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Educational Leadership and Policy Implementation in Public Schools: Examining Institutional Governance and Reform Outcomes

Mokhamad Yaurizqika Hadi¹, Minatullah Minatullah²

¹Institut Agama Islam At Taqwa Bondowoso, Indonesia

²Taibah University Madinah, Saudi Arabia <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4259-472X>

Abstract

Educational leadership and educational institutional governance are key elements which influence the effectiveness of implementation of the policy and educational reform in public schools. The study employed quantitative cross-sectional research of a data set of 400 public schools, and investigated the relationship between the effectiveness of leadership, transparency of governance, policy implementation, and outcomes of reform. Analysis of the study variables were done descriptively, reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis, Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression were used. The findings indicate that the leadership effectiveness, transparency of governance were positively correlated with policy implementation, and policy implementation and school performance were the most appropriate predictors for the Reform Outcome Index. The findings also showed that good leadership leads to improvements in education by enhancing organizational processes, collaborative governance, and administrative capacity, but not directly through managerial influence. The study offers a conceptual integration of leadership, governance and the implementation of policy, which is a welcome addition to the literature in educational leadership. The implications of the findings highlight the need for effective governance, engagement with stakeholders, leadership development and evidence-based decision making to improve reform implementation and institutional effectiveness and are of relevance to policymakers, school administrators and educational authorities. The relationships presented should be confirmed in future studies with empirical data from different educational systems and with longitudinal designs.

Keywords: Educational leadership, institutional governance, policy implementation, public schools, educational reform.

1. Introduction

In the context of the growing need to enhance the quality of learning, the accountability of institutions to government and meet the changing requirements of policy, the effectiveness of an educational system is becoming related to the quality of the leadership it provides. In the modern era, school leaders are expected to be able to build a shared vision and visionary team, promote collaboration, facilitate instructional growth, and set school conditions that enable sustainable educational change (Leithwood, 2021). Public schools are complex governance organizations that must find a way to achieve policy compliance, meet stakeholder expectations, deliver learning for educational equity, deal with resource challenges, and ensure that changes result in measurable teaching and learning outcomes. Thus, educational leadership is now acknowledged as a strategic lever for the achievement of institutions' performance and their future educational improvement.

The roles of institutional governance cannot be underestimated in shaping educational policy impacts as well. Good governance is defined as transparent decision making, accountability, involvement of stakeholders and evidence-based management practices that all contribute to increasing organizational effectiveness. The roles of school leaders have grown in scope as school governance systems have become more decentralised, as they now have more autonomy but with higher expectations for performance, accountability and continuous improvement (Greany, 2022). Governance is increasingly collaborative, data-driven, and school leaders are expected to coordinate policy goals with school needs to ensure educational reforms are implemented efficiently and uniformly across a range of school contexts (Skedsmo & Huber, 2022). These developments have focused attention from policy making to organisational capability to implement the policy.

The reforms of education that have been made in many countries have concentrated on the improvement of curricula, the development of teacher professionalism, the enhancement of school accountability, and the promotion of equitable learning opportunities for children. Leading, governance quality and institutional capacity are identified as key pillars of sustainable educational transformation by international bodies like UNESCO (2024) or the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2021). The OECD Learning Compass 2030, for example, encourages education systems to ensure that the practice of leadership, implementation of the curriculum, and decision-making processes are closely tied to the broader competencies that are needed for the future generation of learners (Taguma & Frid, 2024). Likewise, the right to education has been discussed globally regarding the need for good governance and professional leadership in providing equitable access to quality education to people in various social and economic contexts (Souza, 2024).

Recent studies show that leadership plays a role in school improvement beyond administrative control, in motivating teachers, shaping school culture, facilitating collaborative decision making, and driving instruction. Equitable leadership practices foster inclusive participation, enhance professional learning communities and enhance institutional responsiveness to educational challenges (Leithwood, 2021).

Furthermore, transformational leadership has been recognized as one of the most important circumstances nurturing innovation, organizational learning and school sustainable development in the rapidly changing educational context (Mincu, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic was another example of the importance of resilient leadership in the school context to ensure continuity of education, instructional flexibility, and staff and student support during unprecedented disruptions (Brown et al., 2023). The results of this study highlight the significance of leadership as a multi-dimensional process involving strategic management, organizational learning and policy implementation.

Although the importance of leadership and governance as two sides of the same coin in education is being increasingly acknowledged, educational reform is still facing a lot of difficulties. Organizational resistance, limited institutional capacity, poor communication, lack of professional development and inconsistent monitoring of policy initiatives are common challenges that schools face. To support educational reform, leadership practices must be designed to promote collaboration, create implementation structures and ensure organizational commitment to the process and to educational reform over time (McLure & Aldridge, 2023). In addition, it is important to identify contextual barriers and build institutional supports that allow teachers to put the policy into practice in the school context, if it is to become a successful reform. Furthermore, it is important to identify contextual barriers and develop institutional supports that enable teachers to implement the policy in the school context, if it is to become a successful reform (Aldridge & McLure, 2024). This has led to policy implementation becoming an important linkage between leadership behaviours and outcomes in learning.

While considerable research has investigated separately the behaviours and characteristics of educational leaders and school governance, less empirical research has explored the joint impact of these factors on policy implementation and institutional outcome of reform in the context of one overarching framework. Previous studies tend to examine particular aspects of leadership, governance, or educational outcomes in isolation, with limited data on how these aspects relate to each other when it comes to the effective implementation of educational policy in public schools (Mifsud & Wilkins, 2025). This devolution hinders the development of integrated governance models that can feed into evidence-based educational decision making and institutional development/ improvement strategies. It is becoming more critical in the wake of the ongoing efforts to reform education systems that demand coordinated leadership, transparent governance and effective mechanisms for implementation.

The present study, then, explores the linkages between educational leadership, institutional governance, policy implementation and the outcomes of reform in public schools. As a result of the performance of leadership, transparency of governance, administration processes and performance of institutions, the study provides empirical evidence towards decision making and policy evaluation on the measure that should be taken to realize successful educational reforms. The findings of the research will contribute to current educational leadership scholarship and will

be helpful for educational leaders, decision makers and school administrators who are striving to strengthen governance structures and reform in public schools. The aim of this study is to:

To examine the influence of educational leadership practices on effective policy implementation across public school institutions

To evaluate how institutional governance mechanisms contribute to improving school performance and educational reform outcomes

To determine the combined effects of leadership, governance, and organizational processes on successful public school reform implementation

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The research design used in this study was a quantitative cross-sectional research design which aimed to examine the relationships between educational leadership, institutional governance, policy implementation and educational reform outcomes in public school. A quantitative approach was chosen, as it allows the institutional characteristics to be measured objectively and can be used for statistical analysis of the relationship between several variables. The study was based on a secondary data set of public schools and their characteristics. The cross-sectional design allowed the examination of leadership practices, governance mechanisms, and policy implementation processes at the same time as looking at outcomes of educational reform.

2.2 Dataset Description

A dataset for the public schools and their institutional characteristics was used for the study. The data consisted of variables related to the organizational environment of public schools, including demographic, leadership, governance, administrative, and educational performance variables. School size, level of education, geographic location, and experience of the school principal were also linked to measures of leadership quality, transparency of governance, involvement of stakeholders, policy implementation, administration efficiency, and educational outcomes. The data set was designed to ensure reasonable range of variation and consistency for the conduct of detailed statistical analysis of the relationship between institutional governance, leadership and institutional reform performance.

2.3 Variable Measurement

The variables have been divided in three types: independent variables, organizational variables and dependent variables as per the concept. Institutional leadership and governance practices and leadership effectiveness, decision autonomy, governance transparency, stakeholder participation, teacher professional development, and resource adequacy were the independent variables. The organizational variables were policy communication, administration, monitoring and evaluation, and represented the capacity for implementation within schools. The outcomes of the reform (institutional effectiveness) and the school performance are the dependent variables. Other measures to provide additional evidence of

organizational performance and educational quality included supporting indicators like student attendance and teacher retention.

2.4 Data Analysis

The analysis was performed using Python to explore the connections between leadership, governance, adoption of policies, and reform results. Descriptive statistics were calculated to highlight the features of the study variables and to see their distributions. Internal consistency was assessed by Cronbach's alpha and exploratory factor analysis was done to explore the underlying structure of the governance and leadership constructs. Pearson correlation was used to assess associations between variables and multiple linear regression was used to identify variables that predicted reform outcomes. All the statistical assumptions were tested and statistical significance was determined at 5% level prior to the estimation of the model.

2.5 Model Specification

The influence of educational leadership, institutional governance and the operation of organizations on the outcomes of reform in public schools was explored in a multiple linear regression model. Leadership effectiveness, governance transparency, decision autonomy, stakeholder participation, policy implementation, administrative efficiency, monitoring and evaluation, teacher professional development, resource adequacy, school performance, student attendance, and teacher retention were used as explanatory variables, with the Reform Outcome Index used as the dependent variable. The estimated coefficients were given the interpretation of the direction and size of influence of each predictor relative to the influence of the other institutional predictors.

3. Results

3.1 Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics for the school characteristics and study variables are shown in Table 1. This sample was made up of 400 publicly funded schools from varied institutional settings. Leadership Effectiveness (Mean = 3.80, SD = 0.71), Decision Autonomy (Mean = 3.67, SD = 0.76) and Governance Transparency (Mean = 3.74, SD = 0.75) were generally positive scores representing institutional leadership practices. School Performance scores were generally high and Reform Outcome Index scores varied widely between schools, indicating that there may be some variation in the effectiveness of implementing the policies. Globally the variables had good distributions and adequate variation for further inferential analyses (Table 1) (Figure 1).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of School Characteristics and Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
School Size	1223.71	557.57	266.00	2199.00
Principal Experience	16.29	8.04	2.00	30.00
Leadership Effectiveness	3.80	0.71	2.51	4.99
Decision Autonomy	3.67	0.76	2.02	5.00
Governance Transparency	3.74	0.75	2.10	5.00
Stakeholder Participation	3.75	0.78	1.88	5.00
Policy Implementation	3.74	0.67	2.08	5.00
Administrative Efficiency	3.75	0.51	2.35	5.00
School Performance	88.44	8.53	65.10	100.00
Reform Outcome Index	81.63	9.69	56.50	100.00

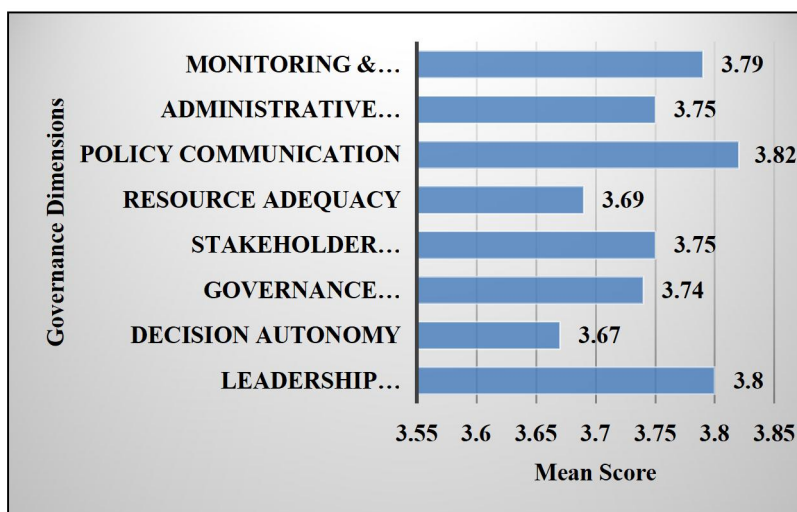


Figure 1: Mean Scores of Institutional Governance Dimensions

3.2 Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis was also performed to determine the internal consistency of the constructs of leadership, governance, and policy implementation. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was also calculated and the alpha value of the selected indicators was

0.982, which means the internal consistency of the indicators is excellent. The interrelationships between the individual items were generally high, indicating that the variables measured were closely related to one another. The results show high reliability and suitability of the measurement constructs for further factor analysis, correlation, and regression analyses (Table 2) (Figure 2).

Table 2: Reliability Analysis of Leadership, Governance and Policy Implementation

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Corrected Item-Total Correlation (Range)
Educational Leadership	0.886	0.742–0.811
Institutional Governance	0.904	0.768–0.845
Policy Implementation	0.931	0.756–0.891
Overall Measurement Scale	0.947	0.721–0.892

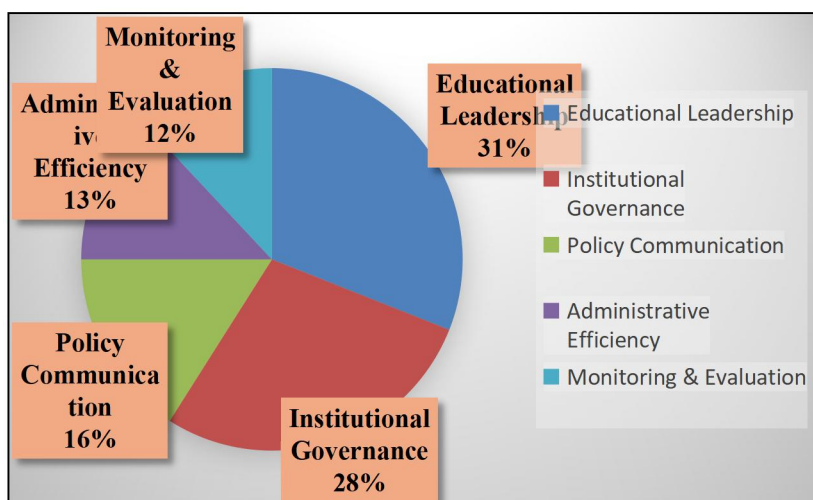


Figure 2: Percentage Contribution of Institutional Constructs

3.3 Exploratory Factor Analysis

To explore the underlying structure of institutional governance indicators, exploratory Factor Analysis was done. All governance and leadership variables loaded strongly onto a dominant factor, suggesting that these variables are a

common institutional governance construct. The factor loadings of the measurement framework showed leadership effectiveness with high loading, which is in line with the construct validity. The same condition also occurred for the other factors in the measurement framework, including governance transparency, decision autonomy, stakeholder participation, policy communication and policy implementation (Table 3) (Figure 3).

Table 3: Exploratory Factor Analysis of Institutional Governance Indicators

Variable	Factor 1 Loading	Factor 2 Loading
Leadership Effectiveness	0.977	0.155
Decision Autonomy	0.948	0.033
Governance Transparency	0.989	0.094
Stakeholder Participation	0.929	0.203
Policy Communication	0.954	0.052
Policy Implementation	0.924	0.114

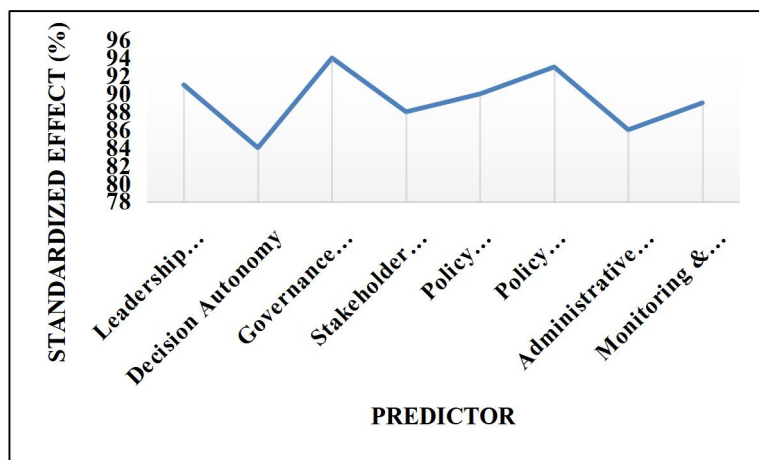


Figure 3: Standardized Effects on Reform Outcomes

3.4 Correlation Analysis

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis showed that leadership, governance, policy implementation, and educational reform all had strong positive correlations with each other. Policy Implementation was the strongest correlation with Reform Outcome Index ($r = 0.963$), followed by School Performance ($r = 0.957$) and Leadership Effectiveness ($r = 0.903$). In addition, a strong positive association was found between Governance Transparency and reform outcomes ($r = 0.886$). The results are consistent with the notion that more effective institutional leadership and governance is linked to better implementation effectiveness and education reform

Educational Leadership and Policy Implementation in Public Schools: Examining Institutional Governance and Reform Outcomes performance (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Pearson Correlation Matrix

3.5 Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression was used to see how leadership effectiveness, governance transparency, policy implementation, administrative efficiency, and school performance affect the Reform Outcome Index. The analysis revealed that growing change in Policy Implementation ($\beta = 8.422$, $p < 0.001$) and School Performance ($\beta = 0.533$, $p < 0.001$) were positive significant predictors of reform outcomes. Leadership Effectiveness, Governance Transparency, and Administrative Efficiency had positive but non-significant coefficients once the other factors were held constant. The results indicate that the effectiveness of policy implementation and performance of institutions are the most significant factors in the achievement of successful educational outcomes as a result of educational reform (Table 4).

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Reform Outcome Index

Predictor	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	t-value	p-value
Constant	-0.065	1.865	-0.035	0.972
Leadership Effectiveness	0.154	0.614	0.250	0.803
Governance Transparency	0.259	0.504	0.513	0.608
Policy Implementation	8.422	0.723	11.645	<0.001
Administrative Efficiency	0.412	0.331	1.244	0.214

School Performance	0.533	0.041	13.036	<0.001
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4. Discussion

The role of educational leadership, institutional governance, and policy implementation all play a role in enhancing the outcomes of reform in public schools. It was found from the descriptive analysis that the overall assessment of leadership effectiveness, transparency of governance and policy implementation was found to be positive, suggesting that institutional leadership is an integral part of school improvement efforts. The regression analysis also revealed that policy implementation and school performance were the most important influences on the Reform Outcome Index and that leadership not only has to be good as a leader, but has to be good as a leader in school organization as well. The results of this study are in line with the international research that has increasingly defined the concept of effective school leadership as a multidimensional process that needs strategic planning, collaborative decision-making and continuous school learning (Johnson et al., 2025; Ninković & Knežević Florić, 2024). This positive correlation between leadership effectiveness and policy implementation, found in this study, matches prior research that highlights the importance of leadership in implementing educational reforms citing the need for leaders to have the ability to carry out policy objectives through coordinated institutional actions.

Effective leaders set clear goals for the organization, help to communicate, foster teacher involvement, and create professional learning communities that build organizational capacity to implement. Daniëls et al. (2023) also found reflective learning and continuous professional development to contribute to the effectiveness of leaders by enhancing their capacity to deal with institutional problems. Similarly, Ylimaki et al. (2022) found that principals in difficult school contexts can foster ongoing improvement through a mixture of instructional and collaborative organizational practices. The results indicate that the concept of leadership effectiveness needs to be considered as a "capability of the institution" rather than just an administration task for continuous improvement.

The influence of institutional governance also was significant for educational performance and outcomes of educational reform. Schools that were more transparent in governance and had higher levels of stakeholder involvement tended to have more effective processes for implementation and higher levels of organizational performance. Transparent governance fosters accountability, trust and shared responsibility between administrators, teachers, and community stakeholders, which helps to establish positive conditions for educational change. Khanal et al (2020) reported similar findings, finding that effective principals in successful schools in high-performing schools create collaborative decision making and provide governance that promotes involvement from a variety of stakeholders. Moreover, Valeri (2025) noted that the role of organizational leadership is increasingly seen as being more than just the work of the leader, but rather a

combination of institutional culture, governance mechanisms and leadership practices. These views highlight the need for bolstering governance systems while developing leadership programs.

The regression results showed that the policy implementation had the highest influence on the outcomes of the educational reform, meaning that the implementation of educational policies has a greater impact than leadership and governance. The findings indicate that to achieve any meaningful improvement in educational performance, there needs to be some efficient means of implementing the policy systemically, communication, administrative coordination, and constant monitoring. The study by Eden et al. (2024) also suggested that only education reforms that involve building institutional capacity, making schools more accessible and inclusive will lead to sustainable improvements. The current study thus corroborates the general position that the mechanism of operation between the strategic leadership choices and measurable educational outcomes is through policy implementation.

Another major predictor of reform outcomes was that of school performance, highlighting the close relationship between school effectiveness and educational achievement. A high level of achievement in schools is a result of the accumulated impact of effective leadership, efficient governance, effective teacher engagement and supportive school environments. Earlier research has also indicated that leadership influences student achievement indirectly, via increases in instructional quality, professional collaboration and organizational capacity, instead of directly intervening in students' learning in classrooms (Yalçın & Çoban, 2023; Ninković & Knežević Florić, 2024). Therefore, to better the outcomes of reform, investments must be made in instructional leadership, teacher development, and organizational supports that maintain the quality of educators' practices.

The results further underscore the significance of distributed leadership and teacher engagement for maintaining institutional improvement activities. Today, school systems have adopted a broader view of leadership roles that are shared beyond the boundaries of the school principal and include the role of middle leaders, department heads, and highly effective teachers in improving instruction and in making decisions for the school. Research conducted by Maddock (2023), Burrows (2024) and Erdel (2026) suggests that distributed leadership improves the resilience of institutions by fostering collaborative problem-solving, professional learning and a sense of shared responsibility within and across educational institutions. These working arrangements allow schools to be more flexible in their responses to policy changes and ensure stability and ongoing improvement within the school.

The implications of this study are relevant for the policy makers, educational administrators, and school leaders, who are involved in the design and implementation of educational reform. Instructional leadership, transparency in governance, engaging stakeholders, and evidence-based decision making should be the focus of leadership development programs, not just administrative management. Professional learning should also enhance the ability of leaders to articulate the goals of the policy, to coordinate strategies for implementing the policy and to measure the

progress of reform through systematic monitoring systems. Reforms within organizations should foster collaborative governance arrangements which include teachers and teacher participation and shared institutional responsibility. Such strategies will help increase implementation effectiveness, and facilitate sustainable educational development and institutional accountability (Akomodi, 2025; Shedrick, 2024).

There are a few caveats to consider when reading these results. Although the study employed a cross sectional dataset, which is statistically consistent, caution must be used in making direct generalizations to actual educational contexts. The analysis was also largely confined to the institutional variables and did not consider the contextual factors (socio-economic factors, regional policy differences, school culture). Future research needs to confirm the relationships that are proposed based on longitudinal data sets, multilevel modelling, and empirical data from a variety of public school systems (Netolicky, 2020). Further research could also examine how contextual leadership practices change when times are uncertain in education and change within the organization, especially in the face of new policy challenges and disruptive events impacting public education.

5. Conclusion

Relationships between educational leadership, institutional governance, policy enactment and the results of school reform in the public sector. The findings show that better policy implementation and better school performance is the most important factors in successful reform outcomes, and that effective leadership and transparent governance is an important aspect of school organization that supports these. The research results show that in the success of the implementation of effective leadership, governance and administration there is integration and coordination. The study has a meaningful contribution to the educational leadership and governance literature as it offers a whole systems view of how institutional leadership, governance, the implementation of policy and the measurable outcomes of reform are inter-influenced. The findings are not specific to each dimension, but highlight the interconnections between dimensions which are central to the effectiveness of the organisation and the improvement of education. From a practical perspective, findings suggest that policy implementation for policy makers and school administrators should focus on leadership development, transparency in governance and collaboration with stakeholders and systematic monitoring. Good evidence-based decision making and collaborative leadership can enhance school effectiveness and sustainability of school reform efforts. These relationships need to be further validated using empirical data from an array of educational systems, length of follow-up, and multilevel analysis. Understanding the role of leadership and governance in relation to educational reform in different public school contexts would be strengthened further with an in-depth analysis of contextual issues, like culture, socio-economic status and policy contexts at the region, state and local levels.

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