

School Principal Leadership and Its Influence on Indonesian Teacher Morale: A Survey Study in Catholic Elementary Schools of Merauke

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Corresponding Author Basilius Redan Werang Ganesha University of Education, Singaraja, Bali, Indonesia Article History Received: 21 / 09 / 2025 Accepted: 13 / 10 / 2025 Published: 18 / 10 / 2025	Abstract: Background: The varying levels of teacher morale in elementary schools are particularly noteworthy, as they are closely linked not only to students' engagement, behavior, and academic achievement, but also to teachers' job satisfaction and emotional well-being. Objective: This study aimed to examine the influence of school principals' leadership on teacher morale in Catholic elementary schools in Merauke, South Papua, Indonesia. Method: We employed a quantitative survey research approach to obtain data from 95 Catholic elementary school teachers in Merauke, South Papua, Indonesia. Obtained data were subjected to statistical analysis using simple linear regression analysis by employing Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 21. Findings: The results of data analysis reveal a positive and significant impact of school principal leadership on the morale of Catholic elementary school teachers in Merauke, South Papua, Indonesia. Implication for Practice and Research: This finding implies that effective leadership practices by school principals play a crucial role in fostering teachers' motivation, satisfaction, and overall well-being, which may in turn enhance the quality of teaching and learning in Catholic elementary schools. Keywords: school principal leadership, teacher morale, Catholic elementary schools.
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Introduction

Teacher morale encompasses the collective perceptions, attitudes, satisfaction, and self-confidence that teachers experience within their professional environment. It is a multidimensional construct that reflects how teachers perceive their instructional roles, the school climate, and the broader educational institution (Al-Halwachi, 2023). As a vital element of school effectiveness, teacher morale has been shown to influence teachers' motivation, classroom performance, and commitment to the profession (Abazaoğlu & Aztekin, 2016; Ehineni, 2017; Samsudin et al., 2025; Sundari & Raja, 2017; Suryani et al., 2025).

High levels of teacher morale reflect a positive organizational culture in which teachers feel valued, engaged, and motivated to perform their duties effectively (Evans, 1997; Hoy & Miskel, 2013; Werang et al., 2023). Such morale is often linked to strong team cohesion, open communication, and a shared sense of purpose and achievement (Sergiovanni, 1996; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Werang, 2014), all of which contribute to improved instructional quality and enhanced student learning outcomes. Conversely, low teacher morale tends to manifest in reduced productivity, declining motivation, and weakened commitment, which may ultimately influence teachers' intentions to leave their

positions or the profession altogether (Ingersoll, 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Bogler & Nir, 2012).

Teacher morale, however, does not develop in isolation. It is shaped by a variety of factors, including workload, administrative support, collegial relationships, and, most importantly, the quality of leadership demonstrated by school principals. The principal, as the key leader in a school, plays a pivotal role in shaping the work environment and influencing teachers' psychological well-being (Mayokhi & Mwila, 2024). Effective principals establish clear goals, provide meaningful feedback, and cultivate a culture of trust and collaboration that enables teachers to thrive professionally (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Leithwood et al., 2008; Robinson, 2011; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). They model ethical behavior, communicate a shared vision, and recognize teachers' efforts and contributions—practices that can significantly enhance teacher morale (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Hallinger, 2011). Conversely, poor leadership characterized by lack of communication, support, or recognition can lead to teacher frustration, decreased motivation, and burnout. Thus, the effectiveness of school leadership is often reflected in the overall morale and productivity of the teaching staff.

Although numerous studies have highlighted the significant influence of school leadership on teacher morale (Amalia & Prayekti, 2024; Black, 2001; Michaud et al., 2022; Willis & Varner, 2010), most have been conducted in urban or Western contexts, with limited attention to schools located in remote or culturally diverse regions. In Indonesia—particularly in the eastern region of South Papua—empirical studies on this topic remain scarce. Catholic elementary schools in Merauke present a distinctive context in which educational leadership is shaped not only by organizational and pedagogical factors but also by religious values and local cultural norms. These contextual dimensions may affect both leadership behaviors and teachers’ morale in unique ways. However, little is known about how school principal leadership specifically impacts teacher morale in these settings. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights into leadership practices that foster teacher well-being, motivation, and professional commitment within faith-based and culturally diverse educational environments. Furthermore, the study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on educational leadership in Indonesia by highlighting the importance of context-sensitive approaches that promote positive school climates and sustainable teacher engagement.

To address this research gap, the present study investigates the influence of school principal leadership on teacher morale in Catholic elementary schools in Merauke, South Papua, Indonesia. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research question: *Does school principal leadership have a significant positive effect on the morale of teachers working in Catholic elementary schools in Merauke, South Papua, Indonesia?* To address the research question, a quantitative research approach employing a survey design was adopted.

Method

The purpose of this research was to analyze the influence of school principal leadership on the work morale of Catholic

elementary school teachers in Merauke, South Papua, Indonesia. To achieve this objective, a quantitative approach with a survey research design was employed. The survey design was chosen because it enables the collection of objective data that can be expressed through numerical and statistical analysis, while also allowing for the observation of the leadership styles of school principals and their influence on teachers’ morale (Burrell & Gross, 2017). Besides, several recent studies (Jim et al., 2025; Werang et al., 2025a, 2025b, 2025c, 2025d) have highlighted several advantages of using a survey research design, as the following: it is cost-effective for data collection, enables rapid and real-time gathering of information, provides flexibility in administering instruments and managing responses, and allows for generalizability and versatility of the findings across broader contexts.

Data were collected using two structured questionnaires measuring principal leadership and teacher morale. The questionnaires were distributed to 95 Catholic elementary school teachers who were purposively selected as research participants. All questionnaire items were presented in Indonesian to ensure clear comprehension by participants. The collected data were analyzed using simple linear regression to determine the effect of school principal leadership on teacher morale. Data analysis was conducted with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25, ensuring accurate and reliable statistical results.

Results

As previously mentioned, the data collected on school principal leadership and teacher morale were analyzed using simple linear regression. This analysis aimed to determine the extent to which school principal leadership influences teacher morale in Catholic elementary schools in Merauke. The results of the regression analysis, indicating a significant effect of school principal leadership on teacher morale, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The effect of school principal leadership on teacher morale

Model Summary					Change Statistics				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.706 ^a	.498	.492	2.73293	.498	92.167	1	93	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), School_Principal_Leadership

The results of data analysis presented in Table 1 reveals a significant positive correlation ($R = .706$) between the school principal leadership and teacher morale. The R^2_{Square} coefficient value of .498 indicates that approximately 49.8% of the variance in teacher morale can be explained by the leadership of the school principal. The Adjusted R^2_{Square} (.492) confirms that the model fits the data well, even after adjusting for the number of predictors.

Discussion

School principals play a crucial role in shaping teacher morale by articulating a clear and shared vision, creating a supportive school climate, and providing intellectual stimulation

for professional growth. Principals who demonstrate these leadership qualities foster a positive organizational culture in which teachers feel valued, trusted, and motivated to contribute meaningfully to the school’s mission. Such leadership not only enhances teachers’ sense of belonging but also encourages commitment, innovation, and improved job performance (Hallinger & Ko, 2015; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

The results of the data analysis reveal a positive and significant effect of school principal leadership on teacher morale in Catholic elementary schools in Merauke, South Papua, Indonesia. This relationship is reflected in the R^2_{Square} value of .498 and the significance value ($p = .000$). The findings suggest that the stronger and more effective the principal’s leadership, the

higher the morale of teachers; conversely, weak leadership tends to lower teacher morale. This finding aligns with the results of previous studies. Werang (2014) and Werang et al. (2023) similarly found that transformational leadership among school principals has a positive and significant influence on the morale of elementary school. Furthermore, the present finding is also consistent with those of Permadi and Agustina (2022), who reported that leadership and organizational commitment both have significant positive effects on employee morale, whether examined individually or simultaneously.

School principals influence teacher morale by articulating a clear vision for the school, fostering a supportive and collaborative environment, and providing intellectual stimulation that encourages professional growth. Principals who demonstrate these qualities help create a positive school culture in which teachers feel valued, respected, and motivated to contribute to the school's overall vision and success. This supportive environment enhances teachers' dedication, creativity, and job performance, leading to improved educational outcomes. Conversely, when teachers feel undervalued or unrecognized, they may experience dissatisfaction and frustration, which can negatively affect their performance, relationships with colleagues, students, and parents, and overall well-being. Prolonged low morale can also result in higher teacher turnover, as educators seek schools that offer stronger professional support and a more positive working atmosphere (Al-Halwachi, 2023).

High levels of morale foster enthusiasm, cooperation, and innovation among teachers, which ultimately enhance student learning outcomes and the overall school climate. High teacher morale is generally viewed as an essential component of a healthy and effective school system, as it influences not only teachers' motivation and commitment but also their instructional quality and interactions with students. When teachers possess a strong sense of morale, they are more likely to demonstrate enthusiasm in their teaching, collaborate effectively with colleagues, and contribute positively to the overall school culture. Conversely, low teacher morale can undermine professional performance, reduce job satisfaction, and negatively affect student learning outcomes. Therefore, understanding the nature and determinants of teacher morale is crucial for improving both teacher well-being and educational quality.

Conclusion

The present study provides a closer look at how school principal leadership influences the morale of Catholic elementary school teachers in Merauke, South Papua, Indonesia. Based on the results of data analysis, it can be concluded that teacher morale is significantly affected by the leadership of school principals. The findings indicate that when principals demonstrate effective leadership—through clear vision, supportive supervision, and professional encouragement—teachers tend to show higher levels of motivation, dedication, and job satisfaction. Conversely, weak or unsupportive leadership can lower morale and reduce teachers' enthusiasm and performance.

The results highlight the need for leadership development programs that strengthen principals' abilities in communication, vision building, and teacher support, particularly within Catholic educational institutions where values-based leadership is emphasized. Future studies are encouraged to expand the scope of this research by including teachers from other regions or

educational levels, or by employing mixed-method approaches to capture deeper insights into how specific leadership behaviors influence teacher morale and overall school effectiveness.

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