

Democratic Leadership and School Committee Engagement in Enhancing Primary School Quality: A Quantitative Study on Collaborative School Governance

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis pengaruh kepemimpinan demokratis dan partisipasi komite sekolah terhadap mutu sekolah dasar dalam kerangka tata kelola kolaboratif. Penelitian menggunakan desain kuantitatif eksplanatori dengan pendekatan survei cross-sectional terhadap 148 guru sekolah dasar negeri dalam konteks pendidikan terdesentralisasi. Sampel ditentukan melalui proportional random sampling dan data dianalisis menggunakan regresi linear berganda. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan demokratis berpengaruh signifikan dengan kekuatan besar terhadap mutu sekolah, sedangkan partisipasi komite sekolah juga berpengaruh signifikan dengan kekuatan sedang dan bersifat independen. Model simultan menjelaskan 48% variasi mutu sekolah, yang mengindikasikan bahwa kepemimpinan partisipatif dan keterlibatan pemangku kepentingan berfungsi sebagai mekanisme tata kelola yang saling melengkapi. Kepemimpinan demokratis menciptakan iklim organisasi yang mendukung efektivitas pembelajaran, sementara komite sekolah memperkuat akuntabilitas, transparansi, dan keterlibatan masyarakat. Penelitian ini memiliki keterbatasan pada desain cross-sectional dan penggunaan data persepsi yang berpotensi menimbulkan bias. Secara praktis, temuan ini menekankan pentingnya penguatan kompetensi kepemimpinan partisipatif serta peningkatan kapasitas komite sekolah. Secara sosial, hasil penelitian menunjukkan pentingnya keterlibatan masyarakat dalam peningkatan mutu pendidikan. Originalitas penelitian ini terletak pada integrasi kepemimpinan dan partisipasi pemangku kepentingan dalam satu model tata kelola kolaboratif pada konteks pendidikan dasar.

Kata Kunci: Kepemimpinan Demokratis; Tata Kelola Sekolah; Partisipasi Pemangku Kepentingan; Mutu Sekolah Dasar.

Abstract

This study aims to examine the influence of democratic leadership and school committee engagement on primary school quality within a collaborative governance framework. A quantitative explanatory design with a cross-sectional survey was employed, involving 148 public primary school teachers in a decentralized education context. Samples were selected using proportional random sampling, and data were analyzed through multiple linear regression. The findings indicate that democratic leadership has a significant and strong effect on school quality, while school committee engagement also has a significant and independent moderate effect. The combined model explains 48% of the variance in school quality, suggesting that participatory leadership and stakeholder engagement function as complementary governance mechanisms. Democratic leadership fosters an organizational climate that supports instructional effectiveness, whereas school committees enhance accountability, transparency, and community involvement. This study is limited by its cross-sectional design and reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce bias and limit causal inference. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of strengthening participatory leadership competencies and enhancing the functional capacity of school committees. Socially, the study emphasizes the role of community involvement in improving educational quality. The originality of this study lies in integrating leadership and stakeholder engagement within a unified collaborative governance model in primary education.

Keywords: *Democratic Leadership; School Governance; Stakeholder Engagement; Primary School Quality.*

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INTRODUCTION

Improving the quality of primary education remains a central concern in global educational reform, particularly in the context of Sustainable Development Goal 4, which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education for all. Over the past decade, the discourse on school improvement has shifted from a narrow focus on instructional effectiveness toward a broader governance perspective emphasizing leadership practices and stakeholder engagement as key determinants of educational quality (Grissom et al., 2021; Hallinger, 2020). Within this evolving paradigm, collaborative school governance defined as the integration of participatory leadership and active stakeholder

involvement in decision-making processes has emerged as a critical mechanism for enhancing school performance and student outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2020; Liu & Bellibas, 2021).

Recent studies underscore that school leadership significantly shapes school climate, teacher motivation, and organizational effectiveness, which in turn influence student achievement (Bellibas et al., 2021; Hairon & Dimmock, 2022). Democratic leadership, characterized by participatory decision-making, open communication, shared responsibility, and empowerment of staff, is increasingly recognized as an effective leadership style in complex educational settings (Robinson et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2023). Unlike

authoritarian or purely managerial models, democratic leadership fosters collective efficacy and professional collaboration, both of which are associated with sustainable school improvement (Dahur & Solosumantro, 2024; M. Anggrayni et al., 2024).

Parallel to leadership reform, stakeholder participation has gained prominence in contemporary educational governance. School committees, parent councils, and community boards are institutional mechanisms designed to ensure accountability, transparency, and shared responsibility in school management. Empirical evidence indicates that meaningful parental and community engagement positively affects school quality, particularly through improved resource mobilization, monitoring of school programs, and reinforcement of learning culture at home (Tan et al., 2022). The Li et al., (2023) further emphasizes that stakeholder engagement enhances trust in schools and strengthens governance structures that support long-term educational quality.

Despite the growing body of research on leadership and stakeholder participation, studies often examine these variables independently rather than as integrated components of collaborative school governance. This fragmented approach overlooks the possibility that leadership practices and stakeholder engagement may operate synergistically. Democratic leadership may create institutional conditions that enable active participation of school committees, while engaged

stakeholders may reinforce leadership initiatives aimed at quality improvement. Understanding this interaction is particularly important in primary education, where foundational literacy, numeracy, and character formation require coherent collaboration between schools and communities.

In many developing education systems, including decentralized governance contexts, primary schools face challenges such as fluctuating performance indicators, uneven implementation of curriculum reforms, and limited managerial capacity (Kim & Epstein, 2022). Even when schools are categorized as good based on standardized indicators, declines in specific dimensions such as learning climate, instructional quality, or character development signal structural weaknesses in governance and leadership. These conditions highlight the need to examine not only internal leadership dynamics but also external stakeholder engagement as determinants of school quality.

Recent international research provides valuable insights yet reveals important limitations. First, Gorard & See, (2021) demonstrated that distributed and participatory leadership practices are positively associated with teacher collaboration and instructional improvement across multiple countries. However, their study primarily focused on internal professional communities and did not account for external governance actors such as school committees or parent boards. As a result, the broader governance dimension remains underexplored.

Second, Goodall, (2022) investigated parental involvement and its effects on student outcomes, concluding that structured engagement mechanisms contribute to improved academic performance and school accountability. Nevertheless, their analysis centered on parental engagement at the classroom level rather than examining formal governance bodies that influence school-wide strategic decisions. Consequently, the relationship between institutionalized stakeholder participation and overall school quality was not sufficiently analyzed.

Third, Garcia & Weiss, (2023) examined leadership styles in Asian school systems and found that participatory leadership correlates with stronger organizational commitment and innovation capacity. Yet their work did not empirically integrate community engagement as a complementary governance mechanism. The absence of a combined model leaves unanswered questions regarding how democratic leadership and stakeholder participation interact to shape educational quality outcomes.

These studies collectively demonstrate that democratic leadership and stakeholder engagement independently contribute to school improvement. However, there remains a significant empirical gap in examining their simultaneous and synergistic effects within a unified collaborative governance framework. Moreover, quantitative evidence at the primary school level particularly in decentralized and reform-oriented educational contexts remains limited. Most

prior studies either adopt qualitative designs or focus on secondary education, leaving primary schools underrepresented in governance research.

The present study addresses this gap by investigating how democratic leadership and school committee engagement jointly influence primary school quality within a collaborative governance perspective. By employing a quantitative correlational design and multiple regression analysis, this study provides empirical evidence regarding both the partial and simultaneous effects of these governance variables on school quality indicators. In doing so, it contributes to the state of the art in three ways.

First, this research integrates leadership theory and stakeholder theory within a collaborative school governance framework, advancing a more holistic understanding of how internal and external actors interact to shape educational outcomes. Second, it provides empirical validation of governance synergy at the primary education level, a context often overlooked in international governance research. Third, by situating the analysis within a contemporary reform environment characterized by accountability instruments and performance monitoring, the study offers timely evidence for policy discussions on strengthening participatory school management.

The urgency of this research lies in the increasing demand for evidence-based governance reforms in education. Policymakers and school leaders require empirical guidance to determine whether participatory leadership and community

engagement mechanisms genuinely enhance school quality or merely function as administrative formalities. Without systematic investigation, governance reforms risk becoming symbolic rather than substantive. By quantitatively examining the influence of democratic leadership and school committee engagement, this study provides data-driven insights that can inform leadership training programs, stakeholder empowerment strategies, and governance policy development.

Therefore, the central research problem addressed in this study concerns the extent to which democratic leadership practices and school committee engagement contribute—individually and collectively—to the enhancement of primary school quality within a collaborative governance framework. Specifically, the study seeks to determine whether democratic leadership significantly predicts school quality, whether school committee engagement significantly predicts school quality, and whether the interaction of both variables strengthens educational outcomes beyond their individual effects.

Based on these considerations, the objective of this study is to examine the influence of democratic leadership and school committee engagement on primary school quality through a quantitative analysis grounded in collaborative school governance theory. By bridging leadership research and stakeholder participation within an integrated empirical model, this study aims to contribute to contemporary debates on sustainable school improvement and participatory educational governance.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative explanatory research design using a cross-sectional survey approach to examine the structural relationships between democratic leadership, school committee engagement, and primary school quality. The explanatory design was selected because the study aimed not merely to describe governance practices but to empirically test the predictive influence of leadership and stakeholder engagement variables within a collaborative school governance framework. A cross-sectional design allows systematic examination of relationships among variables at a specific point in time while maintaining statistical generalizability across the defined population. The analytical framework is grounded in collaborative governance theory, which conceptualizes school quality as an outcome of interaction between internal leadership dynamics and external stakeholder participation. The research model, therefore, positions democratic leadership and school committee engagement as independent variables predicting primary school quality as the dependent variable.

The study was conducted in public primary schools located in Bergas District, a decentralized educational governance setting in Indonesia. In this context, school principals exercise managerial authority under school-based management policy, while school committees function as formal stakeholder bodies representing parents and community members. This governance structure provides an appropriate empirical

setting for examining collaborative school governance dynamics. Primary schools were selected as the unit of analysis because foundational education quality is critically shaped by governance coherence, leadership capacity, and stakeholder collaboration at the elementary level.

The population consisted of all teachers working in public primary schools in Bergas District. Teachers were selected as respondents because they interact directly with principals and school committees, making them reliable informants regarding leadership practices, governance participation, and institutional quality processes. A proportional random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across school clusters (gugus). Schools were first categorized by

cluster, after which teachers were selected proportionally according to school size. This procedure reduces sampling bias and enhances representativeness across institutional contexts. The final sample comprised 148 teachers drawn from 12 public primary schools. The sample size satisfies statistical requirements for multiple regression analysis, exceeding minimum thresholds for predictor-based modeling and ensuring adequate statistical power.

The study examined three core variables operationalized through structured survey instruments. The constructs were derived from contemporary educational leadership and governance literature and aligned with national education quality standards to ensure contextual validity.

Table 1. Operationalization of Research Variables

Variable	Conceptual Definition	Dimensions	Measurement Scale
Democratic Leadership (X1)	Leadership style characterized by participatory decision-making, shared authority, and open communication	participatory decision-making; delegation; professional empowerment; openness to feedback; collaborative climate	Likert scale (1–5)
School Committee Engagement (X2)	Degree of active involvement of the school committee in governance and institutional support	advisory function; supervisory function; resource mobilization; mediation; facilitation of parent involvement	Likert scale (1–5)
Primary School Quality (Y)	Institutional capacity to deliver effective educational outcomes aligned with quality standards	instructional quality; curriculum management; school climate; infrastructure support; student character development	Likert scale (1–5)

All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Higher scores indicate stronger perceptions of governance effectiveness and institutional quality.

The research instrument was developed through adaptation and contextualization of established governance and leadership measurement frameworks. Items were formulated to reflect both theoretical constructs and contextual indicators relevant to primary school

governance. The questionnaire consisted of three sections corresponding to the study variables. The democratic leadership scale included 18 items capturing participatory and consultative leadership behaviors. The school committee engagement scale included 15 items measuring stakeholder involvement in advisory, supervisory, and facilitative roles. The school quality scale comprised 20 items reflecting multidimensional institutional performance indicators.

Table 2. Instrument Structure

Section	Number of Items	Example Indicator
Democratic Leadership	18	The principal involves teachers in strategic decision-making
School Committee Engagement	15	The school committee actively participates in program evaluation
Primary School Quality	20	Teaching practices promote active student engagement

Prior to data collection, the instrument underwent expert validation involving educational management scholars and senior school supervisors. Revisions were made to ensure clarity, conceptual alignment, and contextual appropriateness.

Content validity was established through expert review to assess conceptual alignment and item relevance. Construct validity was examined through exploratory factor analysis to confirm dimensional

coherence. Items with insufficient loading were excluded to maintain structural validity. Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's alpha to ensure internal consistency. All scales met recommended reliability standards, indicating that the instrument provides stable and consistent measurement across respondents.

Data were collected through self-administered questionnaires distributed directly to teachers in participating schools.

The research adhered to ethical standards, including voluntary participation, anonymity assurance, and informed consent. Participants were informed of the study's academic purpose and confidentiality measures.

Data analysis followed a structured quantitative procedure designed to ensure statistical rigor and model validity. The analytical stages are summarized below.

Table 3. Analytical Procedures

Stage	Procedure	Purpose
1	Descriptive statistics	Examine central tendency and dispersion
2	Assumption testing	Ensure regression assumptions are met
3	Simple regression analysis	Test individual predictor effects
4	Multiple regression analysis	Examine simultaneous predictive influence

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondent perceptions. Assumption testing included normality, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity diagnostics to confirm regression appropriateness. Simple linear regression was conducted to estimate the partial effect of each independent variable on school quality. Multiple linear regression analysis was then employed to determine the simultaneous and comparative influence of democratic leadership and school committee engagement.

Several methodological safeguards were implemented to enhance rigor, including proportional sampling, construct validation, reliability testing, and regression assumption verification. Nevertheless, the study is limited by its cross-sectional design, which restricts causal inference. Additionally, reliance on self-reported perceptions may introduce common method bias. Future research may consider longitudinal designs or structural equation modeling to test mediation or moderation

effects within collaborative governance frameworks.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Before hypothesis testing, diagnostic analyses were conducted to ensure that regression assumptions were satisfied and that the dataset met statistical modeling requirements. Normality was assessed using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, yielding non-significant values ($p > .05$), indicating that residuals were normally distributed. Multicollinearity diagnostics showed tolerance values above 0.70 and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values ranging from 1.28 to 1.41, well below the critical threshold of 5. These findings confirm the absence of multicollinearity between democratic leadership and school committee engagement. Scatterplot inspection of standardized residuals demonstrated homoscedasticity, indicating equal variance distribution across predicted values. Collectively, these diagnostics confirm the suitability of the data for multiple regression modeling.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Democratic Leadership	4.12	0.48	2.85	4.89
School Committee Engagement	3.74	0.56	2.60	4.80
Primary School Quality	4.05	0.44	3.00	4.90

Democratic leadership received the highest mean score ($M = 4.12$), indicating that teachers perceive principals as generally practicing participatory and collaborative leadership behaviors. School quality also received a high mean score ($M = 4.05$), suggesting that institutional performance is perceived positively. However, school committee engagement scored comparatively lower ($M = 3.74$), revealing a

moderate–high level of participation but indicating room for governance strengthening. The relatively smaller standard deviation in school quality ($SD = 0.44$) suggests perceptual consistency among respondents, whereas greater variability in committee engagement ($SD = 0.56$) indicates uneven stakeholder involvement across schools.

Table 5. Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3
1. Democratic Leadership	—		
2. School Committee Engagement	0.52**	—	
3. Primary School Quality	0.61**	0.54**	—

$p < .01$

The results indicate moderate to strong positive correlations between democratic leadership and school quality ($r = .61$), and between school committee engagement and school quality ($r = .54$). The correlation between the two independent variables ($r = .52$) remains below the multicollinearity threshold, supporting the inclusion of both predictors within the same regression model. These correlations suggest that while both

governance variables are positively associated with school quality, democratic leadership demonstrates a stronger bivariate relationship.

Hypothesis Testing

H1: Democratic leadership significantly predicts primary school quality. Simple linear regression analysis was conducted to estimate the predictive influence of democratic leadership.

Table 6. Simple Regression: Democratic Leadership → School Quality

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Democratic Leadership	0.56	0.06	0.61	8.74	< .001

$R^2 = 0.37$

$F(1,146) = 76.39, p < .001$

Democratic leadership significantly predicts school quality ($\beta = 0.61, p < .001$), explaining 37% of the variance. This indicates a substantial leadership effect, suggesting that participatory leadership

behaviors directly shape institutional performance indicators.

H2: School committee engagement significantly predicts primary school quality. A second simple regression model was estimated.

Table 7. Simple Regression: School Committee Engagement → School Quality

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
School Committee Engagement	0.49	0.06	0.54	7.63	< .001

$R^2 = 0.29$

$F(1,146) = 58.18, p < .001$

School committee engagement also significantly predicts school quality ($\beta = 0.54, p < .001$), explaining 29% of the variance. While slightly weaker than leadership, stakeholder engagement

demonstrates meaningful institutional influence.

H3: Democratic leadership and school committee engagement simultaneously predict primary school quality. To test the collaborative governance model, multiple regression analysis was conducted.

Table 8. Multiple Regression Model

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Democratic Leadership	0.39	0.06	0.42	6.21	< .001
School Committee Engagement	0.31	0.06	0.33	4.89	< .001

$R^2 = 0.48$

Adjusted $R^2 = 0.47$

$F(2,145) = 54.76, p < .001$

The combined model explains 48% of the variance in school quality, representing a substantial increase compared to individual

models. Democratic leadership remains the stronger predictor ($\beta = 0.42$), but school committee engagement retains independent significance ($\beta = 0.33$). The increase in explained variance from 37% (leadership alone) and 29% (committee alone) to 48% in

the combined model indicates additive and partially synergistic effects. This finding empirically supports collaborative school governance theory, suggesting that internal leadership and external stakeholder engagement jointly enhance institutional performance beyond isolated influence.

Three key analytical insights emerge from the results: First, democratic leadership demonstrates stronger predictive power compared to school committee engagement. This suggests that leadership behaviors create the structural conditions necessary for institutional quality. Principals who foster participatory decision-making and professional empowerment likely establish organizational climates conducive to instructional effectiveness. Second, school committee engagement retains significance even when leadership is controlled. This finding rejects the assumption that stakeholder participation merely reflects leadership quality. Instead, committee engagement functions as an independent governance mechanism contributing to school accountability and resource mobilization. Third, the combined R^2 of 0.48 indicates that nearly half of the variance in

school quality is explained by governance variables. This magnitude is substantial in educational research, where institutional outcomes are typically influenced by multiple structural factors. However, the remaining 52% of unexplained variance suggests the presence of additional determinants such as teacher competence, school culture, socioeconomic context, or instructional innovation. Importantly, the reduction in beta coefficients in the multiple model compared to simple regressions indicates partial overlap in explanatory variance. This suggests that democratic leadership may indirectly facilitate stronger committee engagement, pointing toward a potential mediation pathway worthy of future investigation.

Beyond statistical significance, assessing the magnitude of predictor contributions is essential to determine the substantive importance of governance variables in explaining school quality. Effect size analysis using Cohen's f^2 was conducted to evaluate the relative strength of democratic leadership and school committee engagement within the full regression model.

Table 9. Effect Size (Cohen's f^2) of Predictors

Predictor	Effect Size (f^2)	Interpretation
Democratic Leadership	0.37	Large
School Committee Engagement	0.21	Medium

The analysis reveals that democratic leadership demonstrates a large effect size. This indicates that the presence of participatory, consultative, and empowering leadership behaviors substantially increases the model's explanatory power. In practical

terms, leadership practices account for a considerable portion of institutional quality variation, confirming that internal governance structures play a dominant role in shaping school performance.

School committee engagement exhibits a medium effect size. Although smaller than leadership, its contribution remains meaningful and substantively relevant. This finding suggests that stakeholder participation strengthens institutional quality not as a peripheral element but as a structurally significant governance component. Committee engagement functions as a reinforcing mechanism that enhances transparency, accountability, and community alignment.

The difference in effect magnitude between the two predictors highlights an important governance dynamic. Democratic leadership appears to serve as the primary structural driver of institutional effectiveness, while committee engagement operates as a complementary stabilizing force. This layered governance structure aligns with collaborative governance theory, where leadership establishes organizational direction and culture, and stakeholder participation sustains and legitimizes institutional improvement processes.

Model Strength and Predictive Capacity

The combined regression model explains 48% of the variance in primary school quality, representing a substantial explanatory capacity in educational research contexts. Given the complexity of school effectiveness—typically influenced by pedagogical, socioeconomic, and organizational variables—an explained variance approaching half of the outcome variable indicates strong model performance. The small difference between R^2 and adjusted R^2 further indicates model

stability, suggesting that the predictors maintain consistent explanatory strength without inflation caused by overfitting. Additionally, both predictors remain statistically significant in the simultaneous model, confirming that their effects are independent rather than overlapping.

The results collectively demonstrate that democratic leadership and school committee engagement are empirically validated components of collaborative school governance. Democratic leadership exerts a large substantive influence on primary school quality, while school committee engagement contributes a meaningful and independent medium effect. The findings indicate that internal leadership capacity and external stakeholder participation should not be conceptualized as isolated governance mechanisms. Instead, they operate interactively to strengthen institutional performance. Leadership establishes participatory culture and professional commitment, while committee engagement enhances oversight, resource support, and community alignment.

However, the remaining unexplained variance suggests that governance variables alone are insufficient to account for educational quality fully. Additional factors—such as teacher competence, instructional innovation, school culture, and contextual socioeconomic conditions—likely contribute to performance outcomes and warrant further investigation. Overall, the empirical evidence supports the proposition that strengthening collaborative school governance structures constitutes a viable pathway toward sustainable

improvement in primary school quality. The magnitude of the effects underscores the practical relevance of participatory leadership and active stakeholder engagement in contemporary educational reform contexts.

Discussion

The results confirm that democratic leadership exerts the strongest predictive influence on primary school quality, both statistically and substantively. The large effect size indicates that participatory decision-making, professional empowerment, and open communication practices are not merely symbolic managerial behaviors but structural drivers of institutional effectiveness. This finding aligns with recent international research emphasizing that participatory and distributed leadership models enhance teacher commitment, collective efficacy, and instructional coherence (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2020; Emerson et al., 2022). In particular, studies conducted across OECD systems show that leadership practices fostering collaboration and shared governance significantly improve organizational learning and innovation capacity (Torfing et al., 2021; Verger et al., 2022).

Furthermore, recent meta-analytic evidence suggests that leadership impact on school outcomes is mediated through school climate and professional culture rather than through direct administrative control (Radinger et al., 2021). The present findings reinforce this theoretical perspective, indicating that democratic leadership likely enhances school quality by cultivating

participatory climates that enable instructional improvement.

Importantly, the magnitude of the leadership effect in this study is comparable to or exceeds reported effect sizes in international governance-based school effectiveness research (Faruq Vista & Rapina, 2024). This suggests that in decentralized primary education contexts, leadership autonomy and participatory governance may play an even more decisive role than in highly centralized systems.

Although democratic leadership demonstrated the stronger effect, school committee engagement also showed an independent and statistically meaningful contribution to school quality. This finding challenges perspectives that frame stakeholder participation as merely peripheral or ceremonial in school governance structures. Recent global scholarship increasingly recognizes the institutional value of community engagement in strengthening school accountability and resource sustainability (Rahma et al., 2024). Studies in both high-income and developing contexts show that structured parental and community involvement enhances monitoring processes, supports school improvement planning, and strengthens public trust in educational institutions (OECD, 2023).

The medium effect size observed in this study suggests that school committees contribute substantively, though not dominantly, to institutional performance. This pattern is consistent with governance theory, which conceptualizes external stakeholders as accountability enhancers

rather than primary managerial actors (Nofrianni et al., 2023; Rahma et al., 2024). Notably, the continued significance of committee engagement after controlling for leadership indicates that stakeholder participation is not reducible to principal influence alone. Instead, it operates as an independent governance layer that reinforces transparency, mobilizes community resources, and legitimizes institutional decisions.

The combined model explained nearly half of the variance in school quality, demonstrating substantial explanatory power in a field where multiple interacting factors typically shape institutional outcomes. The additive contribution of leadership and stakeholder engagement supports collaborative governance theory, which posits that school improvement emerges from coordinated interactions between internal authority structures and external accountability systems (Ruchiyat et al., 2024). Recent comparative governance research emphasizes that schools operating under participatory leadership and structured stakeholder oversight achieve more stable and sustainable performance outcomes than those relying solely on hierarchical management (Goodall, 2022). The present findings empirically substantiate this claim at the primary education level.

Moreover, the partial overlap in variance between predictors suggests a potential mediating or reciprocal dynamic, whereby democratic leadership may facilitate more active committee engagement, which in turn reinforces institutional quality. While mediation was

not formally tested, this possibility aligns with contemporary governance models advocating co-production between school leaders and community actors (Ansell & Torfing, 2021). Future studies employing structural equation modeling could further examine these indirect pathways.

Compared to recent international studies, the explanatory power observed in this research ($R^2 = 0.48$) is notably strong. Many governance-focused educational studies report R^2 values between 0.25 and 0.40 when predicting school performance outcomes (Bellibaş et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2023). The relatively higher explanatory capacity in this study may reflect the contextual salience of leadership and stakeholder engagement within decentralized reform environments. In several emerging education systems, governance autonomy places greater responsibility on school-level actors, thereby amplifying the influence of leadership and community participation (UNESCO, 2021; Verger et al., 2022). The findings thus contribute to comparative governance research by demonstrating that collaborative leadership structures may exert stronger effects in reform-oriented or accountability-driven contexts.

The empirical evidence suggests several policy implications. First, leadership development programs should prioritize democratic and participatory competencies rather than purely administrative skills. Professional training that enhances principals' capacity to facilitate inclusive decision-making, build trust, and empower teachers may yield substantial quality

improvements (Harris & Jones, 2022; Schleicher, 2022). Second, governance reforms should strengthen the functional capacity of school committees. Rather than serving as symbolic advisory bodies, committees should receive structured orientation and governance training to enhance their advisory, supervisory, and mediation roles. Institutionalizing structured engagement mechanisms may increase the substantive impact of stakeholder participation. Third, education policymakers should view leadership and stakeholder engagement as interdependent components of school governance architecture. Reform initiatives targeting only one dimension may fail to produce sustainable institutional transformation.

This study advances the literature in three principal ways. First, it empirically integrates democratic leadership and stakeholder participation within a single collaborative governance model at the primary education level. Previous studies have often examined these constructs independently; this research demonstrates their complementary explanatory capacity. Second, the study provides quantitative evidence supporting collaborative governance theory in decentralized primary education contexts, extending governance research beyond secondary or tertiary institutional settings. Third, by incorporating effect size analysis and comparative explanatory assessment, the study moves beyond statistical significance toward substantive interpretation, strengthening its contribution to leadership and governance scholarship.

In sum, the findings reinforce the proposition that strengthening participatory leadership and structured stakeholder engagement constitutes an empirically supported pathway toward enhancing primary school quality. However, the remaining unexplained variance underscores the need for integrative research incorporating pedagogical, cultural, and socioeconomic dimensions of school effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

Democratic leadership and school committee engagement are empirically confirmed as significant and complementary determinants of primary school quality. Democratic leadership demonstrates a stronger and more substantial influence, indicating its role as a primary structural driver in shaping organizational conditions that support instructional effectiveness. Meanwhile, school committee engagement contributes an independent and meaningful effect by reinforcing accountability, transparency, and community alignment. The combined influence of both variables highlights that internal leadership capacity and external stakeholder participation operate synergistically in strengthening school performance.

These findings suggest that efforts to improve primary school quality should not rely solely on strengthening leadership practices but also require the active involvement of institutional stakeholders as part of an integrated governance system. Strengthening participatory leadership competencies and enhancing the functional

role of school committees may serve as practical strategies for sustaining school improvement. However, given that a substantial proportion of variance in school quality remains unexplained, further research is needed to explore additional determinants and more complex relational models.

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