cannot be acted upon. Thus, the public model focuses on curriculum output through standardization, while the private model focuses on character input, leaving a gap in the development of guaranteed professional skills.

3.2.6 Comparative Work Climate and the Challenges of Policy Differentiation

The analysis of the Work Climate (Dimension 4) serves as a final synthesis of all leadership practices found. The consistency (Dimension 1) and procedures (Dimension 2) of the Public School Principal successfully mitigated personal risks, resulting in an orderly, harmonious, and professional work climate (Veletić et al., 2023). This climate is predictive, safe, and conducive to stable work performance (Fortuna et al., 2024). Their primary challenges center on the quality of relationships (need to improve interpersonal closeness), not organizational stability.

In contrast, the private sector climate, described as familial and united, is a fragile state, easily damaged by inconsistent leadership attitudes. This vulnerability is deeply rooted in the conflicting roles of private sector executives (Fortuna et al., 2024) and their failure in emotional self-management. The inability of Private School Principals to maintain consistency of direction and accessibility due to dual roles (Challenge, Dimension 5) directly undermines teachers' collective efficacy (Voelkel, Jr et al., 2024), reduce work motivation, and potentially hinder the improvement of student achievement (Even & Bendavid-hadar, 2021). The challenges of improvement in the private sector are essential (quantity of leadership time and physical presence), which are much more difficult to overcome than the challenges in the state.

4. Conclusion

This comparative qualitative research fundamentally concludes that the institutional context (State School versus Private School) has a significant influence on the practices and stability of school principal leadership, which ultimately affects the work climate and teacher well-being.

- 1) State School Principals are characterized by high consistency in managerial attitude, supported by the bureaucratic system. This consistency manifests in participatory communication through consensus-based deliberations and the provision of planned and standardized structural/formal support. This combined practice successfully creates a stable, orderly, and professional work climate through system predictability.
- 2) Private School Principals, conversely, face high polarity and inconsistency due to limited executive autonomy caused by Foundation intervention. Although capable of creating a warm, familial atmosphere, this climate is fragile and easily damaged by the Principal's failure of emotional control, which functions as a destructive variable.

Thus, the personal integrity and emotional management of the Principal are the main differentiators determining the stability of the work environment. For Future Research, a quantitative study testing the correlation between Principal managerial autonomy and teacher

emotional well-being, as well as an in-depth exploration of the Foundation intervention mechanisms as a structural constraint, is recommended.

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