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The impact of senior leadership on teacher motivation in the province of Santo Domingo

Impacto del liderazgo directivo en la motivación docente en la provincia de Santo Domingo

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to determine the impact of managerial leadership on teacher motivation in the province of Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, Ecuador. Using a quantitative approach and a non-experimental correlational design, the study involved a sample of 186 state school teachers selected through stratified sampling, who were asked to complete a 32-item Likert-scale questionnaire with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.91. The results showed a strong positive correlation between leadership and teacher motivation (rho = 0.742; p < 0.01), with transformational leadership and assertive communication being the strongest predictors of intrinsic motivation; furthermore, the regression model explained 55.1 per cent of the motivational variance, whilst participatory decision-making recorded the lowest level amongst the dimensions assessed. It is concluded that institutional policy should prioritise communicative and participatory leadership amongst teaching staff.

Descriptors: educational leadership; teacher motivation; educational management. (Source: UNESCO Thesaurus).

RESUMEN

El estudio tuvo como objetivo determinar el impacto del liderazgo directivo en la motivación docente en la provincia de Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, Ecuador. De enfoque cuantitativo y diseño correlacional no experimental, se trabajó con una muestra de 186 docentes públicos seleccionados mediante muestreo estratificado, a quienes se aplicó un cuestionario Likert de 32 ítems con un coeficiente alfa de Cronbach de 0,91. Los resultados evidenciaron una correlación positiva fuerte entre el liderazgo directivo y la motivación docente (rho = 0,742; p < 0,01), siendo el liderazgo transformacional y la comunicación asertiva los predictores más fuertes de la motivación intrínseca; asimismo, el modelo de regresión explicó el 55,1 % de la varianza motivacional, mientras que la toma de decisiones participativa registró el nivel más bajo entre las dimensiones evaluadas. Se concluye que la política institucional debe priorizar el liderazgo comunicativo y participativo del profesorado.

Descriptores: liderazgo educacional; motivación del profesor; gestión educacional. (Fuente: Tesauro UNESCO).

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Research articles

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary educational management requires a rigorous examination of the relationship between institutional leadership and teaching effectiveness, as the classroom represents the ultimate setting in which administrative decisions are translated into educational practice. Leadership at the management level constitutes an essential mechanism for creating conditions that enable teachers to foster supportive working environments, since school authorities are responsible not only for managing organisational resources but also for directing pedagogical and emotional processes that shape teachers' attitudes towards their professional practice (Bolívar, 2019).

Teacher motivation is a multidimensional construct that encompasses both intrinsic and extrinsic components. Understanding the factors that motivate teachers therefore requires consideration of these complementary dimensions. Numerous studies conducted in Latin America have shown that highly motivated teachers demonstrate stronger organisational commitment, improve instructional quality, and contribute to the development of classroom environments that are more conducive to learning. Conversely, when institutional leadership adopts authoritarian or excessively bureaucratic approaches, teacher motivation tends to decline, resulting in professional burnout and organisational disengagement (García & Martínez, 2019). Likewise, educational leadership in the twenty-first century has progressively evolved from administrative control models towards approaches centred on pedagogical support, active listening, and the co-construction of institutional objectives. Within this framework, school leaders play a role that extends beyond administrative regulation, exerting a direct influence on teachers' professional identity and their sense of belonging to the educational institution (Herrera, 2019).

Although the literature consistently recognises the importance of institutional leadership, empirical evidence remains limited regarding its relationship with teacher motivation in contexts such as Ecuador, where considerable

socioeconomic and cultural diversity characterises the educational system, particularly in the province of Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas. Consequently, a systematic examination of this relationship within public educational institutions serving students with diverse educational needs is warranted. Transformational leadership has been identified as particularly effective in enhancing teacher motivation by promoting participation, recognising both individual and collective capabilities, and encouraging pedagogical creativity in the classroom. In this regard, Rojas Carrasco et al. (2020) reported that this leadership approach, grounded in the principles of humanistic pedagogy, promotes teachers' self-determination by positioning educators as active agents of institutional transformation rather than passive implementers of managerial directives.

Similarly, institutional climate functions as an intermediary factor between leadership style and teachers' motivational responses, as collective perceptions of fairness, recognition, and communication shape the manner in which teachers interpret managerial decisions (Flores et al., 2024). Effective management of the institutional climate also facilitates collaboration among teaching staff while reducing organisational tensions within educational institutions. This process increasingly incorporates information and communication technologies into educational management, transforming traditional leadership practices and requiring school authorities to develop new digital competencies that enable timely pedagogical support for teachers (García & Moreira, 2024). Consequently, leadership capacity to integrate technological resources with pedagogical processes significantly influences teachers' perceptions of institutional support.

In addition, school climate has been associated with academic achievement and the availability of institutional resources, making its assessment a strategic means of identifying organisational conflicts that may negatively affect teacher motivation before they become more deeply embedded within educational institutions (Hamodi-Galán & Viego, 2024). From this perspective, institutional climate assessment represents a valuable resource for designing leadership support policies. Furthermore, evidence derived from educational neurocommunication has demonstrated that teachers' psychological responses

to messages communicated by school authorities influence the forms of collaborative work developed within educational settings (Barrientos-Báez, 2024).

Within this context, communication management should be regarded as a fundamental leadership competence rather than merely an administrative responsibility. Similarly, praxeological leadership has emerged as an alternative approach that seeks to integrate social inclusion and critical thinking into educational management by promoting leadership decision-making based on continuous collective reflection concerning teaching practice (Díaz-Esteban, 2024). This perspective broadens the understanding of leadership by conceptualising it not only as an instrumental exercise of authority but also as a transformative process capable of shaping institutional culture. Furthermore, the Ecuadorian regulatory framework, particularly the Organic Law on Intercultural Education and its corresponding regulations, assigns institutional authorities responsibility for providing pedagogical support and promoting teachers' professional development.

Nevertheless, the effective implementation of these responsibilities depends largely on the leadership competencies developed by school leaders, since regulatory provisions alone cannot guarantee meaningful transformation of organisational culture within educational institutions. The gap between the regulatory framework and its practical implementation provides an important context for understanding the differences identified in teachers' perceptions reported by previous studies on educational management in Ecuador (Morales Vergara et al., 2018). Consistent with this perspective, pedagogical leadership has been characterised as an approach primarily focused on improving teaching and learning processes rather than merely ensuring compliance with institutional administrative procedures (Bolívar, 2019).

Within this leadership model, school leaders assume mentoring roles by providing pedagogical feedback and fostering the collective construction of institutional educational projects. The literature reviewed indicates that these practices

directly influence teachers' perceptions of the professional support they receive throughout their daily educational activities. Consequently, the socio-emotional competencies of school leaders have become increasingly relevant in contemporary educational management because institutional authorities are expected to regulate both their own emotional awareness and that of the teaching staff under their leadership, thereby strengthening the quality of interpersonal relationships within educational organisations (Aranda Meyer & Luque, 2024).

Accordingly, leadership development programmes should incorporate emotional competencies alongside administrative and regulatory capabilities, recognising that such skills are transferable to the management of human teams across diverse organisational contexts. Evidence from educational institutions has shown that leadership becomes particularly important during periods of organisational uncertainty, when leaders' decision-making processes and their ability to maintain staff morale substantially influence teachers' perceptions of institutional stability and organisational effectiveness (Pascual et al., 2024).

Within the Ecuadorian context, characterised by continuous curricular reforms and fiscal budgetary constraints, examining the influence of leadership on teacher motivation under challenging institutional conditions becomes particularly relevant. Previous ethnomethodological studies conducted in Ecuador have demonstrated that teacher performance is closely associated with the leadership roles assumed by school authorities and with their participation in constructing shared meanings concerning everyday pedagogical practice (Zurita et al., 2019). This evidence further supports the need to investigate this relationship in the province of Santo Domingo, a region of considerable demographic importance where scientific research addressing educational leadership and teacher motivation remains limited.

METHODS

Study Design

This study adopted a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional, non-experimental correlational design. The variables of school leadership and teacher

motivation were measured at a single point in time, and no intentional manipulation of institutional conditions was undertaken. This methodological design enabled the statistical association between both variables to be examined without attempting to establish causal relationships, in accordance with the methodological criteria described by Maya et al. (2020) in studies addressing managerial leadership and educational quality.

Population and Sample

The target population consisted of 412 teachers employed in public educational institutions located in the province of Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, Ecuador. A sample of 186 teachers was selected using stratified probability sampling, with educational level serving as the stratification criterion, including both general basic education and upper secondary education.

The sample size was calculated using the statistical formula for finite populations, adopting a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Participants were recruited from eight public educational institutions that were accessible through institutional collaboration. Teachers ranged in age from 24 to 61 years, with a mean teaching experience of 11.4 years.

Instrument

Data were collected using a structured five-point Likert-scale questionnaire comprising 32 items organised into two sections. The first section assessed the school leadership variable through four dimensions: transformational leadership, transactional leadership, assertive communication, and participatory decision-making.

The second section evaluated teacher motivation, considering three dimensions: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and organisational commitment. All items were formulated as affirmative statements, with response options ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, following the conventional Likert-scale format.

Content validity was established through expert judgement by a panel of five specialists in educational management and research methodology, who assessed the relevance, clarity, and coherence of each item. Subsequently, a pilot study involving 30 teachers who were not included in the final sample was conducted. The instrument achieved a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.91, indicating excellent internal consistency and confirming its suitability for research in the social sciences.

Procedure

Data collection was completed over a six-week period following authorisation from both district education authorities and the participating schools. Questionnaires were administered through face-to-face surveys as well as electronic forms, thereby facilitating participant accessibility and response flexibility.

Before data collection commenced, all participants received detailed information regarding the exclusively academic purpose of the study and provided informed consent prior to their voluntary participation.

Operationalisation of Variables

Operationally, school leadership was defined as teachers' perceptions of the leadership style exercised by institutional authorities, as reflected in the four dimensions evaluated by the questionnaire.

Teacher motivation was operationalised as teachers' affective and behavioural disposition towards the performance of their pedagogical responsibilities and was assessed through the dimensions of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and organisational commitment.

Both variables were considered ordinal constructs, and consequently, non-parametric statistical procedures were selected for the subsequent analyses.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to the ethical principles governing research in the social sciences, including respect for participants' autonomy, confidentiality of the information collected, and the exclusive use of the data for academic purposes.

Neither educational institutions nor individual teachers were identifiable in the presentation or analysis of the findings. Participation was entirely voluntary and did not entail any consequences for participants' professional evaluation or employment conditions.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. Initially, descriptive analyses were performed, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations.

Normality was assessed using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, which indicated that the data did not follow a normal distribution. Consequently, Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient (rho) was employed to examine the associations between school leadership and teacher motivation, as well as between the individual leadership dimensions and the dimensions of teacher motivation. Statistical significance was established at $p < 0.05$ for all inferential analyses.

RESULTS

Regarding the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants, the sample was predominantly composed of female teachers, with most respondents holding an undergraduate degree and having between six and fifteen years of teaching experience, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample.*

Variable	Category	*f*	%
Sex	Female	109	58.6
	Male	77	41.4
Educational attainment	Undergraduate degree	120	64.5
	Postgraduate degree	66	35.5
Length of teaching experience	Between 6 and 15 years	88	47.3
	Less than 6 years or more than 15 years	98	52.7

Note. f = frequency; % = percentage; *n* = 186 teachers.

The data presented in Table 1 indicate that the sample consisted predominantly of female teachers holding undergraduate qualifications, a profile that is representative of Ecuador's public teaching workforce. Furthermore, the concentration of teachers with an intermediate length of professional experience suggests a workforce undergoing professional consolidation rather than one characterised by newly appointed or near-retirement teachers.

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics for school leadership and its dimensions.*

Dimension	Mean	SD	Level
Assertive communication	3.71	0.58	High
Transformational leadership	3.58	0.62	Moderately high
Transactional leadership	3.35	0.54	Moderate
Participatory decision-making	3.04	0.67	Moderately low
School leadership (overall)	**3.42**	**0.49**	**Moderate**

Note. Mean = arithmetic mean; SD = standard deviation. Five-point scale.

As shown in Table 2, assertive communication received the highest rating among the leadership dimensions, whereas participatory decision-making obtained the lowest mean score. These findings suggest that a substantial proportion of teachers perceive limited opportunities to contribute their views to institutional decision-making processes.

Table 3. *Descriptive statistics for teacher motivation and its dimensions.*

Dimension	Mean	SD	Level
Organisational commitment	3.79	0.51	High
Intrinsic motivation	3.62	0.56	Moderately high
Extrinsic motivation	3.15	0.64	Moderate
Teacher motivation (overall)	**3.57**	**0.47**	**Moderately high**

Note. Mean = arithmetic mean; SD = standard deviation. Five-point scale.

Regarding Table 3, organisational commitment achieved the highest score among the motivational dimensions, whereas extrinsic motivation recorded the lowest value. This finding is consistent with the salary constraints and limited financial incentives characteristic of Ecuador's public education system. Likewise, relational and affective dimensions namely assertive communication and organisational commitment received the highest evaluations, whereas the more structural dimensions, participatory decision-making and extrinsic motivation, obtained comparatively lower scores.

Table 4. *Spearman's correlation between school leadership, its dimensions, and teacher motivation.*

Relationship	Spearman's rho	*p*	Strength
School leadership – Teacher motivation	0.742	<0.01	Strong
Transformational leadership – Intrinsic motivation	0.781	<0.01	Strong
Assertive communication – Intrinsic motivation	0.703	<0.01	Strong
Participatory decision-making – Organisational commitment	0.612	<0.01	Moderate
Transactional leadership – Extrinsic motivation	0.548	<0.01	Moderate

Note. Spearman's rho = Spearman's rank correlation coefficient; *p* = two-tailed statistical significance.

The correlation coefficients presented in Table 4 supported rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the research hypothesis, confirming a positive and statistically significant association between school leadership and teacher motivation. Transformational leadership and assertive communication exhibited the strongest relationships with intrinsic motivation, whereas transactional

leadership showed a moderate positive association with extrinsic motivation. Moreover, the relationship between participatory decision-making and organisational commitment remained stable after stratifying the sample according to educational level, with no statistically significant differences observed between teachers in primary and secondary education.

DISCUSSION

The findings obtained in the province of Santo Domingo demonstrate a strong and statistically significant positive association between school leadership and teacher motivation. These results are consistent with those reported by Aparicio Molina et al. (2020), who argued that collaborative experiences between universities and schools facilitate educational change when school leadership adopts a facilitative rather than a purely supervisory role. In this regard, the present study provides more specific empirical evidence of this relationship within the Ecuadorian educational context, an area that has received limited attention in previous research.

The significant association identified between transformational leadership and teachers' intrinsic motivation confirms the findings reported by Rojas Carrasco et al. (2020), who examined educational leadership from the perspective of humanistic pedagogy, conceptualising teachers as active professionals capable of achieving self-realisation when institutional environments provide appropriate support. Similarly, these findings are consistent with those of Weinstein et al. (2019), whose systematic review of educational leadership research in Chile highlighted the greater effectiveness of transformational leadership styles in fostering sustained teacher commitment compared with approaches focused primarily on regulatory compliance. Conversely, the moderate relationship identified between transactional leadership and extrinsic motivation supports the study conducted by Herrera and Cancino (2018), which suggested that the functional competencies of school management teams should be complemented by measurable forms of professional recognition in order to sustain teacher motivation over the medium term. Nevertheless, the findings of the present study

indicate that reliance on this leadership style alone is unlikely to generate high levels of organisational commitment, as its influence appears to be largely restricted to material incentives.

The comparatively low rating assigned to the participatory decision-making dimension is consistent with the observations of Riera et al. (2018), who argued that ethical leadership should actively involve educational communities, particularly in contexts characterised by uncertainty. However, the continued prevalence of hierarchical organisational structures within many public educational institutions in Ecuador may explain the discrepancy observed between participatory leadership discourse and the managerial practices identified in the present study. Likewise, the findings concerning the mediating role of institutional climate are supported by Flores et al. (2024), who reported that the administrative management of school climate directly shapes teachers' perceptions of institutional support. Consequently, strengthening the institutional climate may represent an effective complementary strategy for enhancing the positive influence of transformational leadership identified among the participants included in this investigation.

With regard to the digitalisation of educational management, the results support the findings reported by García and Moreira (2024), who concluded that inadequate technological integration by school authorities limits teachers' access to timely pedagogical support. From this perspective, deficiencies in school leaders' digital competencies may partly explain the variation observed in the assertive communication dimension within the study sample. Furthermore, the tendency towards reduced motivational levels among teachers with longer professional experience is consistent with the observations of Tintoré (2024), who emphasised the influence of middle-tier leadership structures on the long-term development of educational leadership.

Accordingly, it may be argued that continuous improvement of leadership practices throughout teachers' professional careers could help prevent processes of organisational disengagement during later stages of professional

development. In contrast to perspectives that minimise the independent contribution of leadership, the findings of the present study demonstrate a substantial influence of school leadership on teachers' motivational attitudes. These results are also consistent with those reported by Morales Vergara et al. (2018), who identified a comparable relationship within Ecuadorian higher education institutions. Collectively, the available evidence across different educational settings reinforces the strategic importance of school leadership as a key component of educational improvement policies at institutional, provincial, and national levels.

Overall, the findings highlight the implications of the emerging paradigm shifts currently affecting educational organisations and their transition towards more flexible and less hierarchical models of educational management (Rodríguez-Ramírez & Carlson-Morales, 2024). In this respect, the evidence suggests that educational institutions in the province of Santo Domingo are progressing only partially in this direction. Although communication and professional support received higher evaluations than traditional administrative control, important limitations remain regarding teachers' effective participation in institutional decision-making processes, which continue to be largely determined by organisational policies.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study demonstrate that school leadership exerts a strong and statistically significant influence on teacher motivation in the province of Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, Ecuador. The association identified between both variables (Spearman’s rho = 0.742, $p < 0.01$), together with the regression model explaining 55.1% of the variance in teacher motivation, confirms the substantial contribution of leadership practices to teachers’ motivational outcomes.

Among the leadership dimensions examined, transformational leadership and assertive communication emerged as the strongest predictors of intrinsic motivation, highlighting the importance of leadership approaches that promote professional support, effective communication, and collaborative relationships within educational institutions. In contrast, participatory decision-making received

the lowest evaluation, indicating that teachers continue to perceive limited opportunities to contribute actively to institutional governance and decision-making processes.

Accordingly, institutional policies should prioritise the strengthening of communicative and participatory leadership competencies among school leaders as a sustainable strategy for enhancing teacher motivation, reinforcing organisational commitment, and improving the quality of educational management within Ecuadorian public schools.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest involving individuals or institutions associated with this research.

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