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The Influence of Principals' Instructional Leadership, School Culture, and Teacher Professionalism on Teacher Performance: A Quantitative Study in Junior High Schools

Sonya Diah Paramita*, Senowarsito, Harto Nuroso
Magister Manajemen Pendidikan, Universitas Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia, Semarang, 50232, Indonesia

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** Corresponding author:*

E-mail: sonyadiahparamita1975@gmail.com

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A B S T R A C T

Improving teacher performance remains a critical issue in enhancing the quality of education, particularly in strengthening school management and instructional practices. This study examined the influence of principals' instructional leadership, school culture, and teacher professionalism on the performance of junior high school teachers in Jepara District, Jepara Regency. A quantitative approach with an ex post facto design was employed. The study involved teachers from public and private junior high schools selected through proportional random sampling. Data were collected using questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics, multiple regression, and path analysis. The findings indicate that instructional leadership, school culture, teacher professionalism, and teacher performance were generally categorized as high to very high. Simultaneously, the three variables significantly influenced teacher performance. Partially, only teacher professionalism had a significant effect, while instructional leadership and school culture did not show significant direct effects. Further analysis revealed that school culture significantly influenced teacher professionalism, which in turn mediated its relationship with teacher performance. These findings suggest that teacher professionalism is the most proximal factor influencing teacher performance, while school culture functions as a contextual foundation.

1. Introduction

Teacher performance is a crucial determinant of educational quality and the success of the learning process in schools. It reflects not only teachers' ability to deliver instruction but also their competence in planning, implementing, and evaluating learning systematically to achieve educational goals. In the global context, improving teacher performance has become a central priority in educational reform, as it is closely linked to student learning outcomes and overall school effectiveness (Darling-Hammond, 2020). Contemporary perspectives further emphasize that

teacher performance is not merely an individual outcome but the result of complex interactions among competencies, motivation, and the work environment (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Philipsen et al., 2020).

Empirical evidence indicates that enhancing teacher performance is strongly associated with the effectiveness of instructional practices supported by robust school systems. Interventions such as coaching and continuous professional development have been shown to significantly improve instructional quality and teacher performance (Kraft et al., 2021). Therefore, efforts to improve teacher performance must involve not only individual capacity building but also systemic support that fosters continuous professional learning.

One of the most influential factors affecting teacher performance is principals' instructional leadership. Instructional leadership focuses on improving teaching and learning processes through curriculum management, academic supervision, and teacher professional development. Conceptually, it includes setting a clear instructional vision, managing curriculum implementation, and conducting continuous supervision. Research has consistently demonstrated that effective instructional leadership significantly contributes to improved teaching quality and student achievement (Hallinger, 2020). Furthermore, it plays a vital role in fostering teacher commitment and motivation by creating supportive school conditions (Gu et al., 2020).

Instructional leadership also influences teacher performance indirectly through mechanisms such as teacher collaboration and collective efficacy. Goddard et al. (2020) found that instructional leadership enhances teacher performance by strengthening collaborative practices and collective trust within schools. Similarly, Day et al. (2020) highlighted that the integration of instructional and transformational leadership contributes to sustainable school effectiveness. In addition, leadership oriented toward learning has been found to improve teacher collaboration and instructional effectiveness (Liu et al., 2021). In the Indonesian context, school principals are expected to act as instructional leaders who not only manage administrative tasks but also actively develop teachers' competencies (Mulyasa, 2021).

In addition to leadership, school culture plays a significant role in shaping teacher performance. School culture refers to the shared values, norms, and practices that influence the behavior and attitudes of school members. A positive school culture characterized by collaboration, trust, and a strong orientation toward quality can enhance teacher effectiveness and student learning outcomes (Hoy et al., 2021). Theoretically, organizational culture influences individual behavior through the internalization of shared values and norms (Schein, 2020). In schools, a strong culture fosters innovation, collaboration, and commitment to educational excellence.

Empirical studies have shown that a supportive and collaborative school environment can increase teacher motivation and instructional effectiveness (OECD, 2020). Moreover, a positive school culture promotes the development of

professional learning communities that contribute to improved teaching quality. In the Indonesian educational context, school culture is also closely associated with character values and discipline, which strengthen teachers' professionalism and responsibility (Wahyudi, 2020).

Another key factor influencing teacher performance is teacher professionalism. Teacher professionalism encompasses the ability to perform professional duties competently, responsibly, and continuously in accordance with professional standards. It includes pedagogical competence, subject matter mastery, and the ability to engage in ongoing professional development. Globally, teacher professionalism is closely related to reflective practice and lifelong learning. Effective professional development programs have been shown to significantly improve instructional quality (Opfer & Pedder, 2021).

Furthermore, collaborative and practice-based professional development approaches are more effective in enhancing teacher competence than traditional methods (Cordingley et al., 2020). Teacher professionalism is also closely linked to adaptability in responding to changes, particularly in the digital era, where teachers are required to integrate technology and innovative teaching methods into their practice. In Indonesia, teacher professionalism is strengthened through various policies and professional development programs, emphasizing continuous improvement and commitment to educational quality (Suyanto & Jihad, 2021).

The relationships among instructional leadership, school culture, and teacher professionalism are complex and interrelated in influencing teacher performance. Instructional leadership acts as the primary driver in creating effective learning environments, while school culture provides the contextual foundation that reinforces shared values and norms. Teacher professionalism, on the other hand, represents the internal capacity that determines the quality of instructional practices. Empirical studies have confirmed that these three variables significantly influence teacher performance. Day et al. (2020) emphasized that school leadership enhances teaching quality by strengthening teacher capacity, while Goddard et al. (2020) demonstrated that the interaction between leadership and school culture improves collective efficacy, ultimately impacting teacher performance.

Despite extensive research, several gaps remain. First, there is limited research integrating instructional leadership, school culture, and teacher professionalism into a comprehensive empirical model to explain teacher performance. Second, most previous studies have been conducted in developed countries, highlighting the need for contextual studies in local settings, particularly at the junior secondary school level. Third, inconsistencies still exist regarding the direct and indirect relationships between instructional leadership and teacher performance (Hallinger, 2020; Gu et al., 2020; Goddard et al., 2020). Similarly, the influence of school culture and teacher professionalism tends to be context-dependent and varies based on implementation quality (Hoy et al., 2021; Timperley, 2021; OECD, 2020).

Based on these gaps, this study offers several novelties. First, it develops an integrative model combining principals' instructional leadership, school culture,

and teacher professionalism to explain teacher performance simultaneously. Second, it provides contextual contributions by examining these relationships in junior secondary schools within a local context. Third, it emphasizes teacher professionalism as a strategic factor that strengthens the influence of leadership and school culture on teacher performance.

Therefore, this study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the field of educational management. Theoretically, it enriches the literature on teacher performance by proposing a comprehensive and integrative model. Practically, it provides insights for improving teacher performance through strengthening instructional leadership, fostering a positive school culture, and enhancing teacher professionalism. Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the influence of principals' instructional leadership, school culture, and teacher professionalism on teacher performance.

2. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative approach with a descriptive and survey design. The quantitative approach was chosen because this study aims to examine the relationships among variables using numerical data analyzed through inferential statistical techniques (Sugiyono, 2023). Through this approach, hypotheses can be tested objectively based on empirical data obtained from respondents. The descriptive design was used to systematically and factually describe the conditions of the variables, namely principals' instructional leadership, school culture, teacher professionalism, and teacher performance. Meanwhile, the survey method was utilized to collect data from a sample of the population through questionnaire distribution, allowing the findings to be generalized to a broader population (Adiningrat et al., 2025).

This study was conducted in public and private junior high schools located in Jepara District, Jepara Regency. The research location was selected due to its diverse characteristics in terms of school management, organizational culture, and the quality of teacher resources, making it relevant for examining the relationships among the research variables. A total of 12 junior high schools were involved in this study. The research was carried out in November 2025. The timing was determined based on the readiness of schools and respondents, as well as considerations of the teaching and learning schedule to ensure that the data collection process could be conducted optimally without disrupting instructional activities.

Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of all teachers in public and private junior high schools in Jepara District, Jepara Regency, totaling 364 teachers. This population was selected because it aligns with the research objective of examining the influence of principals' instructional leadership, school culture, and teacher professionalism on teacher performance. The sampling technique used was area

proportional random sampling, which involves determining samples proportionally based on regions or schools, followed by random selection to ensure representation from each group (Setiawan, 2024). The sample size was determined as 30% of the total population in each school, resulting in 109 teachers selected proportionally across all schools.

Research Variables

The variables in this study consisted of independent and dependent variables. The independent variables included principals' instructional leadership (X1), school culture (X2), and teacher professionalism (X3), while the dependent variable was teacher performance (Y) (Sugiyono, 2023). Principals' instructional leadership refers to the ability of school principals to effectively manage the teaching and learning process. School culture reflects the values, norms, and practices that develop within the school environment. Teacher professionalism relates to teachers' competence and commitment in carrying out their professional duties. Meanwhile, teacher performance refers to teachers' work outcomes in implementing their professional responsibilities in the learning process. The relationships among these variables were analyzed to determine both partial and simultaneous effects.

Research Instruments and Data Collection Techniques

The research instrument used in this study was a questionnaire developed based on the indicators of each research variable. The measurement scale employed was a five-point Likert scale, consisting of strongly agree, agree, somewhat disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree, each assigned a corresponding score (Sugiyono, 2023). The questionnaire was designed to measure respondents' perceptions of principals' instructional leadership, school culture, teacher professionalism, and teacher performance. In addition to the questionnaire, data were also collected through observation, interviews, and documentation to strengthen the quantitative data obtained. The use of multiple data collection techniques aimed to enhance data validity through source and method triangulation, thereby increasing the reliability of the research findings.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this study was conducted through several systematic stages to test the research hypotheses. The initial stage involved prerequisite tests, including the normality test to determine data distribution, the linearity test to ensure linear relationships among variables, and the multicollinearity test to detect correlations among independent variables (Ghozali, 2021; Sugiyono, 2023). After meeting the prerequisite assumptions, hypothesis testing was carried out using simple linear regression analysis to examine the effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable, and multiple linear regression analysis to assess their simultaneous effects. In addition, correlation analysis was performed to determine the strength of relationships among variables, and the coefficient of determination

was used to measure the contribution of independent variables to teacher performance.

3. Results and Discussion

Based on the results of the study involving 112 junior high school teachers in Jepara Regency, it was found that the variables of principals' instructional leadership, school culture, teacher professionalism, and teacher performance were generally categorized as high to very high. However, it is important to note that the dominance of very high scores across variables indicates relatively low variability in the data, which may influence the strength of inferential statistical analysis. These findings indicate that, overall, managerial and professional conditions in schools have been functioning effectively and support the achievement of optimal teacher performance.

For the variable of principals' instructional leadership, the analysis revealed very high mean scores across nearly all indicators, ranging from 4.46 to 4.59. Indicators such as instructional supervision, instructional vision, teacher professional development, and school climate were all within a range above 4.50. This suggests that school principals not only perform administrative functions but also actively act as instructional leaders. Similarly, school culture showed mean values between 4.44 and 4.62, indicating a strong internalization of values, norms, and collaborative practices within the school. Teacher professionalism and teacher performance also showed very high mean scores, ranging from 4.29–4.51 and 4.27–4.54, respectively. The detailed descriptive statistics of each research variable are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	Mean	Category
Instructional Leadership (X1)	4.46–4.59	Very High
School Culture (X2)	4.44–4.62	Very High
Teacher Professionalism (X3)	4.29–4.51	Very High
Teacher Performance (Y)	4.27–4.54	Very High

As shown in Table 1, all research variables fall into the high to very high category, indicating generally favorable conditions across the studied variables. Nevertheless, the concentration of scores in the upper scale range suggests a potential ceiling effect, which may limit the instrument's sensitivity in capturing differences among respondents. The distribution of respondents further strengthens these findings. A total of 70% of respondents perceived school culture as very high, followed by 29% in the high category and only 1% in the moderate category. Teacher professionalism was also dominant in the very high category (62%), followed by 38% in the high category. Teacher performance showed similar patterns, with 64% in the very high category and 36% in the high category. The distribution of respondents' perceptions across categories is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Distribution of Research Variables

No	Variable	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
1	Instructional Leadership (X1)	–	–	4%	27%	69%
2	School Culture (X2)	–	–	1%	29%	70%
3	Teacher Professionalism (X3)	–	–	–	38%	62%
4	Teacher Performance (Y)	–	–	–	36%	64%

Based on Table 2, the majority of respondents are concentrated in the high and very high categories for all variables. This homogeneous distribution indicates a possible response bias, where respondents tend to provide favorable evaluations, which should be considered when interpreting the findings. Prior to hypothesis testing, prerequisite tests were conducted to ensure that the regression model met classical assumptions. The results of the normality test indicated that the residuals were normally distributed, as evidenced by their alignment along the diagonal line in the normal probability plot. The linearity test showed a significant linear relationship between independent and dependent variables ($p < 0.05$), confirming that the regression model was appropriate. The multicollinearity test revealed tolerance values greater than 0.10 and VIF values less than 10 for all independent variables, indicating the absence of multicollinearity. Furthermore, the heteroscedasticity test showed that the scatterplot points were randomly distributed without a specific pattern, suggesting that heteroscedasticity was not present. These results confirm that all classical assumptions were satisfied, and the regression model was suitable for hypothesis testing.

The results of the regression analysis showed varying effects of each independent variable on teacher performance. The coefficient of determination (R^2) indicates the proportion of variance in teacher performance explained by the independent variables, providing an overall measure of model fit. First, the effect of principals' instructional leadership (X1) on teacher performance (Y) resulted in a beta coefficient of 0.066 with a significance value of 0.513 ($p > 0.05$). This result indicates that H1 is rejected, meaning that principals' instructional leadership does not have a statistically significant effect on teacher performance. Thus, the research objective related to examining the direct influence of instructional leadership on teacher performance is not supported. Second, the effect of school culture (X2) on teacher performance (Y) showed a beta value of 0.092 with a significance value of 0.477 ($p > 0.05$). This indicates that H2 is rejected, meaning that school culture does not have a significant direct effect on teacher performance. Therefore, the hypothesis proposing a direct relationship between school culture and teacher performance is not empirically supported. Third, the effect of teacher professionalism (X3) on teacher performance (Y) showed a beta coefficient of 0.759 with a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). This indicates that H3 is accepted, meaning that teacher professionalism has a positive and statistically significant effect on teacher performance. This finding directly supports the research objective that emphasizes the importance of teacher professionalism as a key determinant of performance. The detailed results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Regression Analysis Results

Variable	Beta	Sig.	Description
Instructional Leadership	0.066	0.513	Not Significant
School Culture	0.092	0.477	Not Significant
Teacher Professionalism	0.759	0.000	Significant

As shown in Table 3, only teacher professionalism has a statistically significant effect on teacher performance, while the other variables are not significant. These findings indicate that, although instructional leadership and school culture show positive coefficients, their effects are not statistically meaningful, suggesting that their roles may be indirect rather than direct in influencing teacher performance. The results of the path analysis revealed a very strong relationship between school culture and teacher professionalism, with a beta coefficient of 0.987 ($p < 0.05$**).** This indicates that H4 is accepted, confirming that school culture has a significant effect on teacher professionalism and supporting the corresponding research objective.

The indirect effect of school culture on teacher performance through teacher professionalism was calculated as $0.987 \times 0.759 = 0.749$. Meanwhile, the direct effect of school culture on teacher performance was only 0.092. Therefore, the total effect of school culture on teacher performance was 0.841. Because the indirect effect (0.749) is substantially greater than the direct effect (0.092), it can be concluded that teacher professionalism fully mediates the relationship between school culture and teacher performance. Thus, H5 is accepted, indicating that the influence of school culture operates primarily through teacher professionalism. Conversely, the indirect path from principals' instructional leadership to teacher performance through teacher professionalism was not found to be significant. This indicates that H6 is rejected, meaning that teacher professionalism does not mediate the relationship between instructional leadership and teacher performance.

Based on the overall analysis, the findings show that: (1) teacher professionalism is the most dominant variable influencing teacher performance; (2) school culture has a very strong effect on teacher professionalism; (3) school culture does not directly affect teacher performance but influences it indirectly through teacher professionalism as a mediating variable; (4) principals' instructional leadership does not have a significant direct or indirect effect on teacher performance; and (5) improving teacher performance is more effectively achieved through strengthening teacher professionalism supported by a strong school culture.

However, these conclusions should be interpreted with caution due to several limitations. The high concentration of responses in the "very high" category suggests the possibility of a ceiling effect, which may reduce the variability of the data and weaken the detection of significant relationships. In addition, the use of self-reported questionnaires may introduce social desirability bias, where respondents tend to provide favorable answers. Furthermore, the measurement instrument may have limited sensitivity in distinguishing subtle differences in respondents' perceptions. Therefore, future research is recommended to use more varied measurement scales, triangulate data sources, and include more diverse samples to improve the robustness of the findings**.**

The findings indicate that principals' instructional leadership is categorized as very high, suggesting that principals are perceived as capable of effectively performing roles such as guiding instruction, conducting academic supervision, strengthening the curriculum, and fostering teacher development. This implies that principals have functioned as instructional leaders who provide direction for teachers' professional practices in schools. However, the partial test results reveal that instructional leadership does not have a significant effect on teacher performance. This finding suggests that a high level of instructional leadership does not automatically lead to improved teacher performance when examined alongside school culture and teacher professionalism.

This non-significant finding requires deeper theoretical reflection. From the perspective of instructional leadership theory, the role of the principal is primarily indirect, focusing on influencing teaching and learning processes through supervision, goal-setting, and capacity building rather than directly altering teacher performance outcomes. In this study context, it is possible that instructional leadership has already been institutionalized as a routine administrative and supervisory practice, thereby reducing its variability and diminishing its explanatory power in the regression model. When a variable becomes a "standardized norm" across schools, its statistical influence tends to weaken because it no longer differentiates performance levels among teachers.

In this context, instructional leadership appears to function more as a supporting factor that builds an academic climate rather than as a direct predictor of teacher performance. This finding is consistent with previous studies indicating that instructional leadership tends to operate through strengthening instructional practices, academic supervision, and professional development rather than exerting a direct influence on teacher performance (Aslam et al., 2022; Werdiningsih et al., 2022; Maula & Hidayatullah, 2024; Annisa et al., 2025; Nurohman et al., 2025; Kamalia et al., 2022).

Moreover, from a contextual standpoint, junior high schools in Jepara Regency may already implement relatively similar leadership patterns due to standardized policies and administrative guidelines in the Indonesian education system. This structural uniformity potentially limits the variation of instructional leadership practices across schools, making it statistically difficult to capture its effect on teacher performance. Therefore, the absence of a significant effect should not be interpreted as the absence of influence, but rather as an indication that the role of instructional leadership operates in a more systemic and indirect manner.

Nevertheless, this result also needs to be interpreted cautiously due to the characteristics of the data, which show very high and relatively homogeneous scores across respondents. This condition indicates a potential ceiling effect, where the instrument may not be sufficiently sensitive to capture variations in perceptions of instructional leadership. As a result, the statistical model may have limited ability to detect significant relationships, even when such relationships conceptually exist. The non-significant effect of instructional leadership on teacher performance may also be explained by overlapping influences with other variables. Additionally,

there is a possibility of perceptual bias, where respondents tend to provide socially desirable responses regarding principals' leadership, leading to inflated scores. Therefore, in this study, instructional leadership is better understood as a structural and contextual condition that supports educational processes rather than as a key differentiating factor in teacher performance (Hanim et al., 2023; Pradika et al., 2025).

School culture in this study is also categorized as very high, indicating that schools have strong values, beliefs, norms, and work habits that are well internalized by school members. A strong school culture is reflected in shared philosophies, professional commitment, core values, and interaction patterns that support organizational order. Theoretically, a positive school culture should serve as a foundation for improving teacher performance, as it shapes how teachers think, behave, and carry out their professional responsibilities. However, the findings reveal that school culture does not have a significant partial effect on teacher performance.

This result can be critically examined through the lens of organizational behavior theory, which suggests that culture operates as a deep structural variable that influences attitudes, norms, and long-term behavioral patterns rather than immediate performance outputs. In this study, school culture may function as a distal variable whose effects are mediated by more proximal variables such as teacher professionalism. Therefore, when teacher professionalism is included in the regression model, the direct contribution of school culture becomes statistically insignificant because its influence has been absorbed by the mediating variable.

This suggests that a strong school culture does not necessarily translate directly into improved teacher performance when analyzed alongside variables more closely related to individual work behavior, particularly teacher professionalism (Wulandari & Nugroho, 2020; Saragih & Suhendro, 2020; Iba et al., 2021). Furthermore, the non-significant result may reflect a contextual reality in which school culture is already relatively stable and uniformly positive across schools. When most respondents perceive culture at similarly high levels, the variable loses its ability to explain differences in performance outcomes. In such conditions, culture functions more as a "baseline condition" rather than a differentiating factor. This reinforces the argument that contextual variables with low variability tend to show weaker statistical effects in quantitative models.

From a critical perspective, this non-significant result may also be influenced by the limited variability of the data, as most respondents rated school culture in the "very high" category. Such homogeneity reduces the discriminatory power of the instrument and weakens inferential analysis, making it difficult to identify the true effect of school culture on performance. These results imply that school culture functions more as a foundational factor shaping teachers' professional behavior rather than as a direct determinant of performance. A positive culture fosters discipline, commitment, work habits, and quality orientation, but its influence is first internalized by teachers in the form of professionalism. Thus, the non-significant direct effect of school culture does not imply that it is unimportant;

rather, it remains strategically significant as the context that shapes the quality of teachers' work behavior. This finding aligns with studies showing that school organizational culture primarily operates through enhancing work commitment, job satisfaction, discipline, and professional habits, which subsequently contribute to teacher performance (Kustini et al., 2025; Mustofa et al., 2024; Yenita & Andriani, 2025).

Teacher professionalism is categorized as very high and is the only variable that has a positive and significant partial effect on teacher performance. This indicates that teacher professionalism is the closest factor to actual work behavior in instructional practices. It encompasses mastery of competencies, commitment to tasks, responsibility, work motivation, and continuous professional development. Given its direct relationship with the quality of teaching practices, it is reasonable that this variable emerges as the strongest predictor of teacher performance. These findings confirm that higher levels of teacher professionalism are associated with higher levels of teacher performance in carrying out educational tasks (Mukarromah & Sartika, 2024; Sukarno et al., 2025; Darmawati et al., 2025; Rini & Lestari, 2025). However, it is important to note that the dominance of very high scores may also inflate the apparent strength of this relationship. The possibility of ceiling effects and limited response variation suggests that the magnitude of the relationship should be interpreted carefully, as the statistical significance may partly reflect measurement characteristics rather than purely substantive effects.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that principals' instructional leadership, school culture, and teacher professionalism are generally categorized as high to very high in junior high schools in Jepara District, Jepara Regency. Simultaneously, these three variables contribute to teacher performance. However, only teacher professionalism demonstrates a positive and statistically significant partial effect. This finding indicates that teacher professionalism is the most direct and decisive factor in improving teacher performance. Therefore, enhancing teacher professionalism plays a more critical role than other variables in determining the overall quality, effectiveness, and consistency of teachers' performance in carrying out their instructional duties.

Principals' instructional leadership and school culture do not have a significant direct effect on teacher performance. Nevertheless, both variables play important roles in shaping school conditions that support the improvement of learning quality. In this study, school culture is found to have a strong influence on teacher professionalism; therefore, it is more appropriately understood as a foundational factor that shapes teachers' professional behavior rather than as a direct determinant of teacher performance. The results of the path analysis further confirm that teacher professionalism mediates the relationship between school culture and teacher performance. Thus, improving teacher performance cannot rely solely on strengthening school culture or principals' instructional leadership, but must be directly focused on enhancing teacher professionalism. Therefore, efforts to

improve teacher performance in junior high schools in Jepara District, Jepara Regency should prioritize the development of professional competencies, strengthening work commitment, promoting continuous professional development, and fostering a conducive school culture alongside more operational instructional leadership.

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