

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 leads to unclear tasks and excessive administrative burden for vocational schoolteachers. As a result, teachers' psychological resources are depleted, threatening the organization's commitment. The purpose of this study is to examine how leadership skills affect teacher retention through repeated mediation pathways stemming from administrative burden and boredom. In this quantitative study, 171 purposively selected vocational schoolteachers were used as respondents. After the 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 such mediation mechanisms. Leadership determines retention through psychological mechanisms, ranging from role ambiguity to resource drainage. By identifying a neglected integrated causal pathway in school human resource management, this study contributes to the literature on vocational education.

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

1. Introduction

School leadership is essential to building a healthy learning environment, especially in Vocational High Schools, which have two goals: producing graduates who are technically capable and ready for entrepreneurship. However, experience in the field shows that sufficient pedagogic and management expertise does not always determine the appointment of a principal. In contrast, structural considerations or seniority are often grounds for appointment. (J. Li et al., 2023). Schools become organizations 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 the school building. Instead, they undermine 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 of such systemic collapse.

Vocational school principals who do not understand vocational competency standards tend to make policies spontaneously without a pedagogical basis. As a result, teachers face uncertainty about key tasks, evaluation standards, and decision-making authority (Morrissette & Kisamore, 2020). When SOPs are not measured or applied discriminatorily, they are flexible for those close to leaders and rigid for others. As a result, teachers are forced to rely on subjective interpretations, leading to ongoing work stress. This condition not only causes psychological discomfort but also jeopardizes professional identity, which will ultimately reduce commitment to the organization (Morrissette & 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). (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. The 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. (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018); (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 (COR) improves the understanding of psychological resource depletion (Hussain & Shahzad, 2022) by explaining how resource loss recurs. 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 hard work do not lead to professional satisfaction or recognition. When people lose a lot of money, they will try to protect their remaining resources, according to (Rolloff et al., 2022). As a result, 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 characterize vocational education teachers' burnout: emotional burnout stemming from long-term work stress; depersonalization, manifested as a cynical attitude towards students; and decreased personal achievement, indicated by feelings of incompetence (Bianchi et al., 2019; Titova & Nakhmedova, 2022). Depersonalization 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 due to the mechanism of psychological contract violations. When teachers realize that their efforts are not rewarded with clarity in the system or procedural justice, their emotional ties to the organization become fragile. (Hermanto, 2022). In the theory of turnover, (X. Li et al., 2025) argues that dismissal stems from the accumulation of dissatisfaction, rather than from 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 company. (Zacher & Rudolph, 2021). Organizational justice improves teachers' civic behavior, thereby contributing to the sustainability of vocational education institutions through affective commitment (Hermanto, 2022). According to (Ha & Moon, 2023) Job satisfaction and organizational commitment serve as a link between organizational justice and teachers' intention to leave. Therefore, the perception of fairness is essential for 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 very important for Indonesian vocational schools because the turnover of productive teachers affects the quality of relationships and their compatibility with industry. Each teacher who leaves brings certain technical competencies that are difficult to replace (Tsang et al., 2021); (Zhang et al., 2023).

The lack of understanding of serial mediation pathways linking leadership competence, administrative burden, burnout, and teacher retention in the context of SMK Indonesia is the main focus of the research. 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 depersonalization (Vullingsh et al., 2020). However, empirical research investigating the causal chain among leadership ability, administrative burden, fatigue, and retention remains very 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, but 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.

The purpose of this study is 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), administrative burden, retention determinants (Hermanto, 2022), and instructional leadership (J. Li et al., 2023), This study fills a gap that previous research has often missed: leadership ability doesn't directly determine whether teachers stay. What really matters is the psychological process—role confusion, inefficient administrative burdens, and drained energy that ultimately lead to burnout. We hope 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. This study examines a mediation serial model linking retention, administrative burden, and leadership competencies among vocational high school (SMK) teachers. Theoretical frameworks such as Turnover Theory (Mobley, 1977), Role Theory (Kahn et al., 1964), JD-R Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), and Role Theory (Morrissette & Kisamore, 2020) are used to collect data regularly on the condition of the research variables. 171 vocational schoolteachers in Central Java and Yogyakarta were purposively sampled. 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 the validity-tested scale adaptations are 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 5-point Likert scale, ensuring all participants provided informed consent. To analyze the results, we used SmartPLS 4 to perform Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) in two stages. First, we confirmed the model's reliability and validity by checking that all measurements met standard thresholds (such as AVE > 0.50 and HTMT < 0.90). Next, we evaluated the structural relationships using 5,000 bootstrap subsamples to test 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, model measurements are evaluated to ensure that all indicators have adequate validity and reliability. All indicators meet the criteria for convergent validity, with the external load value for each

indicator above 0.70 and ranging from 0.701 to 1.000. The lowest indicator on the Leadership Competency variable is WP2 (0.701), but the KRP2 indicator on the Administrative Load variable has a perfect load of 1,000. The DP1, DP2, and DP3 indicators show strong bearings ranging from 0.752 to 0.894. Using Turnover Intention, the teacher retention variable has 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 (ρ_c)	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 the 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 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 with testing the path relationships shown in Figure 1:

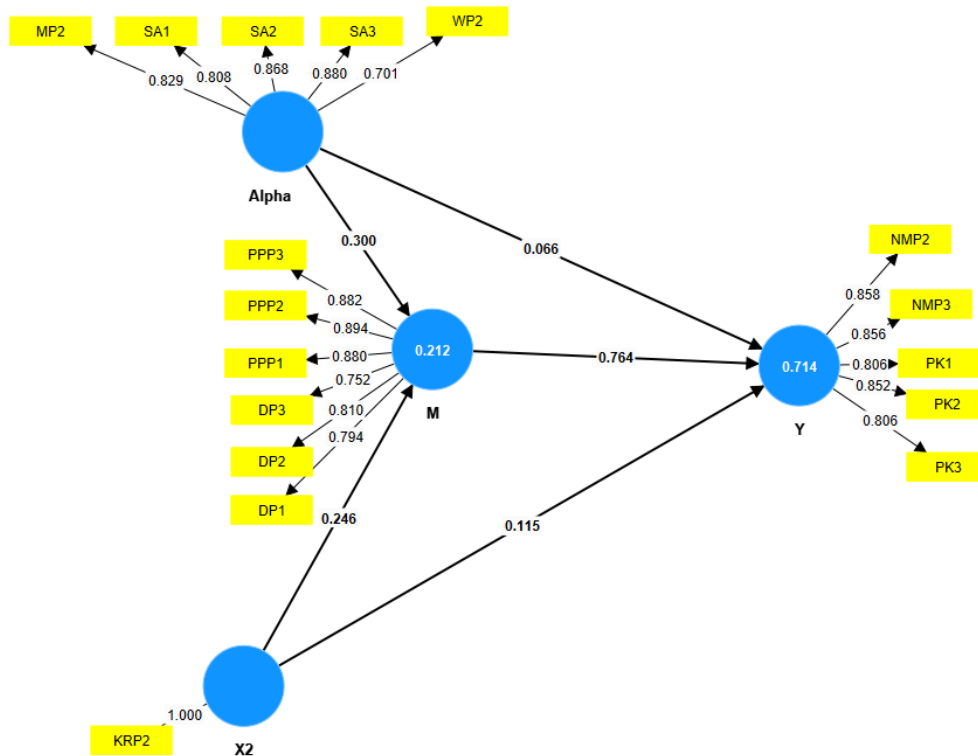


Figure 1. Path diagram

To ensure that each construct is truly unique and empirically distinguishable, discriminant validity is assessed with two approaches: the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) and the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The HTMT values for each construct pair in the research model are shown in Table 3.

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 are below the 0.90 threshold. Given the strong causal relationship between the two constructs in the model, the high correlation between Teacher Burnout and Teacher Retention is theoretically expected. In addition, the Fornell-Larcker Criterion approach asserts that constructs as a whole 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 truly stands on its own—the square root of AVE for every structure was larger than its correlation with others, confirming good discriminant validity. There were also no multicollinearity issues, since all VIF values stayed safely below 5.0 (ranging from 1.00 to 3.97). Finally, to see how much the model explains, we looked at the R^2 values for burnout and teacher retention, which are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Variabel Endogen	R^2	R^2 Adjusted
Burnout (M)	0.212	0.203
Teacher Retention (Y)	0.714	0.709

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

Effect size (f^2) is calculated to measure the relative contribution of each exogenous variable to the variance of endogenous variables. Table 6 shows the f^2 values for all paths in the model.

Table 6. Effect Size (f^2)

Influence Path	f^2	Category
X1 → M	0.094	Small
X2 → M	0.063	Small
M → Y	1.609	Large

Burnout showed a very large impact (1,609) on teacher retention, indicating a dominant contribution. Meanwhile, Administrative Burden and Leadership Competence showed little to no impact on both endogenous variables.

Hypothesis testing is carried out by examining path coefficients and their significance. Table 7 presents the results of the test of the direct influence between constructs.

Table 7. Path Coefficient and Significance of Direct Influence

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

Leadership competence and administrative burden both contribute to burnout—with effects of 0.300 and 0.246 respectively. But burnout itself is the real game changer: it affects teacher retention very strongly (0.764). In contrast, the direct effects of leadership and administrative burden on retention are quite small (0.066 and 0.115). This means burnout is the key bridge connecting those 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 \rightarrow M \rightarrow Y	0.229
X2 \rightarrow M \rightarrow Y	0.188

The total effect of leadership competence on teacher retention was 0.296, while administrative burden's total effect was 0.188. Notably, leadership competence had an indirect effect of 0.229 on retention through burnout—meaning burnout plays a crucial bridging role. Finally, we checked how well the model fit the real-world data, with the results summarized 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

4.1 The Influence of Leadership Competence on Burnout through the Mechanism of Role Ambiguity

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 (Morrissette & Kisamore, 2020). In short, ineffective leadership creates confusion from the start. When vocational school principals don't truly understand competency standards, they make spontaneous, unfounded decisions. Teachers end up unsure of their main tasks, how they'll be evaluated, or what decisions they can make. Without clear guidance, they rely on guesswork—leading to prolonged stress, damaged professional reputation, and eventually, a loss of commitment to their school. These results are in line with (J. Li et al., 2023), who show that instructional leadership serves as a tool that provides psychological support and clarity of direction in the workplace. By 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.

4.2 Administrative Burden as a Manifestation of Job Demands that Trigger Burnout

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, so 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 socialization. This result is significant because administrative burden is considered a cause of structural stress that can be addressed through 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.

4.3 Burnout as a Direct Determinant of Teacher Retention through Psychological Contract Violations

With a very 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 realize that their efforts are not rewarded with clarity in the system or procedural justice, their emotional ties to the organization become fragile (Hermanto, 2022). Three main aspects characterize vocational education teachers' burnout: emotional burnout stemming from long-term work stress; depersonalization, manifested as a cynical attitude towards students; and decreased personal achievement, indicated by feelings of incompetence (Bianchi et al., 2019; Titova & Nakhmedova, 2022). Depersonalization 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 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 very important for Indonesian vocational schools because the turnover of productive teachers affects the quality of relationships and their compatibility with industry. Each teacher who leaves brings certain technical competencies that are difficult to replace (X. Li et al., 2025).

4.4 Integrated Causal Pathways

This study uncovered a unique chain reaction: leadership indirectly influenced teacher retention through burnout (effect: 0.229), while 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. Put simply, passive leadership creates confusion and overwhelming roles, whereas ethical leadership helps reduce burnout (Vullings 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 burden (Tsang et al., 2021). The role of administrative burden in causing structural stress has not been thoroughly studied, but teacher self-efficacy serves as a link between work stress and burnout (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008). According to (Abu-Tineh et al., 2023), This research matters because teacher retention isn't just about one thing—it's shaped by workplace dynamics, work-life balance, and personal career goals. What makes this study unique is that it reveals a path we've long overlooked: leadership doesn't directly make teachers stay or leave. Instead, it works through hidden psychological steps—unclear roles, crushing administrative burdens, and drained energy—that eventually lead to burnout.

4.5 Practical Implications for Vocational School Management and Education Policy

Practical-wise, 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 skill and merit rather than personal ties. Second, streamlining administrative tasks to focus only on what truly supports teaching can significantly lift a weight off educators' shoulders. Finally, simple interventions like psychological support and mindfulness can help teachers manage their emotions and prevent burnout (Bianchi et al., 2019). Fourth, organizational justice improves teachers' civic behavior, thereby contributing to the sustainability of vocational education institutions through affective commitment (Hermanto, 2022). According to (Ha & Moon, 2023), job satisfaction and organizational commitment function as a link between organizational justice and teachers' intention to leave. Therefore, the perception of fairness is essential for staff turnover. In particular, distributive and interactional fairness reduce 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.

4.6 Research Limitations and Future Research Agenda

This study provides valuable insights, yet its scope is naturally shaped by a few key constraints. The cross-sectional approach and reliance on self-reports mean we should view causal links and psychological data with a degree of caution. Additionally, as the sample focuses on specific Indonesian vocational schools and omits certain contextual factors like school culture, these findings are best seen as a localized snapshot. To build on this foundation, future research would benefit from longitudinal designs and mixed method approaches to capture deeper stories over time. Exploring social support and work flexibility as potential buffers could further enrich our understanding of how to better support and retain our dedicated teachers.

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 organization. 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 structural factors of leadership to teacher retention decisions—represents a key research contribution. These results provide an empirical basis for fair administrative system reform 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 the Special Region of Yogyakarta, meaning the results must be interpreted with caution.

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