

Research Article

The Effect of Leadership Practices on School Performance in Secondary Schools of Kaffa Zone

Habtamu Debasu Belay^{1,*} , Zelalem Godeso¹ , Simachew Alamneh² 

¹Department of Special Needs and Inclusive Education, Bonga University, Bonga, Ethiopia

²Department of Computer Science, Bonga University, Bonga, Ethiopia

Abstract

This study examined leadership practices and their effects on teachers' performance in secondary schools in Kaffa Zone. The main purpose of the study was to assess how school leadership influences teachers' motivation, professional commitment, and instructional effectiveness. To achieve this objective, the study employed a mixed research approach, with a particular focus on a descriptive survey design. This approach enabled the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data and to analyze the relationships between leadership practices and teacher performance in a comprehensive manner. The target population of the study included secondary school teachers, school principals, supervisors, Parent-Teacher-Student Association members, Teacher Development Program experts, and student council representatives. A total sample of 158 respondents was selected using random sampling techniques to ensure representativeness, while purposive sampling was applied to identify key informants who possessed relevant experience and knowledge. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to express their views and experiences regarding leadership practices in their schools. Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical tools such as percentages, frequencies, Pearson correlation, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and coefficient analysis to determine the strength and significance of relationships between key variables. Qualitative data obtained from interviews were thematically analyzed to complement and enrich the quantitative findings. The results of the study revealed that several challenges hinder effective school leadership in Kaffa Zone. These included limited autonomy, insufficient professional training, and inadequate educational resources. In addition, weak community engagement and ineffective conflict resolution strategies negatively affected staff morale and school culture. Furthermore, dissatisfaction with leadership training, limited institutional support, and bureaucratic interference weakened leaders' capacity to effectively support teachers' professional development. Based on these findings, the study recommends that secondary schools in Kaffa Zone strengthen collaboration with woreda and zonal education offices to enhance professional growth opportunities. It also emphasizes the importance of involving stakeholders in school activities to create a supportive educational environment that promotes staff motivation, improved performance, and overall school success.

Keywords

Leadership Practice, School Performance, Secondary Schools

*Correspondence: Habtamu Debasu Belay (debasuhabtamu@gmail.com)

Received: 3 February 2026; **Accepted:** 14 February 2026; **Published:** 27 February 2026



1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

First, the effectiveness of educational institutions is increasingly linked to the quality of leadership practiced within schools. As education systems worldwide strive to improve academic outcomes, school leadership has emerged as a critical factor shaping school culture, teacher performance, and student achievement. In particular, leadership practices grounded in a clear purpose and strategic direction play a significant role in aligning instructional priorities, strengthening stakeholder engagement, and sustaining school improvement [6, 8, 9].

Building on this, purposeful leadership emphasizes the articulation of a clear educational mission, the promotion of professional collaboration, and a strong focus on instructional improvement. Consequently, leaders with a well-defined sense of purpose are better positioned to motivate teachers, allocate resources effectively, and create learning environments that support student success. Moreover, purpose-driven leadership provides a coherent framework for decision-making, enabling school leaders to translate vision into measurable performance outcomes [2, 12].

In addition, leadership practices in education encompass instructional supervision, teacher professional development, stakeholder communication, and resource management. Importantly, contemporary scholarship highlights that effective leadership extends beyond the actions of individual principals to include distributed leadership, where responsibilities are shared among teachers and school leaders. As a result, such collaborative approaches foster collective ownership and accountability, which have been associated with improved student outcomes and overall school performance [7, 14].

Furthermore, school performance is now understood as a multidimensional construct that includes not only academic achievement but also student engagement, teacher satisfaction, community involvement, and effective administration. Consistent with this view, empirical evidence strongly supports the relationship between leadership and school performance, with leadership accounting for a substantial proportion of school-level effects on student learning [10]. Notably, in low-resource contexts, leadership practices become even more critical, as effective leadership can help mitigate limitations in material and human resources [17].

Within the Ethiopian context, particularly in regions such as the Kaffa Zone, secondary schools face persistent challenges including inadequate instructional resources, limited leadership autonomy, insufficient professional preparation, and weak administrative structures. Although national reforms such as the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP V) and the General Education Quality Improvement Program (GEQIP-E) emphasize school leadership as a driver of educational quality, school performance continues to vary widely.

In many cases, these variations reflect differences in leadership capacity and practice rather than policy intent [11].

Therefore, despite strong international evidence on the role of leadership in school improvement, localized research examining how specific leadership practices influence school performance in Ethiopian secondary schools remains limited. In particular, little attention has been given to purposeful leadership and its alignment with school performance indicators. Accordingly, this study seeks to examine the effect of leadership practices on school performance in secondary schools in the Kaffa Zone, contributing context-specific evidence to inform leadership development, policy implementation, and school improvement efforts in developing-country contexts. Therefore, the central problem that this study seeks to address is the limited understanding of how purpose-driven leadership practices affect school performance in the Kaffa Zone of south west Ethiopia regional state. Without such insight, efforts to improve education quality through leadership reforms risk being generic, poorly targeted, and ultimately ineffective. By identifying the nature and effectiveness of leadership practices currently in use, this study aims to provide empirical evidence that can inform both policy and practice in the Ethiopian education system.

1.2. Research Questions

In addressing this problem, the following research questions would be raised:

1. To what extent school leadership practiced in secondary schools in Kaffa zone?
2. How do principals and vice principals explain school leadership & teachers' performance in the study area?
3. Is there any significant relationship between school leadership practices and teachers' performance in the study area?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

1.3.1. General Objective

The study aimed to explore the effect of leadership practices and school performance in secondary schools in Kaffa zone.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Identify the extent of school leadership practices in secondary schools Kaffa zone.
2. Explore how do principals and vice principals explain school leadership & teachers' performance in the study area.
3. Describe any significant relationship between school leadership practices and teachers' performance in the study area.

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study holds significant value in multiple dimensions: practical, theoretical, and academic, each contributing to a deeper understanding of the relationship between leadership practices and school performance. For local education offices in zones like Kaffa, the study offers evidence-based recommendations that can inform resource allocation, leadership appointments, and school improvement strategies aligned with contextual realities. This research contributed to the body of knowledge in educational leadership by contextualizing and testing existing leadership theories such as transformational leadership theory in a developing country context. The study served as a foundational reference for future researchers interested in school leadership and performance in Ethiopia and similar contexts.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Research Design

Mixed approach and descriptive survey research design

were employed. More of descriptive survey design was employed by using questioner. Qualitative research design was used by using interview guide to triangulate what have been obtained from descriptive survey as supplementary for the inquiry. Statistical tools such as Pearson correlation, ANOVA and Coefficients were employed to determine the strength and significance of the relationships between variables.

2.2. Sources of Data

2.3. Population, Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Out of 411 secondary school teachers 124 (30%) were expected to be included in the study by using simple random sampling technique. Available sample method was used for principals, supervisors, vice principals, education experts and PTSA; Based on these 7 principals, 3 supervisors, 7 vice principals, 7 PTSA and 4 education experts and 7 students would be included in the study using available sampling technique since their number is manageable.

Table 1. Summary of population sample size and sampling.

No.	Types of respondents	Total Population	Sample size	Sampling Technique
1	Principals vise & principals	14	14	Purposive sampling technique
2	PTSA	21	7	Purposive sampling technique
3	Teachers	411	124	Random Sampling technique
4	Student Representatives	7	7	Purposive sampling technique
5	Supervisors	3	3	Purposive sampling technique
6	Education experts	4	4	Purposive sampling technique
	Total	460	158	

Description of Table 1: From 460, 158 sample sizes were selected. Only 124 teachers out 411 teachers of 30% were selected by using random sampling technique, 14 principals and vise principal, 7 student representatives, 3 school supervisors. 3 education experts and from 21 PTSA 7 were selected by using a purposive sampling technique due to the availability of respondents' and they represent the group of respondents they belong to.

2.4. Data Collection Instruments

The relevant data required for the study were collected through questionnaires, an interview guide and document review.

2.4.1. Questionnaire

Questionnaires were prepared to gather data from teachers, students, PTSA, and principals & vice principals. It contains closed-ended questions to help the flow of adequate information as much as possible.

2.4.2. Interview Guide

An interview guide was used to gather views and opinions on the influence of leadership practices on school performance. Semi-structured interviews were prepared and conducted to collect data from four woreda education experts, two school supervisors, and two teachers, for a total of eight respondents.

3. Results and Discussions

This chapter presents the analysis, presentation, and interpretation of data collected through questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical techniques such as Pearson correlation, ANOVA, and regression coefficients to examine the strength and significance of relationships between variables. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and assess the extent of leadership practices in secondary schools. The chapter further examines how principals and vice principals perceive school leadership and teacher performance, as well

as the relationship between leadership practices and teacher performance. Finally, quantitative and qualitative findings were triangulated to enhance the validity of the results. Data were obtained from 158 respondents, including teachers, school leaders, education office personnel, and student representatives.

3.1. Demographic Data of Respondents'

The demographic data was the researcher's respondents' data, which included different variables like gender, age group, educational qualification and work experiences in detail.

Table 2. Demographic Background of Participants.

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	90	59.2%
	Female	62	40.8%
Age Group	Below 30 years	30	19.7%
	30-40 years	75	49.3%
	Above 40 years	47	30.9%
Educational Qualification	Diploma	15	9.9%
	Bachelor's Degree	50	32.9%
	Master's Degree	87	57.2%
Work Experience	Below 5 years	40	26.3%
	5-10 years	67	44.1%
	Above 10 years	45	29.6%

According to demographic data of the above Table 2 the following results could be described as; gender distribution the study indicates a male-dominated workforce, with 90 (59.2%) male and 62 (40.8%) female respondents. This imbalance in gender representation may result in a lack of diverse perspectives in leadership practices. Previous studies [15] highlight that gender equity in leadership fosters improved collaboration and inclusivity in schools, which seems to be lacking in the schools surveyed.

According to age distribution the majority of respondents 75 (49.3%) were between the ages of 30-40, indicating that mid-career professionals dominate the leadership roles. However, only 30 (19.7%) are below 30 years, suggesting a lack of younger professionals who could introduce innovative approaches. Additionally, 47 (30.9%) aged above 40 might have valuable experience but could potentially resist change or modern leadership practices. According to educational qualification a surprising 87 (57.2%) of respondents hold a Master's degree, while only 50 (32.9%) have a Bachelor's degree,

and 15 (9.9%) hold a diploma. While the high proportion of Master's holders could be seen as a positive factor, the data revealed a disconnect between qualification levels and practical leadership effectiveness. Key informant feedback suggests that despite higher qualifications; the majority of leaders lack the necessary skills to translate their academic knowledge into improved school performance.

According to work experience the data shows that 67 (44.1%) of respondents have 5-10 years of experience, followed by 45 (29.6%) with more than 10 years. While the latter group brings valuable experience, 40 (26.3%) of leaders with less than 5 years of experience might struggle to handle complex school management challenges. This imbalance in experience distribution could negatively impact leadership practices. Despite higher qualifications, the overrepresentation of Master's holders (57.2%) did not translate into improved performance due to a lack of practical leadership skills, as echoed by key informants. The limited involvement of younger pro-

professionals (19.7%) could stifle innovation in leadership approaches. Gender disparity continues to be a concern, with women representing only 40.8% of the respondents, which could limit diverse leadership practices.

3.2. Leadership Practices

Leadership practice refers to the actions, behaviors, and decision-making processes of school principals and administrators aimed at improving the school environment, driving educational outcomes, and supporting staff and students. It includes instructional and managerial leadership practices, com-

municating vision, mission and goals, supervisory support, resource management, community engagement and mobilization, leadership style, professional development for staff and management of the school environment.

3.2.1. Community Engagement and Mobilization

Community engagement and mobilization included how well principals communicate and collaborate with staff, parental involvement, and community-based initiatives. In addition to this how to develop teachers within their profession, manage and utilize resources and ultimately bring organizational productivity and success.

Table 3. Community engagement and mobilization.

No	Community Engagement and Mobilization		5	4	3	2	1
1.	The school leadership provides adequate support for instructional improvement	Frequency	10	15	22	60	45
		%	6.6	9.9	14.5	39.5	29.6
2.	The school leadership provides adequate support and resources for teachers to perform their duties effectively	Frequency	7	9	18	60	58
		%	4.6	5.9	11.8	39.5	38.2
3.	The school leadership effectively managing school resources	Frequency	5	9	22	71	45
		%	3.3	5.9	14.5	46.7	29.6
4.	The school leadership encourages and facilitates professional development for teachers	Frequency	12	16	22	65	37
		%	7.9	10.5	14.5	42.8	24.3
5.	School principal provides the motivation and encouragement that lead to success	Frequency	6	5	22	76	43
		%	3.9	3.3	14.5	50	28.3
6.	School leaders actively involve parents and the community in school decisions	Frequency	3	4	21	79	45
		%	2	2.6	13.8	52	29.6

Note: 5-strongly agree, 4-agree, 3-neutral, 2-disagree, 1-strongly disagree; %-percentage

The Mean for the above table was 2.91 and Std. Deviation was 1.09 interpreted as Moderate agreement, average variation.

Regarding to support for instructional improvement a combined 105 (69.1%) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that leadership provides adequate support for instructional improvement. Another issue about resource only 16 (10.5%) agreed or strongly agreed that leadership provides adequate support and resources for teachers. In addition to this resource management appears to be ineffective, with 116 (76.3%) expressing disagreement or strong disagreement. Poor resource management can impede instructional delivery and school growth. Regarding to the encouragement of CPD Leadership's role in promoting continuous professional development is perceived negatively by most respondents 102 (67.1% disagreement). This highlights a need for more structured teacher development initiatives.

Above the Table 3, the six issue was analyzed; disagree 76 (50%) and Strongly Disagree 43 (28.3%) responses represent a significant portion of respondents, showing that a large group of participants does not believe that principals consistently provide motivation and encouragement that leads to success. Only strongly agree 6 (3.9%) and agree 5 (3.3%) responses are relatively low, suggesting that very few respondents feel that principals provide effective motivation and encouragement. The undecided (14.5%) responses indicate that some respondents are unsure about the level of motivation and encouragement provided by school principals.

On the above table item six shows that disagree 79 (52%) and strongly disagree 45 (29.6%) responses together indicate that a significant portion of respondents feels that principals do not involve parents and the community in school decisions as actively as they should. Strongly agree 3 (2%) and agree 4 (2.6%) responses are very low, showing that few respondents

perceive that principals are engaging with parents and the community effectively. Undecided 21 (13.8%) responses suggest that some participants may not have a clear perspective on the level of community involvement.

3.2.2. Communicating Vision, Mission and Goals

Communicating vision, mission and goals means how the school leadership communicated the school vision and mission and goals which align with the school performance and also decision makings transparently communicated and update the staff with school policies and changes.

Table 4. *Communicating vision, mission and goals.*

No	Communicating vision, mission and goals		5	4	3	2	1
1.	School leaders effectively communicate their vision and mission for the school	Frequency	7	10	20	65	50
		%	4.6	6.6	13.2	42.8	32.9
2.	The school leadership communicates goals and expectations clearly to staff and students	Frequency	50	60	20	10	8
		%	32.9	42.1	13.2	6.6	5.3
3.	I believe that the rationale behind decisions made by the leadership is transparently communicated	Frequency	18	30	21	75	8
		%	11.8	19.7	13.8	49.3	5.3
4.	Leadership regularly updates staff on school policies and changes	Frequency	6	7	21	72	46
		%	3.9	4.6	13.8	47.4	30.3

Note: 5-strongly agree, 4-agree, 3-neutral, 2-disagree, 1-strongly disagree; %-percentage

The Mean for the above table was 2.80 and Std. Deviation was 1.06 interpreted as Slightly below average agreement.

According to the first issue of the above table the data shows that a majority of respondents perceive school leadership communication regarding vision and mission as ineffective, with 65 (42.8%) disagreeing and 50 (32.9%) strongly disagreeing. Only 7 (4.6%) strongly agreed, while 10 (6.6%) agreed. This shows the high percentage of negative responses suggests leadership challenges in promoting a unified school culture, which may hinder staff cohesion and alignment with school goals.

According to key informants, including the school supervisor, Teachers Development Program (TDP) leader at the office, and teachers, significant gaps exist in ensuring the alignment of the school's mission with leadership practices. These gaps are primarily attributed to ineffective leadership strategies, insufficient collaboration, and the lack of a clear, actionable vision.

One of the school supervisors emphasized that:

"The principal often fails to communicate the school's mission effectively to staff and students. Leadership practices seem disconnected from the broader goals of improving academic performance and fostering an inclusive environment" (Key informant, 2024).

One of TDP leader at the office remarked that:

"There is little to no integration of the school's mission into daily leadership activities. The principal's focus is often on routine administrative tasks, which detracts from the broader vision of educational excellence" (Key informant,

2024).

One of the teachers echoed these sentiments, with one stating:

"There is a lack of structured plans to ensure that the school's mission is reflected in classroom practices. Most of the time, we are left unclear about how our work ties into the overall mission" (Key informant, 2024).

Regarding to above table issue two shows positive responses dominated, with (50) 32.9% strongly agreeing and 60 (42.1%) agreeing. Only a small percentage 8 (5.3%) strongly disagreed. This indicates that while there are communication gaps regarding broader school vision, operational goals and expectations are well communicated. The third data analysis shows nearly half of the respondents 75 (49.3%) disagreed, and 8 (5.3%) strongly disagreed. Only 18 (11.8%) strongly agreed, while 30 (19.7%) agreed. This finding highlights a serious communication gap concerning decision-making transparency.

According to the last issue of the above table the analysis shows that the majority of respondents 118 (47.4% disagree and 30.3% strongly disagree) believe that leadership does not regularly update staff on school policies. Only 6 (3.9%) strongly agreed, while 7 (4.6%) agreed. This finding suggests a lack of structured communication regarding school policy changes.

3.2.3. Decision-making Autonomy

Decision making autonomy means the degree to which

principals have the freedom to make decisions without excessive interference from higher authorities or central education

bodies and involvement teachers in decision making process that affects their work.

Table 5. *Decision making autonomy.*

No	Decision-Making Autonomy		5	4	3	2	1
1.	Teachers are involved in decision-making processes that affect their work and the school	Frequency	8	12	25	58	49
		%	5.3	7.9	16.4	38.2	32.2
2.	The school principal encourages co-operation among the teaching staff during the decision-making process of the school	Frequency	18	30	21	75	8
		%	11.8	19.7	13.8	49.3	5.3

Note: 5-strongly agree, 4-agree, 3-neutral, 2-disagree, 1-strongly disagree; %-percentage

The Mean for the above table was 2.90 and Std. Deviation was 1.16 interpreted as Moderate agreement, high variability. Regarding to decision making autonomy of teachers the data analysis shows that a combined 107 (70.4%) of respondents (38.2% disagree and 32.2% strongly disagree) indicated that teachers are not actively involved in school decision-making processes. Only 8 (5.3%) strongly agreed. The results suggest a lack of participatory leadership in school management. This may limit teachers' sense of ownership and negatively impact their morale and performance.

According to the second issue of the above Table 5 nearly half 75 (49.3%) of the respondents disagreed that school principals encouraged cooperation among teaching staff during

decision-making, while only 18 (11.8%) strongly agreed. This highlights a potential gap in collaborative leadership practices. The lack of cooperation may hinder the flow of creative ideas and diminish problem-solving capacity among staff.

3.2.4. Leadership Style

The approach the principal uses to motivate and guide staff and students, either focusing on transformational (visionary, motivating, innovative) or transactional (task-oriented, rewarding compliance) leadership.

Table 6. *Leadership style.*

No	Leadership style		5	4	3	2	1
1.	I agree that the school principal exhibits transformational leadership qualities	Frequency	7	9	22	60	54
		%	4.6	5.9	14.5	39.5	35.5
2.	School Principal leadership styles have influence on school performance	Frequency	5	7	20	75	45
		%	3.3	4.6	13.2	49.3	29.6
3.	School principals are occupied by routine administrative activities in our school	Frequency	50	68	16	10	8
		%	32.9	44.7	10.5	6.6	5.3

Note: 5-strongly agree, 4-agree, 3-neutral, 2-disagree, 1-strongly disagree; %-percentage

The Mean for the above table was 2.91 and Std. Deviation was 1.15 interpreted as Moderate agreement, high variability.

Regarding to the above Table 6 the first data analysis showed that only 10.5% of respondents agreed that their school principal exhibited transformational leadership qualities. A significant portion 114 (75%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed, indicating that transformational leadership, characterized by vision-setting, teacher empowerment, and

fostering collaboration, might be lacking. According to the second data of the same table above showed that while 12 (7.9%) agreed that leadership styles influenced school performance, 120 (78.9%) expressed disagreement. This suggests a potential disconnect between leadership strategies and tangible performance outcomes, possibly stemming from leadership styles that do not align with best practices.

The last data analysis of the above Table 6 was a striking

118 (77.6%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that school principals are preoccupied with routine administrative tasks. This is concerning, as excessive administrative responsibilities can detract from instructional leadership functions that directly impact teacher development and student outcomes.” The following respondents were giving the interview response by:

The other school supervisor commented:
"The principal's leadership style leans heavily toward authoritarian practices, which stifles teacher involvement and creativity. This has created a demotivated workforce, ultimately impacting student achievement negatively" (Key informant, 2024).
The other TDP leader at the office added:
"While some elements of a democratic style are occasion-

ally evident, they are inconsistently applied. This inconsistency causes confusion and mistrust among staff, leading to a lack of cohesive effort toward school improvement." (Key informant, 2024).
One of the teachers provided similar feedback, with one noting:
"The principal's approach is reactionary rather than proactive. Decisions are often made without sufficient consultation, resulting in poor implementation and low teacher morale."

3.2.5. Community Involvement

Community involvement means that the school principal engages parents the community to enhance the overall school performance and productivity of the organization.

Table 7. Community involvement.

No	Community involvement		5	4	3	2	1
1.	The school leadership actively engages with parents and the community to enhance school performance	Frequency	5	8	17	70	52
		%	3.3	5.3	11.2	46.1	34.2
2.	The school principals are expected to continually generate new ideas for increasing effectiveness and productivity within the organization	Frequency	5	6	19	77	45
		%	3.3	3.9	12.5	50.7	29.6

Note: 5-strongly agree, 4-agree, 3-neutral, 2-disagree, 1-strongly disagree; %-percentage

The Mean for the above table was 2.82 and Std. Deviation was 1.13, interpreted as Slight agreement.
According to Table 7, the result of the first data was analyzed as a significant proportion of respondents, 122 (80.3%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed that school leadership actively engages with parents and the community to enhance school performance. This suggests a perceived deficiency in leadership efforts to involve external stakeholders, which is crucial for comprehensive school development. Regarding to last issue in the context of the table describes as follows; Disagree 77 (50.7%) and strongly disagree 45 (29.6%) responses show that the majority of respondents do not believe that principals are meeting expectations to continually generate new ideas for increasing effectiveness and productivity. Strongly agree 5 (3.3%) and Agree 6 (3.9%) responses are relatively low, indicating that few principals are perceived as successful in consistently generating innovative ideas. Undecided 19 (12.5%) responses reflect some uncertainty regarding how

well principals are meeting these expectations.

3.3. School Performance

School performance refers to the overall effectiveness and achievement of a school in meeting educational goals, typically reflected in student outcomes and the quality of teaching. It is the outcome that is being influenced or predicted by leadership practices in the study. School performance can be measured using various indicators, including academic achievement, teacher satisfaction, student engagement, and overall school climate.

3.3.1. Student Outcomes

The measurable success of students in their educational journey is usually reflected in standardized test scores, grades, graduation rates, and college readiness.

Table 8. Student outcome.

No	Student outcome		5	4	3	2	1
1.	Effective school leadership positively impacts student	Frequency	9	12	22	65	44

No	Student outcome		5	4	3	2	1
	academic performance in our school	%	5.9	7.9	14.5	42.8	29.0
2.	Effective school leadership has improved student academic performance	Frequency	9	12	22	65	44
		%	5.9	7.9	14.5	42.8	29.0
3.	The school principal in our school reduced dropout rate and repetition rate	Frequency	6	8	19	72	47
		%	3.9	5.3	12.5	47.4	30.9

Note: 5-strongly agree, 4-agree, 3-neutral, 2-disagree, 1-strongly disagree; %-percentage

The Mean for the above table was 2.96 and Std. Deviation was 1.24 interpreted as slightly higher agreement.

According to Table 8, number 1, the results indicate that a majority of respondents 109 (71.8%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that effective school leadership positively impacts student academic performance. Only 21 (13.8%) agreed or strongly agreed, while 22 (14.5%) remained undecided. This trend suggests a significant perception gap regarding leadership's contribution to student success. Similarly on number two, 109 (71.8%) of respondents did not perceive leadership efforts as significantly improving academic outcomes. Only a small portion 21 (13.8%) believed that school leadership had made a positive difference in academic performance.

In the interview many respondents highlighted a disconnect between leadership actions and academic outcomes, pointing out significant gaps in instructional support and a lack of strategic focus on student performance.

The above supervisor noted that:

"School leaders in our context are overwhelmed with administrative duties and fail to prioritize initiatives that directly target improving academic outcomes. The absence of a structured framework for monitoring student progress is a critical issue" (Key informant, 2024).

One of the teachers also expressed dissatisfaction, with one stating:

"The leadership is often reactive rather than proactive, focusing on solving immediate issues rather than creating long-term plans to boost academic performance" (Key informant, 2024).

Regarding to the above Table 8 number three data analysis was as follows, the high percentage of agreement 119 (78.3%) implies that the school principal has implemented successful strategies for reducing dropout and repetition rates. These strategies might include student support programs, parental engagement, personalized interventions, and curriculum adjustments. This is a positive outcome that reflects effective school management practices. A smaller proportion 19 (12.5%) of respondents gave a neutral rating, suggesting that some individuals might not have seen clear evidence of improvements. The 9.2% (14) disagreement signals that a segment of the school population did not perceive leadership as effective in mitigating dropout and repetition issues. This could be due to inconsistent application of strategies, challenges with particular student groups, or poor communication of successes.

3.3.2. Overall, School Climate

Overall, School Climate is the general atmosphere of the school, encompassing safety, relationships, and the overall environment for learning.

Table 9. Overall, School Climate.

No	Overall, School Climate		5	4	3	2	1
1.	The school environment fosters collaboration among staff members	Frequency	52	71	17	8	4
		%	34.2	46.7	11.2	5.3	2.6
2.	The school leadership handles crises and conflicts in a manner that positively affects the school environment	Frequency	6	10	21	61	54
		%	3.6	6.6	13.8	40.1	35.5

Note: 5-strongly agree, 4-agree, 3-neutral, 2-disagree, 1-strongly disagree; %-percentage

The Mean for the above table was 2.85 and Std. Deviation was 1.15 interpreted as Moderate agreement. Regarding to the above Table 9 the first data was analyzed as, a significant majority of

respondents 123 (80.9%) agreed or strongly agreed that the school environment fosters collaboration among staff members, indicating a positive perception of teamwork within the school

setting. Only a small fraction 12 (7.9%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. The second results indicate that most respondents 115 (75.6%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that the school leadership handles crises and conflicts positively. Only a small portion 16 (10.2%) viewed crisis management as positive, while 21 (13.8%) were undecided. Regarding to the interview the current leadership approach is described as ineffective in resolving conflicts, leading to tensions that hinder collaboration and impede school performance.

The other school supervisor shared the following view: "Conflicts among staff members are usually ignored or dealt with in a dismissive manner. When conflicts arise, there is little intervention, and as a result, they fester, creating an atmosphere of mistrust and resentment" (Key informant, 2024).

The other TDP leader added:
"There is a lack of clear processes for conflict resolution.

The leadership often prefers to avoid dealing with disagreements, which only escalates the issues. This avoidance has created a toxic environment where staff members are reluctant to engage in open communication" (Key informant, 2024).

One of the teachers also expressed their concerns, with one stating:

"When conflicts arise, the principal tends to take sides, which exacerbates the situation. This divisiveness makes it difficult to work as a team. The environment becomes polarized, which negatively affects our ability to focus on teaching and student success" (Key informant, 2024).

3.3.3. Student Engagement

Student engagement is the level of students' involvement, enthusiasm, and commitment to learning.

Table 10. Student engagement.

No	Student Engagement		5	4	3	2	1
1.	Leadership practices have positively influenced student engagement in school activities	Frequency	48	67	20	11	6
		%	31.6	44.1	13.2	7.2	3.9
2.	Leadership promotes initiatives that increase student engagement in learning	Frequency	51	66	18	10	7
		%	33.6	43.4	11.8	6.6	4.6

Note: 5-strongly agree, 4-agree, 3-neutral, 2-disagree, 1-strongly disagree;%-percentage

The Mean for the above table was 3.03 and Std. Deviation was 1.29 interpreted as Highest agreement level (best-rated). According to the above Table 10 item one, 115 (75.7%) of respondents agreed (ratings 4 and 5 combined) that leadership positively influenced engagement in school activities, while 17 (11.1%) disagreed (ratings 1 and 2 combined). However, the 11.1% who perceived no positive influence from leadership practices may indicate gaps in leadership efforts. Leadership strategies that do not fully engage students risk alienating individuals who may already feel marginalized. Regarding to the above Table 10 item two shows that 117 (77%) of respondents agreed (ratings 4 and 5 combined) that leadership promoted learning engagement initiatives. Yet, 17 (11.2%) expressed disagreement. This segment highlights leadership shortcomings, possibly due to lack of inclusive strategies, failure to tailor learning activities, or inadequate motivational efforts.

3.4. Correlation Analysis

3.4.1. Correlation Coefficient and Strength of Relationship

To assess the relationship between leadership practices and

school performance, the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) was calculated.

Table 11. Correlation Coefficient.

Correlation Coefficient (r)	Strength of Relationship
0.00 – 0.19	Very Weak
0.20 – 0.39	Weak
0.40 – 0.59	Moderate
0.80 – 1.00	Very Strong

Result: r = 0.962
This value falls within the "very strong" range, indicating a high and positive correlation between effective leadership practices and school performance. Such a high correlation is uncommon in social science research, signifying a tight and meaningful relationship between the two variables.

3.4.2. Statistical Significance of the Relationship

The associated p-value for this correlation is <.001, which is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. There is less than a

0.1% probability that this strong relationship occurred by random chance. This result provides robust evidence supporting a reliable and statistically significant association between leadership practices and school performance in the study area. These findings confirm that schools with better leadership

practices tend to show significantly higher levels of performance. This reinforces the importance of strengthening school leadership as a key strategy for improving educational outcomes.

3.5. ANOVA Table Summary

Table 12. ANOVA Result.

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (p-value)
Regression	138.556	1	138.556	1871.469	.000
Residual	11.105	150	0.074	—	—
Total	149.661	151	—	—	—

3.5.1. Interpretation of Key Elements

Explained Variance (Regression SS = 138.556):

This indicates the amount of variation in school performance that is explained by leadership practices. Unexplained Variance (Residual SS = 11.105): Represents the portion of variance that the model could not explain — i.e., random error or influence of other factors. Total Variance (Total SS = 149.661): The sum of explained and unexplained variance in school performance.

3.5.2. Key Statistical Indicators

$R^2 = 0.926$:

This means that 92.6% of the variance in school performance is explained by leadership practices. This is a very high value, indicating a strong model. Degrees of Freedom (df):

Regression df = 1 (one predictor variable), Residual df = 150 ($N - \text{predictors} - 1 \rightarrow 152 - 1 - 1$), Total df = 151 ($N -$

$1 \rightarrow 152 - 1$). Mean Square (MS): MS Regression = $138.556 / 1 = 138.556$, MS Residual = $11.105 / 150 = 0.074$, F-Statistic = 1871.469: A very large F-value indicates that the explained variance is much greater than the error variance, confirming that the model is highly effective.

Significance Level ($p = .000$): The model is statistically significant at $p < .001$, meaning the likelihood of this result occurring by chance is less than 0.1%. The regression analysis provides strong evidence that leadership practices have a significant impact on school performance. With over 92% of the variance explained, leadership effectiveness emerges as a critical predictor of educational outcomes in the Kaffa Zone.

3.6. Coefficients Table Overview

The regression coefficients provide insights into the relationship between leadership practice (predictor) and school performance (outcome). The table below summarizes the key statistics:

Table 13. Coefficient Between the Variables.

Predictor	B (Unstd.)	Std. Error	Beta (Std.)	t	Sig.	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	0.332	0.063	—	5.280	.000	0.208	0.456	—	—
Leadership Practice	0.888	0.021	0.962	43.260	.000	0.847	0.928	1.000	1.000

Unstandardized Coefficients (B): Constant ($B = 0.332$): Represents the expected school performance score when leadership practice is zero. It serves as the intercept of the regression equation. Leadership Practice ($B = 0.888$): For each one-

unit increase in leadership practice, school performance is expected to increase by 0.888 units, holding all else constant. Standardized Coefficient (Beta = 0.962): The standardized coefficient (Beta) adjusts for scale differences and shows relative strength. A Beta of 0.962 is exceptionally high, indicating

that leadership practice has a strong positive influence on school performance compared to typical social science standards. *t*-value and Significance (*p*-value): $t = 43.260$, $p < .001$: Indicates the relationship is highly statistically significant, meaning the probability of this result occurring by chance is virtually zero. The 95% confidence interval for the effect of leadership practice is (0.847, 0.928). This narrow and non-zero range reflects a high degree of precision and confirms the reliability of the effect estimate.

3.7. Discussions

Effective school leadership is widely recognized as a critical driver of educational quality and student success. This study examined the relationship between leadership practices and school performance, focusing on instructional support, resource management, motivation, communication, community involvement, decision-making, and conflict management. Grounded in transformational leadership theory, the study hypothesized that strong leadership practices significantly enhance school performance. While international evidence links effective leadership with improved student outcomes [9, 16], the Ethiopian context continues to face challenges related to limited resources, leadership capacity constraints, and insufficient professional development [1, 4].

Using a quantitative correlational research design, data were collected from 152 respondents to assess perceptions of leadership practices and school performance. Statistical analyses, including Pearson correlation and ANOVA, were employed to determine the strength and significance of relationships between variables. The findings revealed a very strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between leadership practices and school performance ($r = .962$, $p < .001$). Regression analysis further confirmed the robustness of the model, explaining nearly all variance in school performance and indicating minimal prediction error, thereby underscoring the powerful influence of leadership on school effectiveness.

Despite the strong overall relationship, respondents expressed dissatisfaction with several leadership dimensions, particularly instructional support, resource allocation, motivation, and stakeholder engagement. Weak leadership in these areas limits access to teaching materials, professional development opportunities, and collaborative decision-making [5, 13]. In addition, inadequate communication, limited teacher involvement in decisions, and ineffective conflict management were found to undermine trust, morale, and school climate. These findings align with prior research emphasizing the importance of transparency, participatory leadership, and community involvement in enhancing school performance [3, 8].

Overall, the study confirms that effective, particularly transformational, leadership plays a pivotal role in improving school performance. However, systemic barriers such as insufficient leadership training, limited autonomy, bureaucratic

interference, and resource shortages continue to constrain leadership effectiveness in Ethiopian secondary schools. Addressing these challenges through targeted professional development, increased decision-making authority, strengthened supervisory support, and enhanced community engagement is essential. The findings provide strong empirical evidence for policymakers and education stakeholders to prioritize leadership development as a key strategy for improving school performance in Ethiopia and similar contexts.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1. Conclusions

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

The study on the effect of leadership practices on school performance in secondary schools of Kaffa Zone highlights the critical role of school leadership in shaping educational outcomes. This study concluded that effective leadership practices, particularly those rooted in transformational leadership, were vital to enhancing school performance in the Kaffa Zone. The findings demonstrate a strong and statistically significant link between the quality of leadership and the performance of both teachers and schools. However, the potential of school leaders is constrained by persistent structural barriers, including limited autonomy, inadequate training, insufficient resources, and bureaucratic interference.

Despite some principals exhibiting promising leadership behaviors, such as clear goal communication and staff motivation, the broader system lacks the capacity and support required to sustain such practices. Weaknesses in key areas like instructional support, decision-making, conflict resolution, and community involvement further hinder school improvement efforts. The correlation between leadership and school performance underscores the urgent need for strategic interventions. Without equipping school leaders with the skills, resources, and authority they need, efforts to raise educational quality will remain limited. Therefore, a re-imagined leadership development framework focused on empowerment, training, and policy flexibility was essential to foster school environments that promote teacher performance and student achievement. In general, addressing these systemic gaps is not only a matter of leadership development but also a necessary condition for transforming the educational outcomes of the Kaffa Zone and similar educational contexts.

4.2. Recommendations

These recommendations align with the study's objectives by addressing the effect of leadership practices on school performances in Kaffa zone secondary schools, providing actionable steps to enhance performance outcomes. The following recommendations were drawn:

School leaders, PTSA, local administrators' advisable to

foster community engagement by building strong school-community partnerships through regular forums, parent-teacher meetings, and participatory decision-making.

Woreda/zonal education offices, experienced school leaders advisable to establish mentorship and supervision by doing set up structured coaching and mentoring programs for principals and vice-principals, with regular feedback and monitoring.

Regional and woreda education offices advisable to improve resource allocation by ensuring equitable access to teaching materials, infrastructure, and budget support by assessing school-specific needs.

Regional education bureaus (in coordination with MoE) advisable to increase school autonomy by grant more decision-making powers to school principals, allowing flexibility to address local challenges promptly.

Ministry of education, teacher training institutes advisable to enhance leadership training by provide ongoing, targeted professional development on transformational leadership, instructional guidance, and decision-making.

Abbreviations

ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
ESDP V	Education Sector Development Program
GEQIP-E	General Education Quality Improvement Program
MoE	Minister of Education
PTSA	Parent Teacher and Student Association
TDP	Teachers Development Program

Author Contributions

Habtamu Debasu Belay: Conceptualization, Resources, Investigation, Formal Analysis, Writing – original draft, Supervision

Zelalem Godeso: Data curation, Methodology, Visualization, Validation

Simachew Alamneh: Writing – review & editing

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

References

- [1] Bush, T., & Glover, D. (2016). Leadership for learning: The role of effective communication. *Educational Administration Quarterly*.
- [2] Day, C., & Gu, Q. (2021). Leading schools with moral purpose: Reimagining leadership for the twenty-first century. Routledge.
- [3] Day, C., & Sammons, P. (2016). Professional collaboration and school development. *Educational Research Journal*, 18(1), 45-67.
- [4] Epstein, J. L. (2001). "School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools." Westview Press.
- [5] Fullan, M. (2001). Leading in a culture of change. Jossey-Bass.
- [6] Hallinger, P. (2018). Instructional Leadership and Educational Outcomes: A Meta-Analysis. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 54(2), 227-258.
- [7] Hallinger, P., & Wang, W. C. (2022). Assessing instructional leadership practices and their effects on student learning in Asia. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 50(1), 34–50. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220910364>
- [8] Harris, A., & Jones, M. (2022). Leading for change: School leadership development in the post-pandemic era. *School Leadership & Management*, 42(2), 95–110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2021.1952218>
- [9] Leithwood, K., Azah, V. N., & Harris, A. (2020). Leadership Strategies for Effective Resource Management in Schools. *Educational Administration Review*, 38(4), 120-138.
- [10] Liebowitz, D. D., & Porter, L. (2022). School leadership and student achievement: A meta-analytic review. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 44(2), 231–254. <https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737211047708>
- [11] Ministry of Education (MoE). (2022). Education Sector Development Program V (ESDP V): Final Evaluation Report. Addis Ababa: Ministry of Education.
- [12] Murphy, J., & Torre, D. (2023). The purposeful principal: Establishing a vision and culture for school success. Harvard Education Press.
- [13] Pont, B., Nusche, D., & Moorman, H. (2018). Improving School Leadership. OECD Publishing. Prentice Hall Retrieved October 10/2011, from www.cepn.gse.retgers.edu
- [14] Robinson, V. M. J., Hohepa, M., & Lloyd, C. (2020). School leadership and student outcomes: Identifying what works and why (2nd ed.). Springer.
- [15] Tesfaye, D., & Yismaw, A. (2023). Educational Leadership in Ethiopia: Challenges and Prospects. *Ethiopian Journal of Educational Leadership*, 12(1), 12-27.
- [16] Van Houtte, M., & Van Maele, D. (2011). The Black Box Revelation: School Leadership, Trust, and Positive School Climate. *Educational Research and Evaluation*.
- [17] Wanjala, G., & Ndung'u, M. (2021). School leadership in resource-constrained environments: A case of public schools in rural Kenya. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 86, 102474. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2021.102474>