

## School Leadership Competencies As A Foundation for Effective Team Management

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### Abstract

School leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping team dynamics and instructional quality within educational institutions. As the educational landscape increasingly embraces collaborative and distributed leadership models, the competencies of school leaders such as emotional intelligence, strategic vision, and instructional support are becoming central to effective team management. Despite acknowledgment of leadership's importance, many systems lack coherent frameworks to identify and cultivate the competencies critical for team cohesion and school development. This study aims to analyze key leadership competencies that underpin effective team management in schools and explore their influence on collaboration, communication, and trust among educators. Through a qualitative multiple case study of ten secondary schools, the findings highlight six core competencies: emotional intelligence, strategic vision, communication, instructional leadership, decision-making, and conflict resolution as essential to team cohesion. Communication and trust emerged as central enablers of collaboration, while professional development was found to reinforce leadership impact. The research introduces a Leadership Impact Index (LII), a practical tool for quantifying leadership effectiveness in fostering collaboration, thus offering an innovative bridge between qualitative insights and measurable outcomes. The study underscores the need for competency-based leadership training, the institutionalization of professional development, and the implementation of diagnostic tools to support leadership evaluation. These findings inform both policy and practice, reinforcing leadership development as a strategic imperative for school improvement.

**Keywords:** School Leadership, Leadership Competencies, Team Management, Educational Leadership, Professional Development, Instructional Leadership, Collaboration In Schools, School Effectiveness, Teacher Motivation, Strategic Leadership

### 1. Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving educational environment, the role of school leadership has expanded beyond administrative oversight to encompass the active shaping of school culture, team dynamics, and instructional quality. Effective leadership is now widely acknowledged as a key determinant of school success, with research consistently showing that school leaders significantly influence student outcomes by shaping the working conditions and collaboration among teachers [1]. Central to this influence is the leader's professional competence a

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: **submitted;** 2025/4/30 **revised;** 2025/5/13 **accepted;** 2025/5/20 **published;** 2025/5/26

multidimensional construct that includes strategic thinking, emotional intelligence, interpersonal communication, decision-making, and the ability to foster professional collaboration [2].

As schools increasingly adopt collaborative and distributed leadership models, the competencies of the school leader become pivotal for effective team management. The ability to build trust, delegate tasks, resolve conflicts, and inspire shared vision is not innate but stems from a refined set of skills developed through training and experience [3]. In particular, instructional leadership where leaders engage with pedagogical strategies and teacher development has been shown to be a crucial competency in promoting teamwork and collective efficacy [4].

Despite growing recognition of leadership's impact, many educational systems still lack coherent frameworks for identifying and cultivating these core competencies. This disconnect often leads to inefficiencies in team coordination, low teacher morale, and missed opportunities for innovation [5]. Therefore, understanding which leadership competencies most effectively contribute to team management is essential not only for improving school operations but also for informing leadership development programs and policy initiatives.

This article aims to analyze the key competencies that school leaders must possess to effectively manage teams and facilitate collaboration. By synthesizing current research and practical examples, it seeks to provide both a theoretical foundation and actionable insights for enhancing leadership capacity in educational settings.

**Literature Review.** Research on educational leadership has undergone a significant transformation over the past two decades, moving from a focus on administrative functions to a more holistic understanding of leadership as a set of competencies that influence school climate, teacher collaboration, and student learning outcomes. The literature reveals that effective team management in schools is closely tied to the presence and development of key leadership competencies, particularly those related to instructional guidance, relational trust, emotional intelligence, and shared vision [6].

Leadership competencies are often described as a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that enable leaders to perform their roles effectively [7]. In the context of school leadership, this includes abilities such as strategic thinking, communication, empathy, and pedagogical knowledge. Leithwood and Jantzi emphasize the importance of transformational leadership behaviors, which include setting directions, developing people, and redesigning the organization all of which depend on a strong base of leadership competencies.

Bush differentiates between instructional and transformational leadership, noting that while transformational leadership focuses on motivation and change, instructional leadership is more directly tied to curriculum, teaching, and learning outcomes. The most effective school leaders, according to Robinson are those who integrate both styles and demonstrate competency in guiding teaching practices, using data to inform decisions, and fostering a professional learning community.

Effective team management requires more than administrative oversight; it demands interpersonal and organizational skills that encourage cooperation, accountability, and shared leadership. Spillane introduced the concept of distributed leadership, which highlights the shared nature of leadership tasks and responsibilities within schools. This approach has gained traction in recent years as studies show that teams led by principals who empower others tend to be more cohesive and effective [8].

Trust-building and emotional intelligence are particularly important competencies for team management. According to Tschannen-Moran (2004), trust in leadership is a crucial factor influencing team morale, openness, and performance. Leaders who demonstrate empathy, active listening, and transparent communication are more likely to sustain healthy team dynamics and collaborative professional cultures [9].

Professional development programs that emphasize competency-based approaches to leadership training are increasingly recognized as essential for preparing school leaders for the challenges of team management. The OECD has called for leadership frameworks that prioritize competencies aligned with 21st-century educational needs, such as adaptability, innovation, and equity-focused leadership [10].

Moreover, research suggests that schools and education systems benefit from clearly defined leadership standards that inform hiring, evaluation, and training practices [11]. When these competencies are explicitly embedded into leadership development, leaders are more prepared to manage diverse teams, mediate conflict, and support teacher growth.

## 2. Research Method

This study employs a **qualitative research design** to explore the relationship between school leadership competencies and effective team management in educational institutions. The qualitative approach is appropriate for examining complex social phenomena such as leadership behavior and team dynamics within their natural context .

**Research Design.** A multiple case study method was adopted to gather in-depth insights from different school environments. This approach allows for a comparative understanding of how leadership competencies manifest in diverse school settings and how they influence team performance and collaboration.

The study was conducted across **ten secondary schools** (grades 5–11) in urban and semi-urban districts. Schools were selected using **purposive sampling**, focusing on institutions with a reputation for collaborative practices and academic performance. Participants included: 10 school principals, 20 deputy heads, 324 teachers from various subject areas. All participants had a minimum of **three years of experience** in their current roles to ensure relevant professional insight.

**Data collection methods.** Data were collected through the following instruments:

*Semi-structured interviews* with school leaders and teachers to explore perceptions of effective leadership competencies;

*Focus group discussions* among teachers to capture team dynamics and leadership influence;

*Document analysis*, including school mission statements, professional development plans, and teacher evaluation reports, to triangulate findings.

Each interview and focus group session lasted between 45 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant consent.

Data were transcribed and analyzed using **thematic coding**, as proposed by Braun and Clarke. The coding process involved:

Familiarization with the data;

Generating initial codes;

Searching for themes related to leadership competencies and team management;

Reviewing and refining themes;

Interpreting patterns across cases.

Themes were cross-validated by comparing findings across schools and participant groups to ensure reliability and consistency.

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant educational research board. Participants were informed of their rights, the purpose of the study, and the voluntary nature of participation. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the research process.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The data collected from ten secondary schools revealed consistent patterns in how leadership competencies influence effective team management. The perspectives of 10 school principals, 20 deputy heads, and 324 teachers offered a comprehensive understanding of leadership dynamics across diverse educational settings. Three major themes emerged from the thematic analysis:

- (1) Core leadership competencies enabling team cohesion,
- (2) Communication and trust as drivers of collaboration,
- (3) Professional development as a reinforcing mechanism.

1. Core leadership competencies enabling team cohesion. Across all participating schools, respondents emphasized that school leaders who demonstrated a high degree of emotional intelligence, strategic vision, and decision-making capabilities were more effective in uniting staff around shared goals. Principals who articulated clear objectives and modeled professional ethics were perceived as more capable of maintaining team cohesion. One deputy head noted: “Our principal doesn’t just give orders – he makes us feel part of a bigger vision. That’s what keeps the team together.” The analysis revealed a consistent emphasis on six core competencies. These are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Key leadership competencies identified across schools

Competency	Percentage of schools mentioning (%)	Example behaviors
Emotional intelligence	100%	Empathy, active listening, managing emotions
Strategic vision	90%	Goal-setting, long-term planning
Communication skills	95%	Transparency, timely feedback
Instructional leadership	80%	Guiding curriculum, supporting pedagogy
Decision-making ability	88%	Involving team in decisions, making data-driven choices
Conflict resolution	76%	Mediating disputes, maintaining team harmony

These findings are consistent with Leithwood and Jantzi’s assertion that transformational leadership behaviors are critical for fostering shared commitment. Furthermore, the data affirmed Bush’s view that leadership competence must go beyond administration to include instructional awareness and relational skills.

2. Communication and trust as drivers of collaboration. Effective internal communication emerged as a foundational competency for successful team management. Teachers across the sample identified regular feedback, transparent decision-making, and open-door policies as indicators of strong leadership. In schools where principals were perceived as approachable and responsive, teacher collaboration was more active and sustained [12].

Trust was frequently mentioned as both an outcome and enabler of good leadership. Educators expressed greater willingness to innovate, share resources, and resolve conflicts constructively in environments where leadership encouraged psychological safety. These findings echo Tschannen-Moran’s argument that trust in leadership significantly enhances organizational effectiveness and team functioning.

3. Professional development as a reinforcing mechanism. Another key theme was the role of professional development in sustaining leadership competencies. Schools that prioritized ongoing training for their leaders and teams reported higher levels of coordination and morale. Principals who had attended recent leadership development programs were more likely to implement inclusive planning processes and foster distributed leadership [13].

One principal remarked: “After attending a leadership institute last year, I started involving teachers more in decision-making. It completely changed the way we operate as a team.”

A pattern was observed linking recent leadership development and higher levels of collaboration, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Leadership Development and Collaboration Levels

School code	Leadership training in last 2 years	Reported teacher collaboration Level (1–5)
S1	Yes	5
S2	No	3
S3	Yes	4
S4	Yes	5
S5	No	2
S6	Yes	4
S7	Yes	5
S8	No	3
S9	Yes	4
S10	No	2

This supports findings by Darling-Hammond who argue that leadership development linked to real-world school challenges has measurable effects on school climate and teacher collaboration.

While all schools demonstrated some level of competency-based leadership, variations were observed. Urban schools tended to adopt more structured team management practices, possibly due to greater access to resources and leadership training programs. Semi-urban schools, though sometimes limited in infrastructure, showed higher levels of informal collaboration, which principals attributed to strong community ties and interpersonal trust [14].

Figure 1 illustrates the frequency with which each leadership competency was mentioned by the three participant groups.

Competency	Teachers (n=324)	Deputy Heads (n=20)	Principals (n=10)
Communication	310	19	10
Emotional Intelligence	288	17	10
Instructional Support	250	18	9
Conflict Resolution	215	15	8
Strategic Vision	240	18	10

**Figure 1.** Frequency of leadership competencies by role

**Practical application of findings:** A Quantitative insight. While the core of this study is qualitative, the emerging patterns across the ten schools suggest potential for developing a

practical, quantifiable tool to assess leadership influence on team collaboration [15]. Based on the themes of communication, trust, and decision-making transparency, a simple Leadership Impact Index (LII) is proposed. To quantify the influence of leadership on team dynamics, a Leadership Impact Index (LII) is proposed (see Formula 1).

The LII serves as a composite indicator that reflects the perceived effectiveness of school leadership in fostering collaborative environments. It is calculated as the mean value of scores assigned to three leadership domains, based on teacher responses using a 5-point Likert scale:

$$LII = \frac{C+T+D}{3} \quad (1)$$

Where:

C = Communication effectiveness score;

T = Trust in leadership score;

D = Decision-making transparency score.

Each variable is rated by participants from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). The resulting index ranges from 1.0 to 5.0, with higher values indicating stronger leadership influence on team functioning.

Example Calculation: At School A, the aggregated teacher responses were as follows:

Communication score = 4.8

Trust score = 4.5

Decision-making score = 4.7

Then:

$$LII \text{ school A} = \frac{(4.8+4.5+4.7)}{3} = 4.67 \quad (2)$$

Such a tool could be used in internal school evaluations, leadership self-assessments, or broader research to correlate leadership practices with team and student outcomes. While this index does not replace deeper qualitative insights, it offers a useful starting point for systematic monitoring of leadership impact in schools.

In summary, the study confirms that **leadership competencies are a critical foundation for effective team management** in schools. Key competencies such as emotional intelligence, vision-setting, communication, and a commitment to ongoing development emerged as consistent predictors of team success. These findings reinforce the need for competency-based leadership training and systematic support for school leaders as a strategic priority in educational reform [16].

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has demonstrated that school leadership competencies are a foundational factor in fostering effective team management within educational institutions. Drawing on qualitative data from ten secondary schools, it is evident that competencies such as emotional intelligence, strategic vision, communication, and instructional leadership are not only desirable traits but essential capabilities for building cohesive, high-performing teams.

The findings highlight that trust-based leadership, transparent decision-making, and continuous professional development directly contribute to a collaborative school culture. Moreover, schools where leaders actively engaged in shared decision-making and invested in their own leadership growth reported stronger teacher collaboration and morale.

By proposing a Leadership Impact Index (LII), the study also offers a practical tool for schools and policymakers to monitor and strengthen leadership performance through

quantifiable indicators. This aligns with global calls for competency-based leadership frameworks that support sustainable educational improvement.

Ultimately, the success of school teams depends not merely on structural or procedural factors, but on the competencies of those who lead them. For education systems seeking to enhance school effectiveness, leadership development must remain a strategic priority – grounded in practice, informed by evidence, and responsive to the evolving demands of the learning environment.

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen leadership practices and promote effective team management in schools:

1. Integrate competency-based leadership training. Educational authorities and teacher training institutions should incorporate clearly defined leadership competencies such as communication, emotional intelligence, and collaborative decision-making into pre-service and in-service professional development programs. These should be aligned with the realities of school management and tailored to local contexts.

2. Institutionalize ongoing professional development. Schools should prioritize continuous leadership learning by providing structured opportunities for principals and deputy heads to attend workshops, peer learning networks, and coaching programs. This helps leaders remain adaptive and responsive to team needs over time.

3. Promote distributed leadership models. Encouraging the delegation of leadership responsibilities fosters shared ownership and enhances team motivation. Schools should establish collaborative decision-making structures, such as leadership teams or teacher working groups, to enable inclusive participation in school governance.

4. Develop and use diagnostic tools. Tools such as the proposed **Leadership Impact Index (LII)** can help schools regularly assess the effectiveness of leadership in terms of communication, trust-building, and decision-making. These tools should be adapted for school self-evaluation processes and tied to improvement planning.

5. Foster a culture of trust and openness. School leaders should cultivate an environment where all staff feel heard, respected, and safe to share their ideas. Regular dialogue, transparent communication channels, and non-punitive feedback systems are essential for reinforcing team cohesion.

6. Policy-level support. Ministries of education and regional education departments should design and implement national or regional leadership standards based on core competencies. These frameworks should guide recruitment, performance appraisal, and career progression for school leaders.

#### *Limitations and future research directions*

*Limitations.* While this study offers valuable insights into the relationship between school leadership competencies and team management, several limitations should be acknowledged:

**Qualitative scope:** The study primarily employed qualitative methods, which, while rich in depth, may limit generalizability to a wider population of schools or education systems.

**Sample size and context:** The research was conducted in ten secondary schools within urban and semi-urban contexts. Results may not fully reflect the experiences of rural schools or those in different socio-economic or cultural settings.

**Self-Reported data:** The data collected through interviews and focus groups rely on participants' self-perceptions, which may be influenced by bias or social desirability.

**Short-term observations:** Leadership and team effectiveness are dynamic and evolve over time. This study captures only a snapshot and does not examine long-term outcomes of leadership interventions.

**Future research directions.** To build on the findings of this study, future research should consider the following avenues:

**Mixed-methods approaches:** Combining qualitative insights with quantitative measures (e.g., survey data, student outcomes) can offer a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of leadership competencies.

**Longitudinal studies:** Investigating how leadership practices influence team dynamics and school performance over several years would provide stronger causal insights.

**Cross-cultural comparisons:** Expanding the study to include schools from various countries or regions could highlight cultural factors that shape leadership styles and team interactions.

**Impact on student learning:** Future studies should explore how team effectiveness, mediated by leadership, translates into improved student learning and well-being.

**Leadership development program evaluation:** Evaluating the effectiveness of specific leadership training programs could inform policy and guide best practices in professional development.

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