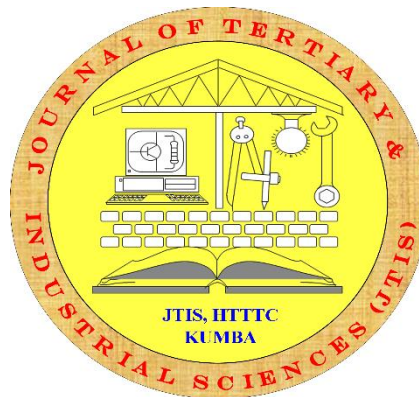


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SCIENCE OF EDUCATION

Examining the Association among Leadership Behaviour, Workers' Well-Being, and Organizational Trust in Educational Settings

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the associations of leadership behavior, workers' wellbeing, and organizational trust in a school setting. It also examines the mediating role of workers' well-being in the relationship between leadership behavior and organizational trust in educational settings. Using correlational and mediation research design, data for 282 selected secondary and high school employees was analyzed using SPSS PROCESS macro. Schools and Participants were selected using purposive sampling technique. Findings revealed that there is evidence of significant positive associations among these constructs, with a significant mediating role of workers' well-being in the link between leadership behavior and organizational trust. These findings suggest that leadership behavior and workers' well-being are critical in building high level of school organizational trust amongst the employees. It is then recommended that school leaders should adopt dynamic leadership styles that promotes positive levels of employees' wellbeing which in turn will create high level of trusts in the school systems.

Keywords: leadership behavior, workers' well-being, organizational trust.

1. Introduction

Contemporary teaching has evolved into a dynamic and complex academic sphere characterized by innovation, heightened expectations, and multifaceted challenges. Educators are now required to adapt to diverse learning environments that shape the effectiveness of instruction and overall student outcomes. Education has moved beyond the traditional role of delivering knowledge; it has become a transformative process that seeks to foster meaningful learning, motivation, and positive change for both students and academic staff. Nevertheless, significant gaps remain within the educational landscape, particularly those arising from issues of organizational trust, leadership challenges, and concerns related to the well-being of academic staff. These persistent concerns hinder the potential of educational institutions to fully achieve their transformative role. Thus, examining the current academic climate through a professional and critical lens is

imperative to generate insights that can inform strategies for improvement and sustainable educational development.

Cameroon's education system has made progress since the colonial era, notably in literacy and access to free elementary education. However, significant challenges persist, including poor quality and limited access to secondary and higher education for impoverished communities (Mackie, 2021). The prevalence of the crisis in the Southwest and Northwest regions of Cameroon has violated the right to education in the North West Region in Cameroon, that led to mounting pressure from the government, non-government organisations, and others involved in the educational sector. Without functioning schools, many children do not have access to secure learning environments that provide them not only with a space to learn. In addition (Yenika, 2024). Ashu (2018) notes that although recent years have seen growing attention toward the leadership, management, and administrative functions of school leaders in African countries such as Cameroon, research on the subject remains limited.

McCune (1989) argues that effective school restructuring requires a comprehensive understanding of organizational change to meet the shifting demands of society. Such initiatives must prioritize student performance outcomes and emphasize systemic, long-term transformation. Leech and Fulton (2008) further affirm the importance of implementing meaningful and impactful educational reforms grounded in foundational principles. Numerous scholars have emphasized the need for fundamental reforms in societal institutions, particularly in the governance and organization of schools, the roles adults assume within educational settings, and prevailing instructional practices. Moreover, this was affirmed that several scholars have further underscored the urgency of a comprehensive transformation of the entire education system (Chubb, 1988; Conley, 1991).

The association of leadership behaviour, workers' well-being, and organizational trust in an educational setting has significant implications for work in an educational setting. Charles-Leija et al. (2023) argue that while work is traditionally viewed as an exchange of time and effort for income, it holds deeper significance. Beyond economic compensation, work challenges individuals to apply their skills, fosters personal growth, and provides opportunities for achievement and social connection that contribute to overall well-being.

A positive workplace is key to the success of any organization. People's behaviours are shaped by the organization's collective beliefs and values. Applying positive psychology to the workplace showcases the characteristics and behaviours that lead to individual advantage (Harvard Division of Continuing Education, 2025).

Leadership is the driving force behind educational reforms, without which improvement efforts often fail to take root. Strong leadership provides direction, builds capacity, and aligns the efforts of teachers and staff toward achieving shared educational goals (Fullan, 2019). Jambarsang et al. (2025) posit that educational leadership is a multifaceted and dynamic process that requires diverse strategies and tools to address the evolving needs of educational systems and the varied expectations of stakeholders.

Ashu (2018) observes that educational organisations in African countries like Cameroon experience major changes in the next decade. State, faith, and private schools in Cameroon

must learn to practice distributed leadership and offer strategies and procedures that allow school leaders to work in harmony with other educational institutions, such as nursery, primary, and secondary schools, teacher training institutions, universities, government and community, and industry partners in Cameroon.

The school environment has grown increasingly complex and unpredictable, with each institution functioning within unique contexts influenced by multiple factors. These contextual elements shape the school's organizational setting and significantly impact student learning and achievement. Such factors include school climate, safety, interpersonal relationships, instructional practices, and organizational structure (Makoko & Marishane, 2024).

In certain circumstances, secondary schools are expected to provide students with a safe and secure learning environment, a responsibility that falls on principals. However, some principals struggle to recognize the relationship between school context and student learning, creating challenges that hinder PCCSS principals from effectively linking the two. This gap largely stems from the absence of context-responsive policies on pre-service training and continuous professional development for both principals and teachers in PCC secondary schools. With proper policy support, such training could strengthen principals' leadership capacities, enabling them to foster learning conditions that allow Cameroonian students to thrive, succeed, and remain relevant in an ever-changing world (Makoko & Marishane, 2024).

Education is not only a fundamental right but also an essential necessity for every child, serving as the foundation for personal growth and the development of future leaders. To safeguard this right, the active support of educated elites, community quarter-heads, and government officials across the North West Region of Cameroon is crucial. Their role in raising awareness about the value of education and the harmful consequences of child labour is indispensable (Yenika, 2024).

The main motivation behind this study stems around the poor leadership in some secondary schools in the South west regions of Cameroon which is evident by corruption practices (The Guardian Post, 2024 September 7th); reduce or lack of trust in school organizations as evident by very high exodus of secondary and high school teachers away from Cameroon (The Guardian Post, 2023 June 7), which of course could also be strongly related to poor workers wellbeing or poor leadership.

This study is significant and beneficial for the following reasons: First, it will assist school administrators, particularly at the secondary level, in identifying effective strategies to enhance the workplace by emphasizing the importance of leadership behaviour, supporting employees' well-being, and fostering educational trust. Secondly, it aims to help employees improve their overall well-being, recognizing that total health directly influences organizational productivity and performance. Thirdly, it will enable organizations to critically analyse and adopt empowering leadership and institutional practices that align with their mission and vision. By doing so, institutions can enhance organizational trust, support the well-being of their members, and ultimately advance toward improved educational outcomes. Lastly, it will serve as a valuable reference for future researchers

seeking to validate or expand upon the study's findings, ultimately contributing to the improvement of educational institutions focusing on leadership behaviours, well-being, and organizational trust.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework

This presents the set of theories, concepts, and approaches that are essential to lend substance to the study. The underpinnings of these theories establish a solid ground for discussion.

Knowledge of a phenomenon emerges when theory and research complement one another to provide a well-founded basis for understanding. Any attempt to generate knowledge without the presence of either element risks resulting in inadequacy and lack of relevance.

Leadership Behaviour Theories

The *behavioural theory of leadership* suggests that a leader's actions are more important than their traits. Leadership can be learned and developed through practice, focusing on what you do rather than who you are. According to Davis (2003), leadership involves driving change within an organization by setting new directions, addressing challenges, fostering innovation, launching initiatives, developing organizational frameworks, and enhancing overall quality. The shift from early founder to multitask manager requires emphasis on communication, restructuring of organizational reporting and responsibilities, and a call for accountability (Lewis, 1989).

Transformational Leadership Theory. Leadership that inspires and motivates followers to achieve significant change and personal development, focusing on intrinsic motivation and collective goals. Leaders push their followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their leadership capacity. Burns (1995) highlights that transformational leaders engage with their followers, which raises their motivation and morale.

Eddy and VanDerLinden (2006) observe that investing much time and energy studying leadership in academic institutions, as well as local, state, and national associations and organizations have devoted valuable resources to fund campus members to attend leadership training workshops. The Institute targeted senior administrators and had the stated objectives of instilling the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for successful leaders.

Transactional Leadership Theory. A leadership style that utilizes rewards and punishments to motivate and direct followers. Referred to as managerial leadership, emphasizes the importance of structure, organization, supervision, performance, and outcomes.

Transactional leaders monitor followers carefully to enforce rules, reward success, and punish failure. Rewards and punishments are contingent upon the performance of the followers. The leader views the relationship between managers and subordinates as an exchange, you give me something for something in return. When subordinates perform well, they receive a reward. When they perform poorly, they will be punished in some way. Rules, procedures, and standards are essential in transactional leadership (Cherry, 2022).

Servant Leadership Theory - These leaders seek to help their followers grow healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely to become servants. Its purpose is to serve others

to be what they are capable of becoming (Sarros, 2002). This theory explores whether this practice is beneficial to the workers owing to its relationship to other variables

Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX Theory) - Focuses on the unique, evolving relationships between leaders and individual followers. It emphasizes how the quality of these dyadic relationships influences job satisfaction, performance, and organizational commitment. Leaders form varying types of relationships, high-quality ones marked by trust and mutual respect (in-group), and lower-quality, transactional ones (out-group). High-quality exchanges foster motivation, support, and communication, while low-quality ones may lead to disengagement. Communication, shared experiences, and respect are key to strengthening these relationships over time. It shifted the focus from a one-size-fits-all approach to leadership to recognizing that leaders form unique relationships with each follower. Practical Implications: First, organizations can benefit from fostering high-quality leader-member exchanges, as these relationships enhance employee empowerment and engagement. Second, LMX theory also highlights the importance of being mindful of relational differences among team members. Leaders create inclusive environments where all members feel valued and supported, regardless of their relationship quality with the leader. This provides valuable insights into the importance of leader-follower relationships in the workplace, emphasizing that the quality of these exchanges can significantly influence organizational effectiveness and employee well-being. By understanding and applying LMX principles, leaders can enhance their effectiveness and foster a more positive organizational culture (Erdogan & Bauer, 2013).

According to Stayanov_(2015), leadership is primarily a process of personal influence by the leader on the actions of followers. Good leaders must have innate traits that affect the performance and behaviour of staff to achieve effective results. Leadership covers a wide range of behavioural methods, defining the relationship of the leader to the people who depend on the specific situation. Leaders are generators of ideas, provoking the followers to work hard and achieve personal and organizational effectiveness.

Worker's Well-being Concept

Well-being plays a key role in economic psychology, illustrating how psychological mechanisms impact economic factors. Well-being is vital for occupational psychologists, as it allows for the development of interventions to protect and improve workers' health (Doyle, 2023).

Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model. This model was developed to address the limitations of previous occupational stress models by incorporating a broader range of factors that influence employee well-being. It posits that every job has its specific risk factors associated with stress, which can be categorized into job demands and job resources. A model that encourages the functioning of the employees' well-being.

It is used to manage employees' involvement. The work stress model suggests that stress arises from the imbalance between the requirements of the job and the resources the employee has available to meet those requirements.

Janssen (2025) elucidates that when the job resources are scarce and job requirements are high, factors such as stress and the chance of burnout increase. If the job resources are

sufficiently available and the job requirements are high, the right factors, such as involvement and performance levels, are improved.

Perma Model of Well-Being- The PERMA model makes up WBT, where each dimension works in concert to give rise to a higher-order construct that predicts the flourishing of groups, communities, organizations, and nations (Forgeard et al., 2011). Martin Seligman designed the PERMA model to conceptualize the main factors contributing to well-being.

Research has shown significant positive associations between each of the PERMA components and physical health, vitality, job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and commitment within organizations (Kern et al., 2014). PERMA is also a better predictor of psychological distress than previous reports of distress (Forgeard et al., 2011). This means that proactively working on the components of PERMA not only increases aspects of well-being but also decreases psychological distress (Madison, 2017).

Psychological Safety - Psychological safety at work is what separates good workplace cultures from toxic ones. When employees have the confidence to be themselves, speak up, voice concerns, and ask questions, they're more connected, engaged, productive, and happier. Psychological safety is a shared belief that the person can bring his full self to work, that he/she will not be humiliated or made to feel less good about himself/herself if he/she speaks up with ideas, with questions, with concerns, and yes, even with mistakes, according to Harvard Business School Professor Edmundson.

Chachkes et al. (2007) emphasize the significant benefits of providing emotional and practical support to employees, noting that such efforts contribute to a work environment characterized by care and psychological safety, core components of an effective organizational safety net. They argue that a robust safety net should be adaptable, offer varied forms of personal support, and be reinforced by capable leadership. In academic institutions, this kind of structure enables flexibility in personnel deployment during crises, allowing the organization to respond effectively. Key features include: maintaining communication with employees' families and within the institution, having established crisis response plans, ensuring readiness through training, strong leadership at the senior level, empowering mid-level leaders, and implementing well-structured, multidimensional strategies. Together, these elements cultivate a secure, responsive environment essential for sustaining critical functions during emergencies, which not only work well when things are going well.

Organizational Trust Theories

Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's Model of Organizational Trust - Organizational trust is no longer seen as a personality trait, rather as an individual construction that varies within each individual, in different contexts, and according to different relationships. As trust becomes more relevant in the relationship between people and institutions, replacing control contracts, the main assumption is that trust will have an impact on individual and team performance. Knowledge of the organizational trust behaviour, development, and results may facilitate the connection between people and the establishment of a positive relationship (Schoorman et al., 1989).

Social Exchange Theory - Social behaviour is the result of an exchange process where individuals seek to maximize benefits and minimize costs in their relationships. This theory is a sociological and psychological framework that examines how individuals interact and make decisions based on the perceived costs and benefits of their relationships. This suggests that people engage in social exchanges with the expectation of receiving something of value in return for what they give. This can include tangible rewards or intangible rewards. Social exchange theory proposes that social behaviour is the result of an exchange process in which people weigh the potential benefits and risks of relationships. People are motivated to maximize benefits and minimize costs, and relationships form, continue, or dissolve based on the perceived worth of the exchange (Nickerson, 2023).

Leech and Fulton (2008) provide implications for the leadership of school principals as they implement shared decision making in their schools. Consequently, there are direct implications for the preparation of future school leaders; as such, principal preparation institutions must be charged with the task of developing programs that provide experiences that enhance potential leaders' skills to create learning organizations.

Organizational Support Theory (OST) - Proposes that employees form a generalized perception concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. This perception is called perceived organizational support (POS). As such, employees form this perception to meet socio-emotional needs and to assess the benefits of increased work effort. This theory holds that, in order to meet socio-emotional needs and to assess the benefits of increased work effort, employees form a general perception concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. Such perceived organizational support would increase the employees' felt obligation to help the organization reach its objectives, their affective commitment to the organization, and their expectation that improved performance would be rewarded. Behavioural outcomes of POS would include increases in in-role and extra-role performance and decreases in stress and withdrawal behaviours such as absenteeism and turnover (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011).

The findings of Onesti et al. (2024) suggest a vantage sensitivity effect and underscore the importance of cultivating positive work climates to enhance workers' ability to cope with stressors and improve their global well-being, with particular relevance for highly sensitive individuals.

Cárdenas et al. (2024) point out that using the social identity framework demonstrates that school leaders who actively define, embody, and advance a shared group identity, contribute to a more positive school climate. This, in turn, boosts staff well-being and engagement. Employees who perceived their leaders as identity-focused reported reduced stress and burnout, along with improved self-esteem, commitment, morale, and interest in professional growth over time. These findings reinforce the vital influence of leadership in cultivating supportive environments and reflect the increasing research attention on how leader qualities like fairness and supportiveness affect employee well-being and motivation.

Integrated Theoretical Frameworks

Path-Goal Theory - Path-goal theory is the belief that managers can affect their team's performance by adapting their leadership style to fit the specific needs of their teams. It identifies four primary types of leader behaviours: achievement-oriented leadership, directive path-goal clarifying leadership, supportive leadership, and participative leadership. Employee motivation depends on leadership support and a manager's ability to compensate for team challenges effectively (House, 1971).

Cárdenas et al. (2024) suggest that individual perceptions of identity leadership predict individual changes in well-being and organizational engagement through changes in school climate. It is also possible that the impact of leadership on building shared experiences among staff within the whole school may require longer time frames to be detected. Through the leadership's ability to represent, work towards, and embed themselves in the relevant group, they can directly impact the way organizational staff experience their work environment, including policies, practices, and by changing the social environment of the group, identity leaders can support staff well-being and engagement.

Ellemers et al. (2004) reveal that there is strong evidence that employees' identification with their organizations matters for a wide array of positive organizational outcomes. That is to imply that the more employees see themselves as members of their organization and incorporate this perception into their sense of self, the more likely they will prioritize their organizational goals over their self-interest.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) - A theory of motivation and personality that addresses three universal, innate, and psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and psychological relatedness. The key terms are motivation, competence, autonomy, and relatedness. This addresses issues of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, where people have innate psychological needs like competence, relatedness, and autonomy. If these universal needs are met, the theory argues that people will function and grow optimally. To actualize their inherent potential, the social environment needs to nurture these needs (Deci & Ryan, 2012). With extrinsic motivation, a person tends to do a task or activity mainly because doing so will yield some kind of reward or benefit upon completion. Intrinsic motivation, in contrast, is characterized by doing something purely because of enjoyment or fun. Deci, Lens, and Vansteenkiste (2006) find that intrinsic goal framing produced deeper engagement in learning activities, better conceptual learning, and higher persistence at learning activities. Cárdenas et al. (2024) posit that school leaders, and in particular school identity leaders, play an important role in shaping and strengthening the organizational climate of schools. By doing so, they are exercising their influence in promoting better well-being and organizational engagement. This is particularly important in schools, where there are important flow-down effects for students and, therefore, the next generation. Identifying ways to promote identity leadership is hence a necessary path forward for well-being and engagement for all.

2.2. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is anchored on the interrelationship among leadership behaviour, organizational trust, and workers' well-being in educational settings. Leadership behaviour serves as a primary driver (main independent variable) that influences how educators experience their work environment, shaping both their sense of trust in the organization and their overall well-being. Drawing on leadership behaviour theories, workers' well-being concepts, organizational trust theories, and integrated theoretical frameworks, it impacts effective associations among constructs. Trust emerges when leaders demonstrate transparency, fairness, and support. Leaders cultivate organizational trust, which, in turn, fosters a collaborative and positive institutional climate. This trust becomes the foundation upon which professional relationships and organizational commitments are built. At the same time, when workers' well-being is prioritized – through supportive leadership practices and a trustworthy organizational environment, educators are more motivated, satisfied, and effective in their roles. The leadership behaviour, organizational trust, and well-being are not isolated constructs but interconnected dimensions that collectively determine the strength, sustainability, and effectiveness of educational institutions.



Figure 1a: Research Model

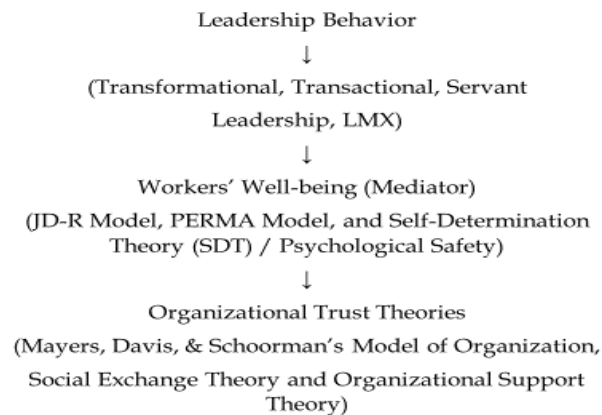


Figure 1b: Research model with theories

The supporting theories per construct are itemized as: Leadership Behaviour (i.e. Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership Theory, Servant Leadership Theory, and LMX Theory), Organizational Trust (i.e. Mayer et al Trust Model, Social Exchange Theory, OST; and lastly, the Workers' Well-being (i.e. JD-R Model, PERMA Model, and Self-Determination Theory (SDT)/Psychological Safety). As gleaned from figure 1a, the model proposes leadership behaviour as the main independent variable, organizational trust as the main dependent variable and workers wellbeing as the mediator construct. The hypothesized relationships are:

H1: Leadership behaviour is significantly related to workers' well-being

H2: Leadership behaviour is significantly associated with organizational trust.

H3: Workers' well-being is significantly associated with organizational trust.

H4: Workers' well-being mediates the relationship between leadership behaviour and organizational trust.

This study looks into examining the association among leadership behaviour, workers' well-being, and organizational trust in educational settings in order to address existing gaps in the institution.

As the main objective, the study investigates the association among leadership behaviour, workers' well-being, and organizational trust in educational settings.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the main and supporting research questions of this study were formulated as follows: Does workers wellbeing mediates the relationship between leadership behaviour and organizational trust in a school setting? Furthermore, specifically the current study poses the following research problems; 1) How is leadership behaviour related to the well-being of workers in educational settings? 2) How is leadership behaviour of school administrators associated with the level of organizational trust among employees? 3) What is the relationship between workers' well-being and organizational trust in educational institutions? And lastly, 4) Do workers' well-being mediate the relationship between leadership behaviour and organizational trust?

3. Method

This section elucidates the research design, participants, and locale of the study, data collection instruments, researcher procedure for gathering the data, and data analysis employed by the researchers from the study 'Examining the Association among Leadership Behaviour, Workers' Well-being, and Organizational Trust in Educational Settings are presented'.

Research design

The present study employed a cross-sectional survey design to investigate the influence of leadership behaviour and workers' well-being on organizational trust among school staff in selected divisions of the Southwest Region of Cameroon. Data were gathered through a structured quantitative questionnaire, which facilitated the systematic measurement of variables and the analysis of relationships among them. This design was appropriate as it enabled the collection of data at a single point in time, allowing the researchers to draw inferences regarding the associations between leadership behaviour, organizational trust, and workers' well-being within the given educational context.

All variables were assessed using a structured, numbered questionnaire, which facilitated the identification of response patterns and enabled the use of probabilistic methods to test the research hypotheses (Popper, 2005). The study included three respondent groups: high school teachers, school administrators, and other staff members such as security personnel and utility workers. Each group provided ratings on items related to leadership behaviour, organizational trust, and employee well-being. Participants also completed questions concerning their demographic backgrounds.

The questionnaires were distributed in paper format, and the researcher personally approached school administrators and teachers to explain both the purpose of the study and the contents of the instrument.

Participants

The population of this study was drawn exclusively from school personnel employed in high schools within the Southwest Region of Cameroon. This group included teachers, administrators, security staff, and facilities personnel, thereby capturing a broad representation of individuals who contributed to the functioning of educational institutions. Schools were identified through purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the study objectives, while individual participants were selected using simple random sampling to enhance representativeness and reduce bias. The study population included secondary and high schools in the Southwest Region, one of Cameroon's ten administrative regions, which is particularly significant as one of only two predominantly English-speaking areas in the country. In total, 282 school personnel, comprising both teaching and non-teaching staff from selected divisions in the Southwest Region, participated in the study.

Table 1: Profile of participants

Constructs	Sub-category	n=282	%
Gender	Male	123	43.6
	Female	159	56.4
Age	Less than 25 years	40	14.2
	26 to 35 years	104	36.9
	36~45 years	111	39.4
	46 to 55 years	27	9.6
School Location	Manyu Division	28	9.9
	Ndian division	68	24.1
	Meme Division	54	19.1
	Fako Division	120	42.6
	Others	12	4.3
Education level	High school diploma	34	12.1
	Bachelor degree/equivalent	156	55.3
	Masters` degree	82	29.1
	PhD/equivalent	10	3.5
Occupation	Staff	57	20.2
	Teacher	195	69.2
	Others	30	10.6
Financial Motivation	Yes	97	34.4
	No	185	65.6
Years in service	Less than 5 years	86	30.5
	5 to 10 years	130	46.1
	11 to 15 years	54	19.1
	Above 15 years	12	4.3
Salaries/wages per month (CFA-BEAC)	Less than 50,000	62	22.0
	50,000 to 100,000	136	48.2
	101,000 to 200,000	59	20.9
	Above 200,000	25	8.9

Source: Fieldwork 2024

The participants, as shown in Table 1, primarily consisted of 159 (56.4%) females and 123 (43.6%) males. Most participants (39.4%) were 36 to 45 years old, followed by those between 26 and 35 (36.9%), those under 25 (14.2%), and 27 participants (9.6%) between 46 and 55. Geographically, the largest group of respondents (42.6%) worked in the Fako division, with 24.1% from Ndian, 9.9% from Manyu, and 12 (4.3%) from other divisions in the Southwest region.

Regarding education, the majority (156, or 55.3%) held a Bachelor's degree, while 82 (29.1%) had Master's degrees, 34(12.1%) had high school diplomas, and 10(3.5%) had PhDs.

By occupation, teachers formed the largest group (195, or 69.2%), followed by administrative staff (20.2%), and 30(10.6%) utility workers working as drivers, cleaners, or security personnel. Of the 282 participants, only 34.4% reported receiving financial motivation from their institutions.

In terms of years of service, most participants (130 or 46.1%) were employed for 5 to 10 years. Another 86(30.5%) had less than 5 years of service, 54(19.1%) had 11 to 15 years, and only 12(4.3%) had more than 12 years.

Finally, regarding monthly salary, the majority of participants (136 or 48.2%) earned between 50,000 FRS and 100,000frs. 22% earned less than 50,000 FRS, 20.9% earned between 101,000 FRS and 200,000 FRS, and only 8.9% earned over 200,000 FRS per month.

Measures

The instrument designed to gather the data in this study consisted of two parts:

Part 1. Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents, part 2A: Leadership Behaviour, part 2B: Workers' Well-being, and part 2C: Organizational Trust

Part 1 of the instrument was intended to establish the profile of the respondents in terms of gender, age category, division (where their schools are located), educational qualification, occupation or job position, years in service, financial motivation, and salary/wages.

Part 2A was designed to evaluate the leadership behaviour of the leader of the institution where the respondents worked. The instrument used to measure task-oriented and relations-oriented leadership behaviours was the LBDQ. The responses were measured using a Likert scale with the following values: (1 - Never, 2 - Seldom, 3 - Occasionally, 4 - Often, and 5 - Always).

Leadership Behaviour Description Questionnaire (LBDQ)

The instrument used to measure leadership behaviours (task-oriented and relations-oriented), adopted from Halpin (1957), was the Leadership Behaviour Description Questionnaire (LBDQ). LBDQ focuses on employees who have observed their leader in action, and in turn, have provided them opportunity to describe their leader's behaviour. The 20-item questionnaire was divided into two dimensions, Initiating Structure and Consideration Structure, each containing 10 items for every dimension. A total leadership behaviour score is obtained by the summation of all individual item scores. Higher scores indicated positive levels of leadership behaviour, and lower scores indicated poor levels of leadership behaviour. The Cronbach alpha (α) for this measure was 0.797, which represented a very good reliability.

Organizational Trust Questionnaire (OTQ)

Organizational trust or OT served as the dependent variable. The instrument used to measure this construct is the Organizational Trust Questionnaire (OTQ), which was subdivided into parts designed to measure the subcategories of organizational trust - trust in employer, trust in co-worker, trust in direct supervisor, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction. The study utilized a 19-item questionnaire developed by Kampen (2011) to assess organizational trust. This reliable and valid instrument used a 5-point Likert scale for responses, ranging from 1 ("Never") to 5 ("Always"). Individual item scores were summed to get a total organizational trust score, which ranged from 19 (lowest trust) to 95 (highest trust). A higher total score indicated greater employee trust in the organization, while a lower score suggested less trust. The questionnaire demonstrated a very good reliability in this study, with a Cronbach's alpha (α) of 0.887.

Well-being or WB is the other mediating variable included in this study. The *Short-Swell Wellbeing Questionnaire (SSWQ)* was used to determine the state of well-being among teachers and other school personnel in the academic institution serving as respondents in this study. This study also investigated what mediating WW has in the relationship between LB and OT. For this study, the workers' well-being was measured using a 10-item questionnaire adapted from Andrew and Hugo (2017). While originally a 10-point scale was used, the researchers utilized a 5-point Likert scale for the assessment.

To calculate a total well-being score, the researchers summed the individual item responses. Scores ranged from a minimum of 10 points to a maximum of 50 points. Higher scores indicated greater worker well-being, whereas lower scores suggested reduced well-being. The questionnaire demonstrated good reliability in the study, with a Cronbach's alpha (α) of 0.635. This instrument has a strong track record of reliability in previous research.

Data analysis

Before analysing the main data, the researchers undertook several important preparatory steps. First, the researchers assessed the reliability of all measurement items, ensuring that Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.60 to 0.99, which is within the acceptable threshold. The researchers also evaluated the potential for Common Method Bias (CMB) to determine whether the responses were influenced by the measurement instruments themselves rather than by the participants' genuine perceptions

Further preliminary statistical analysis was conducted to control the participants' socio-demographic characteristics (like age, gender, education, and years of service). Additionally, before running regression analyses, negative survey items were reverse-coded, and all continuous variables were mean-centred. There was no common method bias since the common method variance was less than 50% (Podsakoff et al., 2012).

The study used SPSS PROCESS macro to conduct a mediation analysis, incorporating all primary constructs. To estimate the direct and indirect effects 5,000 bias-corrected bootstrap samples were generated. An effect was deemed statistically significant if at 95% confidence level, the interval did not include zero (Hayes, 2018).

Table 2: Reliability and common method variance

Constructs	Cronbach alpha values	Harman's Single Factor test (% of variance)
Teachers' leadership behaviour (TLB)	0.797	22.774 %
Organizational trust (OT)	0.887	
Workers' well-being (WW)	0.635	

Source: authors

Results

Table 3: Descriptive statistics and correlation

Variables	1(LB)	2(OT)	3(WW)
1. Leadership behaviour (LB)	1		
2. Organizational trust (OT)	0.691***	1	
3. Worker's well-being (WW)	0.682***	0.771***	1
Mean	3.504	3.532	3.558
Standard deviation	0.521	0.645	0.565

Variables	1(LB)	2(OT)	3(WW)
Skewness (SE)	0.035(0.145)	0.088(0.145)	0.209(0.145)
Kurtosis (SE)	2.273(0.289)	- 0.882(0.289)	-0.994(0.289)

Source: authors

As shown in Table 3, descriptive statistics revealed that leadership behaviour received an average score of 3.504 on a 5-point scale, indicating that participants generally reported that the behaviour of their leaders was to a moderate extent. Additionally, participants reported a slightly high level of trust in their organizations, with an overall average score of 3.532 out of 5. Lastly, Worker well-being was perceived to a high extent ($m=3.558$), suggesting that the participating teachers generally experienced a positive level of well-being.

Furthermore, as detailed in Table 3, bivariate correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships among all main constructs: leadership behaviour, organizational trust, and workers' well-being. There was a strong, significant positive correlation between leadership behaviour and organizational trust ($r=0.691$, $p<0.001$). This suggests that more positive attitudes from leaders lead to increased employee trust in the organization. Additionally, A significant positive correlation was also found between leadership behaviour and worker well-being ($r=0.682$, $p<0.001$). This indicates that when employees perceive more positive leadership, their well-being improves. Thus, the alternative hypothesis was accepted ($H1$: Accepted as illustrated in figure 2). Furthermore, a significant positive correlation was found between organizational trust and worker well-being ($r=0.771$, $p<0.001$). This suggests that as workers' well-being increases, so does their trust in the organization.

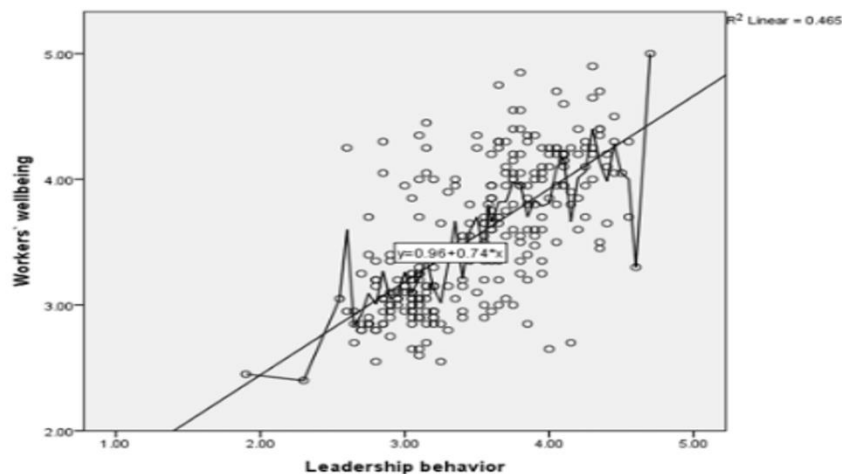


Figure 2: Correlation between leadership behaviours and workers' well-being
Mediation Analysis (H2, H3 & H4)

After accounting for demographic factors, a mediation analysis using ordinary least squares path analysis was conducted. The findings among the students indicated that leadership behaviour indirectly affected school organizational trust by influencing perceived workers well-being.

As illustrated in Figure 3 and detailed in Table 4, Leadership behaviour had a significant positive influence on workers' well-being (0.682 p<0.001). The mediation analysis further revealed that at a 99.9% confidence level, workers' wellbeing has a significant positive influence (H2-accepted) on organizational trust (0.560, p<0.001). When controlling for workers' wellbeing, leadership behaviour significantly positively influenced (H3-accepted) organizational trust (0.309, p<0.001). Similarly, overall, as shown in Table 4, 64.5% of the variation in organizational trust is explained by the combined effect of leadership behaviour and workers' well-being.

Table 4: Model coefficients

Antecedent	Outcome variable					
	M1 (Workers' wellbeing)			Y (organizational trust)		
	$\beta(B)$	SE	P	$\beta(B)$	SE	P
X (LB)	0.682(0.741)	0.047	<0.001	0.309(0.383)	0.060	<0.001
M (WW)	-	-	-	0.560(0.639)	0.056	<0.001
Constant	0.962	0.168	<0.001	- 0.084	0.165	0.614
	R ² =0.465			R ² =0.645		
	F (1, 280) =243.688, p<0.001			F (2, 279) = 253.921, P<0.001		

Source: author. LB: Leadership behaviour; WW: worker' wellbeing;



Figure 3a. Statistical Model (Mediation)



Figure 3b. Total effect Model

Figure 3: Statistical Model

Verification of the mediating effect (H4)

The bootstrap confidence interval for this indirect effect (B=0.473) was entirely above zero (0.343 to 0.611). This provides clear evidence that leadership behaviour significantly influences organizational trust through its effect on workers' well-being. In other words, workers' well-being partially mediates the relationship between leadership behaviour and organizational trust.

As gleaned from Table 5, the bootstrap confidence interval for the total effect ($B = 0.856$) based on 5,000 corrected bootstrap samples was entirely above zero (0.751 to 0.961). This indicates that the total effect of leadership behaviour and workers' well-being on organizational trust was evident to be significant. As shown in figure 3b, it is evident that the total effect increased, which also verifies the significance of the indirect effects.

Table 5: Verification of the mediating effect of workers' well-being

	Effect (B)	SE	T	P	LLCI	ULCI
Total Effect	0.856	0.054	16.002	0.000	0.751	0.961
Direct Effect	0.383	0.060	6.339	0.000	0.264	0.502
Indirect effect		Effects (B)	Boot SE	BootLLCI	BootULCI	
Ind1: LB → WW → OT		0.473	0.068	0.343	0.601	

Source: authors. LB: *Leadership behaviour*; WW: *workers' wellbeing*; OT: *Organizational trust*

4. Discussion and conclusion

This section presents a discussion of the study findings based on the order of the research problems.

Relationship between Leadership Behaviour and Workers' Well-Being

Leadership behaviour plays a vital role in supporting workers' well-being, which is essential for achieving an organization's mission and vision. Preliminary findings show the total leadership behaviour score reflected a positive perception of leadership, suggesting that participants perceived their leaders' behaviour as effective to a moderate extent. This indicates that while leadership behaviour does contribute to employee well-being, its influence may not be sufficiently strong or consistent to fully support optimal well-being outcomes. This moderate level of effectiveness suggests room for improvement in leadership practices to enhance workers' well-being and, by extension, organizational performance.

Enhancing leadership behaviour aligns with Ashu (2018) who observes that African countries like Cameroon are adopting the distributed leadership perspective, following the need for consistent implementation of central government policies to achieve specific educational goals. Distributed leadership focuses on activating leadership across all levels of an organization rather than depending solely on those in top positions (Harris, 2009). It emphasizes the involvement of many individuals in leadership activities within the school, with leadership practices intentionally shared and distributed. The approach highlights leadership as a process of interaction, extending beyond the formal roles or responsibilities traditionally linked to leadership positions. This model is grounded in the principles of capacity building, succession planning, and talent development.

Effective leadership calls on principals to actively support and empower teachers by addressing their academic needs while demonstrating integrity in serving students (Makoko & Marishane, 2024).

The Path-Goal Theory emphasizes the leader's role in adapting leadership style to the specific needs of the institution. In this area, the findings of a moderate scale can be improved by the following insight. Eddy (2006) posited that administrators are now conceiving of themselves as leaders using expanded ideals beyond just position. Southwest Cameroon educational leaders can choose to adopt the four leadership behaviours: achievement-oriented, directive, supportive, and participative to clarify goals, remove obstacles, and foster motivation. Adopting these theories offers a practical framework for administrators to explore and improve their leadership approaches, as they impact educational challenges, sustain a motivated workforce among employees, and promote both individual and institutional success in the process. Some researchers elucidate that the standard of mutuality primes the emotional state of responsibility that inspires the employees to give in return good job-related behaviours (Goie and Boster, 2005; Tarkang et al., 2020). As such, the behavioural theory of leadership and the social exchange theory mitigate the issue of rapport between employees and leaders of the academic institutions.

Given the moderate perception of leadership behaviours, administrators in the Southwest region of Cameroon are faced with the decision on which strategies to adopt to enhance their leadership behaviour. Strengthening leadership practices to ensure a more consistent and meaningful contribution to workers' well-being remains an important area for development. Eddy (2006) argues that if community colleges want to embrace the ideal of participatory leadership and leadership throughout the organization, organizational structures and the mindsets of leaders may need to change.

By fostering a supportive, inclusive, and purpose-driven leadership approach, administrators can better align their influence with organizational goals while addressing the holistic needs of their staff. These findings also inform leadership development programs and guide institutional/educational policies aimed at cultivating a resilient, motivated, and high-performing educational workforce. Leaders can do more, when they are more oriented towards innovation (Ashu, 2018).

Worker well-being, on the other hand, was perceived to a high extent suggesting that the participating teachers generally experienced a positive level of well-being. This means that the participating teachers generally experienced support and attention to well-being. This suggests that the organizational environment and leadership practices were supportive of teachers' emotional, psychological, and professional needs. A healthy and conducive work atmosphere positively influences job satisfaction, performance, and retention, highlighting the importance of leadership behaviour in sustaining such outcomes. In addition, the JD-R Model promotes employees' well-being together with the PERMA Model that can decrease psychological stress impacting productivity and efficiency once adopted in the workplace. The findings imply that workers can provide consistent and credible assessments of their leaders' behaviour. The positive scores on both dimensions—initiating structure and consideration—underscore the need for balanced leadership that is both task-oriented and people-centred. Additionally, employee well-being within an organization is critical due to its positive impact on employee performance (Budiharto & Pratiwi, 2025; Ligaya et al., 2024).

The well-being of the workers is better attended to by adopting the various models that promote better organizational outcomes.

The study accepted the *alternative hypothesis* (H1), indicating that leadership behaviour is significantly related to the workers' well-being. This means that leadership practices have a meaningful impact on how workers perceive and experience their well-being in schools in Southwest, Cameroon. The finding highlights the importance of effective leadership in fostering a positive work environment, where supportive, clear, and responsive leadership behaviours contribute to harmonious interactions, leading to improved emotional, psychological, and professional outcomes for school personnel, which are advantageous for both parties.

One manifestation of shared leadership involves conceptions of shared governance (Eddy, 2006). TarKang et al. (2020) claim that a poor relationship between leaders and their subordinates hinders employees' progress and threatens the organization's productivity and long-term success.

The school organization needs to pay close attention to leadership practices. Improving leadership behaviour through training, evaluation, and development can lead to a healthier, more motivated, and more productive workforce. Adopting the path-goal theory and self-determination theory contributes to workers' awareness, which proves beneficial to organizational trust.

Authentic leaders demonstrate self-awareness by remaining true to themselves, align their personal values with external expectations, and making choices guided by deeply held moral principles (internalized moral perspective). They also actively consider diverse viewpoints when making decisions (balanced processing) and nurture relationships grounded in honesty, openness, and authenticity (relational transparency). Such leadership qualities have been shown to significantly contribute to positive outcomes (Kleynhans et al., 2021).

In summary, leadership behaviour is significantly related to workers' well-being, demonstrating a strong positive influence. This finding underscores the critical role of effective leadership in shaping a supportive and healthy work environment. When leaders exhibit positive behaviours, they not only enhance performance but also promote psychological, emotional, and social well-being among workers. The significance of this relationship highlights that leadership is not merely about organizational outcomes, but also about fostering resilience, satisfaction, and overall quality of experiences of the workplace.

Relationship Between Leadership Behaviour of School Administrators and Organizational Trust

There was a strong, significant positive correlation between leadership behaviour and organizational trust. This suggests that more positive attitudes from leaders among the participating schools in Southwest region of Cameroon led to increased employee trust in the organization, which is of utmost importance.

The workers agreed that the way the leaders treat, support, and interact with them contributed to their perception of the educational and/or organizational trust.

The alternative hypothesis was accepted, indicating that leadership behaviour is significantly associated with organizational trust. This finding underscores the critical

importance of leaders in among the selected schools in SW region of Cameroon demonstrating positive leadership behaviours, as these directly foster organizational trust, build confidence, and nurture a culture of unwavering trust.

The findings highlight the relationship between leadership behaviour and organizational trust that impacts workers' performances. A study observed that individuals who live in 21st century spend most of their lives at work, hence employees' positive emotions were found to be associated with several positive work and personal consequences like job performance, organizational involvement, problem solving, and effectiveness. Employee happiness at the workplace, positive organizational behaviour, and social capital structure of the organizations have been among the most important issues of postmodern organizations. As such, effective leadership is often viewed as the foundation for organizational performance (Taştan et al., 2020).

Keating and Moorcroft (2006, as cited in Ashu, 2018) offer practical guidance on the key technical responsibilities of school leaders, which include risk management, facilities management, human resource oversight, in-service training, assessment, and addressing broader strategic concerns such as workforce restructuring and the provision of extended learning opportunities. Other researchers observed that the existing body of academic knowledge surrounding adaptive performance, proactivity, and agility varies across different domains (Linnenluecke, 2017; Manyena, 2006; Doeze, 2022).

Innovative leaders foster a culture of creativity and continuous improvement, motivating staff to embrace change rather than resist it. This not only strengthens organizational trust and well-being among employees but also ensures that schools remain responsive to the evolving demands of society and the global educational landscape. Various theories in organizational trust, like Mayers, Davis, and Schoorman's Model of Organization, Social Exchange Theory, and Organizational Support Theory, impact organizational trust as shown in the conceptual framework, contribute to the development of trust within organizations, which can serve as a strategic advantage.

In summary, there was a strong and significant positive correlation between leadership behaviour and organizational trust. This indicates that the more positively school leaders demonstrate their attitudes and behaviours, the greater the level of employee trust in their organizations which is a factor that is of utmost importance for organizational stability and effectiveness. The workers further emphasized that the way leaders treat, support, and interact with them directly shapes their perception of educational and/or organizational trust. This perception was reflected in the findings, which showed a slightly high level of trust in their organizations.

Relationship between Workers' Well-Being and Organizational Trust

The findings revealed that participants reported a slightly high level of trust in their organizations. This suggests that, in general, the workers feel confident in the integrity of their schools, which proves beneficial to the conduct of work. While the score does not reflect an extremely high trust, it implies a positive organizational climate where trust is present but may still need to be strengthened or improved for better outcomes. This level of trust can support better communication, collaboration, and commitment among the personnel,

but also signals that there is room for improvement to build deeper, profound, and more consistent trust throughout the organization. Thus, regular evaluation and assessment are a must.

Workers' well-being and organizational trust have shown a significant positive correlation between the two variables. This high correlation coefficient indicates a strong relationship, meaning that when employees experience higher levels of well-being, such as feeling valued, supported, and satisfied in their roles, they are also more likely to trust their organization. Trust, in turn, reinforces well-being, creating a positive feedback loop which promotes a healthy environment in the workplace. Taştan et al. (2020) elucidate that human behaviours and attitudes are a function of the interaction between the individual and his/her environment, and emotions direct these behaviours and attitudes. Thereby, happy employees become a source of desirable outcomes for organizations. It is suggested that happy employees ensure both positive individual outcomes and overall organizational health and performance.

The alternative hypothesis was accepted, confirming that workers' well-being is significantly associated with organizational trust. This finding implies that workers' well-being must be given serious attention across its various domains, including personal, behavioural, mental, physiological, and emotional aspects, as these factors collectively foster stronger connections and organizational trust. In turn, such trust enhances efficiency, productivity, and overall performance among workers.

Tarkang et al. (2020) suggest that organisations should also frequently interconnect with individuals, keeping them knowledgeable about decisions made and the motives for the same. However, when institutions are bound to revise a current policy or technique due to uncontrollable external issues, they should suggest social accounts to inform J-R decisions.

This significant relation between workers wellbeing and organizational trust further implies that well-being is not just a personal benefit, but a strategic organizational asset. When workers are supported and satisfied at their workplace, they are more likely to believe that the organization acts fairly, is keen about their needs, and is supportive in all ways. This means that when workers feel better holistically (e.g., mentally, emotionally, psychologically, and professionally), their trust in the organization increases, which in turn is advantageous to the organization. Budiharto and Pratiwi (2025) find that employees are encouraged to nurture and strengthen both intrinsic and extrinsic gratitude in their professional and personal lives, as these practices play a vital role in fostering overall well-being. The acceptance of the alternative hypothesis suggests that well-being initiatives, such as stress management programs, supportive leadership, work-life balance policies, safe space, and mental health support, can directly enhance trust in the school environment.

This relationship is highly beneficial across all levels of the organization. For workers, greater trust reduces stress and promotes a sense of security and belonging, which in turn motivates them to work efficiently and effectively. For administrators, it leads to better employee engagement, cooperation, and morale. This symbiotic relationship is advantageous for both workers and the administrators. And for the organization, high trust and well-being contribute to improved performance, lower turnover, and a more resilient

workplace culture. The data suggest that investing in employee well-being can directly strengthen organizational trust, an outcome that is strategically advantageous and promotes long-term institutional success in the workplace.

The essential role of organizational trust in enhancing quality of work and organizational performance has gained consideration from both academicians and practitioners. Within positive organizational behaviour studies. There is evidence of a positive relationship between workers wellbeing and organizational trust (e.g., trust in leadership, co-workers, organisation), job satisfaction, and well-being (Kelloway et al., 2013).

In summary, these findings revealed that participants reported a slightly high level of organizational trust, indicating confidence in the integrity of their schools, which supports effective work conduct. Moreover, workers' well-being was found to be significantly associated with organizational trust, underscoring the need to prioritize well-being across its various domains to strengthen trust and enhance overall performance in the educational institutions.

Mediating Role of Workers' Well-Being in the Relationship Between Leadership Behaviour and Organizational Trust

Workers' well-being partially mediates the relationship between leadership behaviour and organizational trust. This indicates that workers' well-being plays a key intermediary role in the relationship between leadership behaviour and organizational trust. The alternative hypothesis (H4) is accepted, where well-being significantly mediates the relationship between leadership behaviour and organizational trust. In other words, when leaders demonstrate positive behaviours, such as being supportive, fair, and connected, these behaviours enhance workers' well-being (e.g., their job satisfaction, mental health, and sense of value). In turn, this improved well-being leads the workers to develop greater trust in the organization. This implies that workers well-being is a critical mechanism through which leadership exerts its influence on trust in the organization.

Schools in the Southwest region of Cameroon can strategically explore ways to optimize leadership behaviour and organizational trust to enhance workplace effectiveness. The findings is consistent with the study of Tarkang et al. (2020) who posits that there is a positive relation between leader-member exchange and employee work engagement. Leader's positive interactive behaviour could have an expressive influence on their followers' engagement levels, propagate their innovation, and positive voice suggestions. Eddy and VanDerLinden (2006) emphasize that multidimensional leadership emerges from collective team efforts and participation across various levels, rather than being attributed to the ability of a single individual.

This implies that without promoting workers' well-being, even effective leadership behaviour may not fully translate into higher organizational trust. This underscores that improving leadership alone is not enough; organizations must also be intentional about creating conditions that nurture workers' well-being at all times and at any cost.

Ashu (2018) highlights the connection between delegating management responsibilities and the distribution of leadership and emphasize that leadership is not an abstract concept but is enacted and shaped through the daily performance of both macro- and micro-level tasks.

Mornar (2024) posits that the teaching profession is characterized by high levels of stress and numerous emotional challenges, especially in the early stages of a career. Additionally, teachers' social and emotional competencies (SEC) are related to their occupational well-being as they influence the way they cope with everyday emotional challenges at work. In this study, this issue can be mitigated if the administrator and organization attend to the well-being of the school workers in the South West region of Cameroon, specifically focusing on SEC.

Accepting the alternative hypothesis (H4) confirms that well-being is a key pathway connecting leadership behaviour to trust, making it a central component of effective organizational leadership and human resource strategies in the school environment. Leaders are encouraged to invest time in building trust and open communication with their team members in order to promote rapport in the academic institution.

In summary, workers' well-being was found to partially mediate the relationship between leadership behaviour and organizational trust. This highlights the key intermediary role of well-being in strengthening the link between positive leadership practices and organizational trust in the school setting. Accordingly, the alternative hypothesis (H4) was accepted, confirming that workers' well-being significantly mediates this relationship.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers conclude that: The leadership behaviour of school administrators significantly influences the well-being of workers, which in turn affects their overall productivity and efficiency. Effective leadership is not merely about issuing commands or directives but about fostering meaningful connections by demonstrating empathy, care, and genuine concern for the needs of their subordinates. When leaders exhibit supportive and ethical behaviours, workers experience greater psychological and emotional well-being. This positive influence enhances overall job satisfaction and morale; thus, leadership behaviour plays a crucial role in shaping the well-being of workers within the organization. Additionally, a strong positive relationship between leadership behaviour and organizational trust is marked by supportive and goal-oriented actions that significantly enhance the workers' trust. While organizational trust is slightly high, there remains potential for growth. Leadership is essential not just for direction purposes, but for cultivating a trusting and supportive workplace environment.

The study further revealed a strong and significant positive correlation between leadership behaviours and organizational trust. Positive leadership practices and attitudes foster greater employee trust, which is essential for building confidence, morale, and a supportive work environment. Organizational trust, in turn, is enhanced overall by well-being, creating a reinforcing cycle that underscores workers' well-being as a vital organizational asset. Leadership behaviours not only shape the development of organizational trust but also play a crucial role in sustaining employee well-being and, ultimately, institutional effectiveness. Additionally, Leadership behaviours influence organizational trust primarily by enhancing employees' psychological, emotional, and professional well-being. When leaders demonstrate fairness, support, and inclusiveness, they elevate workers' well-being, which in

turn fosters stronger trust in the organization. This mediation highlights that leadership alone cannot directly build trust without addressing workers' well-being; therefore, well-being is not just an outcome but a vital pathway through which leadership cultivates a trustworthy organizational environment.

Overall, the study demonstrates that leadership behaviour plays a pivotal role in shaping both workers' well-being and organizational trust in educational settings. The strong positive correlations indicate that supportive and effective leadership directly enhances employee well-being and fosters greater organizational trust. Furthermore, the finding that workers' well-being partially mediates the relationship between leadership behaviour and organizational trust highlights its critical function as both an outcome of leadership and a pathway through which trust is strengthened. These results underscore that cultivating positive leadership behaviours and prioritizing the well-being of staff are essential strategies for building and sustaining organizational trust, thereby promoting a healthier, more productive, and more resilient educational environment.

Implications

Positive leadership behaviours with high levels of consideration and initiating structures is critical for secondary schools in the South West region of Cameroon as these leadership practices showed evidence to build employees trust in schools. The wellbeing of secondary schools' employees is a critical factor to reckon with in a school setting. Work-life balance if not controlled can be detrimental to mental health of school employees. Therefore, based on the evidences provided in the current study, it is imperative for supervisors of the school system to adopt strategies that promote positive leadership behaviours and high levels of employees' wellbeing in secondary and high schools in the South West region of Cameroon.

Recommendation

Based on the conclusions of the study, the researchers strongly recommend the following:

1. Schools in Southwest region of Cameroon, should adopt a dual-focus strategy that prioritizes both leadership development and workers' well-being initiatives. Leadership training programs should integrate emotional intelligence and well-being-focused practices. At the same time, organizations should implement policies and support systems that address workers' mental health, job satisfaction, and work-life balance. Regular assessment tools, such as the LBDQ and organizational trust surveys, should be used to monitor progress periodically. By embedding well-being as a core component of leadership and organizational culture, educational institutions can strengthen trust, enhance performance, and build a more resilient and engaged workforce.
2. To strengthen organizational trust, school administrators should prioritize developing and modelling effective leadership behaviours that align with the principles of leadership theories that are appropriate and can be feasibly adopted by the school. Leadership development programs should focus on building emotional intelligence, communication skills, and supportive management styles. In addition, schools should cultivate a culture that prioritizes workers' well-being and provide opportunities for meaningful interactions between leaders and employees, as well-being significantly mediates the relationship between leadership and organizational trust.

3. It is recommended that school administrators implement comprehensive well-being initiatives as a strategic approach to strengthening organizational trust. These should include mental health support, stress management programs, work-life balance policies, and the establishment of safe and inclusive spaces where workers feel heard and supported. Additionally, leadership development should focus on fostering empathetic, responsive, and transparent practices. Regular assessments of workers' well-being and trust levels through validated instruments should inform continuous improvement efforts. By investing in a culture that prioritizes well-being, schools as organizations can expect to see increased trust, enhanced job satisfaction, better performance, and a more resilient workforce, positioning themselves for long-term success in a complex and evolving educational landscape.

4. Given the central role of workers' well-being in fostering organizational trust, it is recommended that school administrators implement integrated leadership and well-being strategies. Professional development programs must promote a well-being-oriented mindset among leaders, emphasizing empathy, recognition, work-life harmony, and psychological safety. Simultaneously, schools should institutionalize workers' well-being frameworks that include mental health services, workload management, stress reduction programs, and channels for open communication. Evaluating leadership effectiveness must also include assessments of its impact on workers' well-being. These interventions will ensure that leadership behaviour translates effectively into organizational trust. Ultimately, placing well-being at the heart of leadership and organizational culture fosters sustainable trust, resilience, and enhanced institutional performance.

Suggestions for further studies

Future researches in this domain should involve more schools to increase generalizability. Involving schools beyond South West region is a good area to explore.

Additionally, further research in this domain should adopt longitudinal research design to enable investigations about pattern of change.

Declaration of conflicting interests

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