

## **SERIAL MODEL OF MEDIATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN AND BURNOUT IN LEADERSHIP RELATIONS AND RETENTION OF VOCATIONAL TEACHERS**

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### **Abstract**

Ineffective school leadership often results in unclear tasks and excessive administrative burdens for vocational school teachers. Consequently, teachers' psychological resources are depleted, threatening their commitment to the organisation. This study aimed to examine how leadership skills affect teacher retention through repeated mediation pathways stemming from administrative burdens and boredom. In this quantitative study, 171 purposively selected vocational school teachers were used as respondents. After data were collected through a structured questionnaire, partial least squares structural equation analysis was used to assess structural validity, path coefficients, and to test specific mediation effects. The results show that burnout is the most dominant factor influencing retention, and administrative and leadership burdens have a significant impact through mediation mechanisms. Leadership determines retention through psychological mechanisms, ranging from role ambiguity to resource depletion. By identifying a neglected integrated causal pathway in school human resource management, this study contributes to the vocational education literature.

*Keywords: Teacher retention, Teacher burnout, administrative burden, School leadership, Vocational education*

### **1. Introduction**

School leadership is essential for building a healthy learning environment, especially in Vocational High Schools (VHS), which have two goals: producing graduates who are technically capable and ready for entrepreneurship. However, experience in the field shows that sufficient pedagogical and management ability does not always decide the appointment of a principal. In contrast, structural considerations or seniority are often grounds for appointment. (J. Li et al., 2023). Schools become organisations that are not administratively oriented and lose pedagogical direction when leaders do not understand the importance of vocational education (Romanova & Anisimova, 2023; Restrepo et al., 2023). This phenomenon did not immediately destroy school buildings. Instead, it undermined teachers' psychological foundation, the main pillar of learning. Role theory (Morrissette & Kisamore, 2020) explains how role ambiguity, also known as "role ambiguity," becomes the basis of the problem when leadership is ineffective. This helps to understand the mechanisms underlying such systemic collapses.

Vocational school principals who do not understand vocational competency standards tend to make policies spontaneously without a pedagogical basis. Consequently, teachers face uncertainty regarding key tasks, evaluation standards, and decision-making authority (Morrissette and Kisamore, 2020). When SOPs are not measured or applied discriminatorily, they are flexible for those close to the leaders and rigid for others. Consequently, teachers are forced to rely on subjective interpretations, leading to increased work stress. This condition not only causes psychological discomfort but also jeopardises professional identity, which ultimately reduces commitment to the organisation (Morrissette and Kisamore, 2020).

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which distinguishes between job demands and job resources (Bianchi et al., 2019; Zacher & Rudolph, 2021), It describes the proposed mechanism. Entrepreneurial resources

that provide direction and psychological support, industry-based curriculum management, and academic supervision abilities are all examples of leadership competencies (Y. Li, 2023). Conversely, unhealthy job demands, disproportionate administrative burdens, overlapping reporting lines, and sudden procedural changes without socialization stem from a lack of competencies (Andersson et al., 2024). Competency certifications, reports related to the business or industry world, and often systemically unintegrated teaching factories exacerbate the administrative tasks of vocational schools (Andersson et al., 2024). According to Maas et al., (2022) they point out that an imbalanced need for resources will lead to a process of health disorders, in which teachers experience chronic fatigue due to spending their psychological energy on completing meaningless pedagogical administrative tasks. A high number of jobs, including administrative responsibilities, is closely related to lower teacher well-being. As a result, professional motivation and commitment may be higher (Salinas et al., 2022). School principals often face difficulties providing adequate support in resource-limited environments. This affects their abilities and positively impacts teachers' well-being (Tan, 2023). Efforts to improve the quality of vocational education will be hampered by a decline in teachers' pedagogical abilities if there is no systemic intervention on the administrative burden (Oyarzún-Maldonado & Cornejo-Chávez, 2023; Zhang et al., 2023).

Resource management theory improves the understanding of psychological resource depletion (Hussain & Shahzad, 2022) by explaining how resource loss occurs. Teachers bring resources such as idealism, pedagogical expertise, and a desire to contribute to their profession (Clercq, 2024). However, the achievement of failed resources occurs when an unclear role makes them spend time understanding unclear rules, followed by an administrative burden that is irrelevant to the purpose of education. The outcomes of challenging work do not lead to professional satisfaction or recognition. When people lose a lot of money, they attempt to protect their remaining resources (Roloff et al., 2022). Consequently, defensive strategies turn into emotional withdrawals. This is the beginning of burnout: emotional exhaustion stemming from the absence of meaning and systemic justice in daily work, rather than from the abundance of teaching (Bianchi et al., 2019). Three main aspects characterise vocational education teachers' burnout: emotional burnout stemming from long-term work stress; depersonalisation, manifested as a cynical attitude toward students; and decreased personal achievement, indicated by feelings of incompetence (Bianchi et al., 2019; Titova & Nakhmedova, 2022). Depersonalisation is often considered a way to cope with pressure from school authorities, thereby avoiding teachers' psychological needs (Cuevas, 2021). Coping strategies such as regular breaks and mindfulness can help teachers manage their emotions (Bianchi et al., 2019).

Finally, fatigue is a direct determinant of teacher retention because of the psychological contract violation mechanism. When teachers realise that their efforts are not rewarded with clarity in the system or procedural justice, their emotional ties to the organisation become fragile (Hermanto, 2022). In turnover theory, Li et al. (2025) argue that dismissal stems from the accumulation of dissatisfaction rather than an impulsive reaction to a single event. When teachers breach psychological contracts, they become emotionally exhausted and less engaged, increasing the likelihood that they will leave the school (Zacher & Rudolph, 2021). Organizational justice improves teachers' civic behaviour, thereby contributing to the sustainability of vocational education institutions through affective commitment (Hermanto, 2022). According to Ha and Moon (2023), job satisfaction and organizational commitment link organizational justice and teachers' intention to leave. Therefore, feelings of fairness are essential for reducing staff turnover. In particular, distributive and interactional fairness reduce organizational cynicism, a negative attitude that strongly indicates teachers' desire to quit (Hussain & Shahzad, 2022). This phenomenon is important for Indonesian vocational schools because the turnover of productive teachers affects the quality of relationships and their compatibility with the industry. Each teacher who leaves brings certain technical competencies that are difficult to replace (Tsang et al. 2021; Zhang et al. 2023).

This study addresses the lack of understanding of the serial mediation pathways linking leadership competence, administrative burden, burnout, and teacher retention in the context of VHS in Indonesia. While passive leadership leads to ambiguity and over-role, ethical leadership lowers burnout (Vullingsh et al., 2020). Teachers' failure to meet psychological needs stems from administrative burdens that reveal procedural uncertainty. This leads to emotional stress and depersonalisation (Vullingsh et al., 2020). However, empirical research investigating the causal chain among leadership ability, administrative burden, fatigue, and retention is limited in the Indonesian vocational education environment. Although psychological empowerment has been shown to mediate the relationship between structural factors, such as school bureaucracy, and teacher burnout, this mechanism has not been tested in the context of vocational schools' specific administrative burden (Tsang et al., 2022). The role of administrative burden in causing structural stress has not been thoroughly studied; however, teacher self-efficacy serves as a link between work stress and burnout (Guti, 2023). According to Abu-

Tineh et al. (2023), the urgency of this research is underscored by the fact that organizational dynamics, work-home disruptions, and personal career desires influence decisions about teacher retention.

This study aimed to examine how leadership competence affects teacher retention in Indonesian vocational schools, with administrative burden and burnout as mediators. How does the principal's leadership competence affect teacher retention through the mediation of administrative burden and chain stress? By integrating the research results into a tested causal model based on theoretical roles (Morrissette & Kisamore, 2020), the JD-R model (Zacher & Rudolph, 2021), retention determinants (Hermanto, 2022), administrative burden, and instructional leadership (J. Li et al., 2023), this study addresses a gap in previous research, namely that leadership ability does not directly determine whether teachers stay. What truly matters is the psychological process—role confusion, inefficient administrative burdens, and drained energy—that ultimately leads to burnout. We hope that these findings can support competency-based policies for hiring vocational school principals, rather than decisions based on structural factors or personal connections. On a practical level, this study offers guidance for vocational schools to build a healthier work environment—one with better leadership, fair and transparent administrative procedures, less burnout, and more teachers choosing to stay.

## 2. Method

This study uses a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional survey design. It examines mediation serial model linking retention, administrative burden, and leadership competencies among VHS teachers. Theoretical frameworks such as turnover theory (Mobley, 1977), role theory (Kahn et al., 1964), job demands-resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), and role theory (Morrissette & Kisamore, 2020) are used to collect data regularly on the condition of the research variables. We sampled 171 vocational schoolteachers in Central Java and Yogyakarta. They must be permanent teachers, teach productive subjects, and have worked for at least two years. The variables and dimensions of the instruments are presented in Table 1, and validity-tested scale adaptations were used to develop the research instruments.

*Table 1. Variables and dimensions of research instruments*

Variable	Dimensions and codes	Number of Items
Leadership Competencies (X1)	Pedagogic Leadership (KP), Learning Management (MP), Academic Supervision (SA), Educational Entrepreneurship (WP)	12
Administrative Burden (X2)	Disproportionate Quantity (KTP), Unclear Procedures (KJP), Pedagogic Irrelevance (KRP), Distribution Injustice (KAD)	12
Burnout (M)	Emotional Fatigue (KE), Depersonalization (DP), Reduction of Personal Achievement (PPP)	9
Teacher Retention (Y)	Intention to Find Another Job (NMP), Exit Considerations (PK), Negative Evaluation of the Organization (UNO)	9

We collected data through an online survey using a five-point Likert scale and ensured that all participants provided informed consent. To analyse the results, we used SmartPLS 4 to perform partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) in two stages: first, we confirmed the model's reliability and validity by checking that all measurements met standard thresholds (e.g., AVE > 0.50 and HTMT < 0.90). Next, we evaluated the structural relationships using 5,000 bootstrap subsamples to test the path coefficients, effect sizes, and serial mediation. With a low VIF (< 5.0) and strong quality indicators (SRMR and NFI), the model provides a clear and reliable picture of the factors influencing teacher retention.

## 3. Findings

Prior to hypothesis testing, the model measurements were evaluated to ensure that all indicators had adequate validity and reliability. All indicators met the criteria for convergent validity, with the external load value for each indicator above 0.70, ranging from 0.701 to 1.000. The lowest indicator for the Leadership Competency

variable was WP2 (0.701), but the KRP2 indicator for the Administrative Load variable had a perfect value of 1,000. The DP1, DP2, and DP3 indicators showed strong bearings, ranging from 0.752 to 0.894. Using Turnover Intention, the teacher retention variable had six indicators with very consistent loadings, ranging from 0.806 to 0.858. The convergent validity and reliability of the four latent constructs in the research model are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Convergent Validity and Construct Reliability

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (ρc)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Leadership Competencies (X1)	0.877	0.911	0.672
Administrative Burden (X2)	1.000	1.000	1.000
Burnout (M)	0.914	0.933	0.700
Teacher Retention (Y)	0.892	0.921	0.699

All key reliability and validity checks looked excellent. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.877 to 1.000 (well above the 0.70 benchmark), and composite reliability scores were between 0.911 and 1.000. Each structure also explained more than half of its indicators' variance, with AVE values ranging from 0.672 to 1.000. (The Administrative Load structure shows a perfect score simply because it ended up using only one indicator in the final model.) These solid results give us confidence to move forward by testing the path relationships shown in Figure 1.

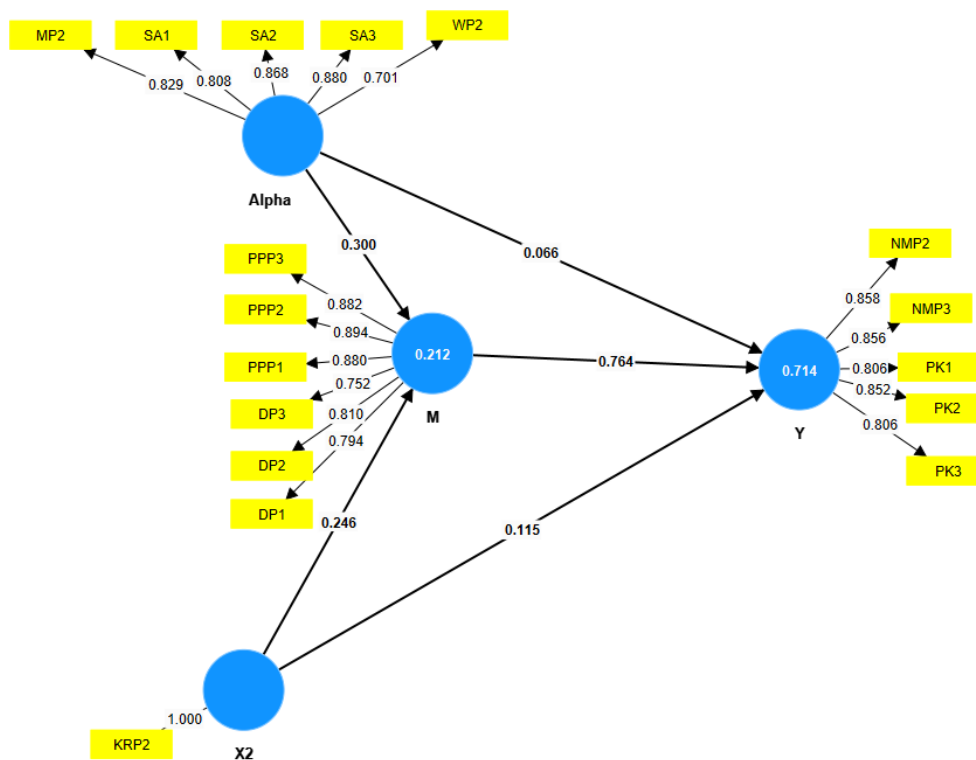


Figure 1. Path diagram

To ensure that each construct was unique and empirically distinguishable, discriminant validity was assessed using two approaches: the HTMT and Fornell-Larcker criteria. Table 3 presents the HTMT values for each construct pair in the research model.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity (HTMT Ratio)

Construct Pairs	HTMT
X1 ↔ M	0.447
X2 ↔ M	0.383
X2 ↔ X1	0.453
Y ↔ M	0.916
Y ↔ X1	0.476
Y ↔ X2	0.450

Except for the Y ↔ M pair, which shows a value of 0.916, all HTMT values were below the 0.90 threshold. Given the strong causal relationship between the two constructs in the model, a high correlation between teacher burnout and retention is expected. In addition, the Fornell–Larcker criterion approach asserts that the constructs exhibit sufficient discriminant validity.

**Table 4.** Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Construct	X1	X2	M	Y
X1	0.820			
X2	0.420	1.000		
M	0.403	0.372	0.837	
Y	0.423	0.427	0.834	0.836

We confirmed that each concept stood on its own—the square root of the AVE for every structure was larger than its correlation with others, confirming good discriminant validity. There were also no multicollinearity issues, as all VIF values remained below 5.0 (ranging from 1.00–3.97). Finally, to determine the extent to which the model explained, we examined the R<sup>2</sup> values for burnout and teacher retention, which are presented in Table 5.

*Table 5. Coefficient of Determination (R<sup>2</sup>)*

Variable Endogen	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> Adjusted
Burnout (M)	0.212	0.203
Teacher Retention (Y)	0.714	0.709

The Burnout variable had an R<sup>2</sup> of 0.212, indicating that Administrative Burden and Leadership Competence explained 21.2% of the variance in burnout. The Teacher Retention variable had an extremely high R<sup>2</sup> of 0.714, indicating that a model including Administrative Burden, Burnout, and Leadership Competence explained 71.4% of the variance in teacher retention. An altered R<sup>2</sup> value close to the original R<sup>2</sup> indicates that the model is not overfitted and has good predictive capability.

The effect size (f<sup>2</sup>) was calculated to measure the relative contribution of each exogenous variable to the variance of endogenous variables. Table 6 presents the f<sup>2</sup> values for all paths in the model.

*Table 6. Effect Size (f<sup>2</sup>)*

Influence Path	f <sup>2</sup>	Category
X1 → M	0.094	Small
X2 → M	0.063	Small
M → Y	1.609	Large

Burnout had a very large impact (1,609) on teacher retention, indicating a dominant contribution. In contrast, administrative burden and leadership competence had little to no impact on both endogenous variables.

Hypothesis testing was conducted by examining the path coefficients and their significance levels. Table 7 presents the results of the test for the direct influence of the constructs.

*Table 7. Path Coefficient and Significance of Direct Influence*

Hypothesis	Influence Path	β (Original Sample)	t-statistics
H1	X1 → M	0.300	Significant
H2	X2 → M	0.246	Significant
H3	M → Y	0.764	Significant
H4	X1 → Y	0.066	No significant
H5	X2 → Y	0.115	No significant

Leadership competence and administrative burden both contribute to burnout, with effects of 0.300 and 0.246, respectively. However, burnout itself is the real game changer: it affects teacher retention strongly (0.764). In contrast, the direct effects of leadership and administrative burden on retention are small (0.066 and 0.115, respectively). This means that burnout is the key factor connecting these factors to whether teachers stay or leave, as confirmed by the indirect effects shown in Table 8.

*Table 8. Indirect Effects*

Mediation Pathway	Indirect Effects
X1 → M → Y	0.229
X2 → M → Y	0.188

The total effect of leadership competence on teacher retention was 0.296, and the total effect of the administrative burden was 0.188. Leadership competence had an indirect effect of 0.229 on retention through burnout, indicating that burnout plays a crucial role in mediating this relationship. Finally, we verified how well the model fits the real-world data, and the results are summarised in Table 9.

*Table 9. Goodness-of-Fit Model*

Indicator	Value	Criteria
SRMR	0.061	Good Fit (<0.08)
d_ULS	0.573	-
d_G	0.299	-
NFI	0.862	Acceptable (>0.80)

An NFI value of 0.862 also indicates a reasonable level of conformity, and an SRMR value of 0.061 is below the 0.08 threshold, indicating a good fit between the model and the data. An NFI value of 0.862 also indicates a reasonable level of conformity, and an SRMR value of 0.061 is below the 0.08 threshold, indicating a good fit between the model and the data.

#### 4. Discussion

The results showed that leadership ability had a positive and significant impact on fatigue, with a path coefficient of 0.300. These results support role theory (Morrisette & Kisamore, 2020); in short, ineffective leadership creates confusion from the start. When vocational school principals do not truly understand competency standards, they make spontaneous, unfounded decisions. Teachers become unsure of their main tasks, how they will be evaluated, or what decisions they can make. Without clear guidance, they rely on guesswork, leading to prolonged stress, damaged professional reputations, and eventually, a loss of commitment to their school. These results are in line with those of (J. Li et al., 2023), who showed that instructional leadership serves as a tool that provides psychological support and clarity of direction in the workplace. In contrast, as explained by the JD-R model, a lack of competence results in unhealthy job demands (Zacher & Rudolph, 2021). These results are important because they show that improving teacher retention cannot be achieved by providing material incentives alone; important interventions are needed to strengthen the leadership ability of vocational school principals.

The analysis showed that administrative burden (with a coefficient of 0.246) had a positive and significant effect on burnout. These results support the JD-R model (Maas et al., 2022), which distinguishes between job resources and job demands. Competency certifications, reports related to the business or industry world, and often systemically unintegrated teaching factories exacerbate the administrative tasks of vocational schools (Andersson et al., 2024). As explained by resource conservation theory, resource loss occurs when unclear roles lead teachers to spend time understanding unclear rules, followed by administrative burdens that are irrelevant to educational goals (Hussain & Shahzad, 2022). Hard work does not lead to professional satisfaction or recognition; therefore, psychological energy is drained to complete useless pedagogical administrative tasks. According to Andersson et al. (2024), chronic burnout is caused by disproportionate administrative burdens, overlapping reporting requirements, and abrupt procedural changes without adequate socialisation. This result is significant because an administrative burden is considered a cause of structural stress that can be addressed through the reform of the school's administrative system. Efforts to improve the quality of vocational education will be hampered by a decline in teachers' pedagogical abilities if there is no systemic intervention on the administrative burden.

With a strong pathway coefficient of 0.764, the effect of burnout on teacher retention is the most important finding of this study. These results support the mechanism of psychological contract violation described by turnover theory (Mobley et al., 1979). When teachers realise that their efforts are not rewarded with clarity in the system or procedural justice, their emotional ties to the organisation become fragile (Hermanto, 2022). Three main aspects characterise vocational education teachers' burnout: emotional burnout stemming from long-term work stress; depersonalisation, manifested as a cynical attitude toward students; and decreased personal achievement, indicated by feelings of incompetence (Bianchi et al., 2019; Titova & Nakhmedova, 2022). Depersonalisation is often considered a way to cope with pressure from school authorities, thereby avoiding teachers' psychological needs (Cuevas, 2021). When teachers breach psychological contracts, they become emotionally exhausted and less engaged, increasing the likelihood that they will leave the company (Zacher & Rudolph, 2021). These results are particularly important because they identify the loss of enthusiasm as an important point of intervention to prevent teacher turnover. This phenomenon is important for Indonesian

vocational schools because the turnover of productive teachers affects the quality of relationships and their compatibility with the industry. Each teacher who leaves brings certain technical competencies that are difficult to replace (X. Li et al., 2025).

This study uncovered a unique chain reaction: leadership indirectly influenced teacher retention through burnout (effect = 0.229), whereas administrative burden had an indirect effect of 0.188. These findings fill a critical gap in understanding how leadership competence, administrative load, fatigue, and retention are connected in Indonesian vocational schools. In simple terms, passive leadership creates confusion and overwhelming roles, whereas ethical leadership helps reduce burnout (Vullingsh et al., 2020). Although psychological empowerment has been shown to mediate the relationship between structural factors, such as school bureaucracy, and teacher burnout, this mechanism has not been tested in the context of vocational schools' specific administrative burdens (Tsang et al., 2021). The role of administrative burden in causing structural stress has not been thoroughly studied; however, teacher self-efficacy serves as a link between work stress and teachers' burnout (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008). According to Abu-Tineh et al. (2023), this research is important because teacher retention is not just about one thing; it is shaped by workplace dynamics, work-life balance, and personal career goals. What makes this study unique is that it reveals a path that has long been overlooked: leadership does not directly influence teachers' decisions to stay or leave. Instead, it works through hidden psychological steps—unclear roles, crushing administrative burdens, and drained energy—that eventually lead to the burnout.

Practically, this study suggests that vocational schools can foster a healthier work ecosystem by focusing on three areas. First, school leadership should be chosen based on genuine skills and merit rather than personal ties. Second, streamlining administrative tasks to focus only on what truly supports teaching can significantly alleviate educators' burden. Finally, simple interventions such as psychological support and mindfulness can help teachers manage their emotions and prevent burnout (Bianchi et al., 2019). Fourth, organizational justice improves teachers' civic behaviour, thereby contributing to the sustainability of vocational education institutions through affective commitment (Hermanto 2022). According to Ha and Moon (2023), job satisfaction and organizational commitment link organizational justice and teachers' intention to leave. Therefore, feelings of fairness are essential for managing employee turnover. In particular, distributive and interactional fairness reduces organizational cynicism, a negative attitude that strongly indicates teachers' desire to quit (Hussain & Shahzad, 2022). To implement these consequences, systemic commitment is needed from the national policy level to school operations.

This study provides valuable insights; however, its scope is limited by several key constraints. The cross-sectional approach and reliance on self-reports mean that causal links and psychological data should be viewed with caution. Additionally, as the sample focuses on specific Indonesian vocational schools and omits certain contextual factors such as school culture, these findings can be viewed as a localised snapshot. To build on this foundation, future research would benefit from longitudinal designs and mixed-method approaches that capture deeper narratives over time. Exploring social support and work flexibility as potential buffers could further enrich our understanding of how-to better support and retain dedicated teachers in the future.

## **5. Conclusions**

This study shows that leadership competence indirectly affects vocational teachers' retention through the mediating mechanisms of administrative burden and stress, where ineffective leadership creates role ambiguity and a disproportionate administrative burden that depletes teachers' psychological resources, leaving them exhausted and ultimately leading them to leave the organisation. Burnout has been shown to have a greater impact than all other exogenous factors on teacher retention, confirming that retention interventions are ineffective if they rely solely on material incentives without addressing psychological and systemic problems in the work environment. In the literature on vocational education management, this long-neglected gradual causal pathway—the psychological mechanisms linking the structural factors of leadership to teacher retention decisions—represents a key research contribution. These results provide an empirical basis for fair administrative system reforms and competency-based principal appointment policies. However, this research has several limitations, including a cross-sectional design that limits definitive causal inference, the potential for self-report bias in measuring psychological constructs, and a sample limited to vocational schools in Central Java and Yogyakarta. Therefore, the results should be interpreted with caution.

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