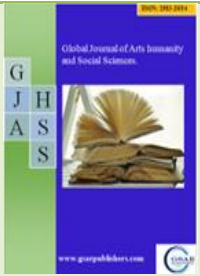
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## Principal Leadership and Working Conditions and Its Impact on Teacher Stress in Indonesian Elementary Schools

By

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### Abstract

The quality of learning is influenced not only by teachers themselves but also by the working conditions within schools. This study aims to examine the potential impact of school principal leadership and working conditions on the work-related stress facing Catholic elementary school teachers in Merauke Regency, South Papua Province. To achieve this objective, a quantitative approach using a survey research design was employed. The collected data were subjected to statistical analysis technique using both simple and multiple linear regression techniques. For accurate and reliable analysis, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 21, was utilized. The data analysis revealed that school principal leadership and working conditions exert a negative and statistically significant influence on teacher work-related stress in Catholic elementary schools in Merauke Regency, South Papua Province, Indonesia. These findings underscore the critical role of effective leadership and supportive work environments in mitigating teacher stress. As such, they call for strategic and evidence-based interventions by regional education policymakers—particularly initiatives aimed at strengthening school leadership capacity and creating more conducive working conditions. These efforts are essential not only for reducing teacher stress but also for fostering a healthier, more sustainable teaching profession that ultimately enhances the overall quality of education.

**Keywords:** school principal, leadership, working conditions, teacher, work-related stress

### Introduction

Teaching is widely recognized as a highly stressful profession, as teachers are frequently confronted with a range of demanding challenges (Anton & Van Ryzin, 2024; Asaloei et al., 2020; Buskila & Chen-Levi, 2021; Jepson & Forrest, 2006; Wullur & Werang, 2020) due to rising responsibilities and tight deadlines, including heavy workloads, diverse student needs, and the burden of administrative duties. As a result, teachers are leaving the profession at significantly higher rates than those in other fields (Demjaha et al., 2015). Work-related stress among teachers refers to emotional states such as tension, anxiety, restlessness, or insomnia, which arise from persistent mental pressure in the workplace. Stress itself can be understood as an internal or external

force that exerts psychological or physical pressure, pushing individuals beyond their capacity for balance and stability (Friedman, 2000). According to Sánchez-Rinza and Peralta (2013), stress represents a state of internal tension that compels the body to activate its defence mechanisms in response to functional imbalances.

Work-related stress arises when individuals perceive their work environment as excessively demanding, making it difficult for them to carry out their assigned responsibilities effectively (World Health Organization, 2004). Factors within the workplace that contribute to stress are commonly referred to as stressors or job pressures. In the educational context, major stressors typically include heavy workloads, intense administrative demands, and



challenges in classroom management (Betoret, 2006; Demerouti, 2001). However, numerous studies (Collie & Martin, 2017; Hakanen et al., 2006; Harris, 1999; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015) have consistently shown that positive relationships with school principals and colleagues can play a crucial role in alleviating work-related stress. In addition, a strong sense of purpose—believing that one’s work is meaningful and impactful—has also been linked to reduced stress levels and enhanced overall well-being (Collie & Martin, 2017; Hakanen et al., 2006; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015).

A growing body of literature (Blasé, 1999; Blasé & Kirby, 1992; Calabrese, 1987; Harris, 1999; Hysa, 2015; Jackson et al., 1986; Munawar et al., 2020; Susar et al., 2023; Tahseen, 2010) has identified school principal leadership as a significant factor influencing teacher work-related stress. Haris (1999) found that principal leadership was a primary source of stress experienced by teachers. Similarly, Blasé (1986) noted that the principal’s leadership style directly affects both teacher stress and job satisfaction, suggesting that teachers’ performance is shaped by their perceptions of the principal’s behavior. Jackson et al. (1986) argued that teacher stress and burnout are strongly associated with principals who fail to practice participative management, exhibit insensitivity to issues affecting schools and teachers, and offer insufficient support to their staff. Calabrese (1987) and Blasé and Kirby (1992) further emphasized the principal’s dual role as both a critical source of support and a potential contributor to teacher stress and burnout. Their findings indicate that adverse interactions with principals are often cited by teachers as a contributing factor to their decision to leave the profession.

Given the significant amount of time and energy that teachers devote to their profession, schools should ideally be environments where teachers feel both satisfied and content (Requena, 2003). Working conditions arise from the dynamic interaction between employees and the overall organizational climate, encompassing both mental and physical aspects of the workplace (Ali et al., 2013; Bhaga, 2010). Petersen (2018) defines working conditions as the atmosphere in which employees are expected to perform their duties. Similarly, Ogunola (2024) describes working conditions as the broader work environment, which includes facilities, the physical setting, safety, organizational climate, workload, stress levels, and ambient noise.

Teachers frequently face simultaneous and ongoing challenges that contribute to elevated stress levels. These include tight deadlines driven by increasing expectations for assigning and assessing homework, excessive workloads, student behavioral issues, lack of student engagement, and a misalignment of educational values (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Lee et al. (2014) observed that student misbehavior—both on an individual level and at the classroom level—is among the most commonly reported sources of stress for teachers during instruction.

This study aims to examine the potential influence of principal leadership and working conditions on teacher work-related stress in Catholic elementary schools in Merauke Regency, South Papua

Province, Indonesia. While a substantial body of literature has explored the roles of principal leadership (Blasé, 1999; Blasé & Kirby, 1992; Calabrese, 1987; Harris, 1999; Hysa, 2015; Jackson et al., 1986; Munawar et al., 2020; Susar et al., 2023; Tahseen, 2010) and working conditions (Fretes et al., 2023; Friedman-Krauss et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2014; Putra & Saraswati, 2022; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017) in predicting teacher stress, our research was driven by a specific regional concern: the urgent need for committed and passionate teachers. This need is particularly critical given previous findings indicating that one of the main factors contributing to the low academic performance of Indigenous Papuan students—when compared to their peers from other regions in Indonesia—is the high rate of teacher absenteeism in South Papua (Werang et al., 2017, 2019). Furthermore, unlike earlier studies that tended to examine the impact of these variables individually, the present study adopts a more holistic perspective by investigating how the principal leadership and working conditions collectively shape teachers’ work-related stress.

Thus, this study seeks to address an existing gap in the literature by providing context-specific insights into how principal leadership and school working conditions impact teacher work-related stress in the unique setting of Papua, with a particular focus on Catholic elementary school teachers as both the population and sample. The study is guided by the following three research questions: (a) Does principal leadership significantly impact teacher work-related stress in Catholic elementary schools in Merauke Regency, Papua Province, Indonesia?; (b) Do working conditions significantly impact teacher work-related stress in Catholic elementary schools in Merauke Regency, Papua Province, Indonesia?; (c) Do principal leadership and working conditions jointly impact teacher work-related stress in Catholic elementary schools in Merauke Regency, Papua Province, Indonesia? To address these research questions, a quantitative approach was employed using two structured survey questionnaires.

## METHODS

This study employs a quantitative research approach using a survey research design. Quantitative research involves the systematic investigation of phenomena through the collection and analysis of numerical data. It is commonly used to identify patterns and averages, make predictions, examine cause-and-effect relationships, and generalize findings to a broader population (Bhandari, 2022). Consequently, quantitative research is often associated with the measurement and analysis of research variables within a defined sample, with the goal of generating findings applicable to larger populations.

Surveys are among the most widely used tools in quantitative research, as they enable researchers to gather numerical data efficiently (Williams, 2007). The popularity of survey designs stems from their practicality, particularly as they provide respondents with an accessible means to share their knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions on specific topics (Mills, 2021). This study adopts a survey research design, drawing on recent studies (Agung et al., 2024; Margunayasa et al., 2024; Werang et al.,

2023a.b., 2024a.b., 2026) that highlight the various advantages of using surveys, including: (a) cost-effectiveness, (b) ease of data collection, (c) the ability to gather a large amount of data in a relatively short period, and (d) high accuracy in statistical analysis.

The population of this study consisted of all teachers employed at Catholic elementary schools in Merauke Regency, South Papua Province. Due to practical limitations such as time constraints, high research costs, and the difficulty of reaching all members of a large population, researchers often rely on sampling techniques to obtain a smaller yet representative group for study. In this research, a convenience (non-random) sampling approach was adopted. This decision was based on the limited time available for data collection and the considerable logistical challenges posed by the region's remote and difficult-to-access geographical areas in South Papua.

To obtain the research data, we distributed three survey questionnaires to 95 Catholic elementary school teachers that have been established as samples. Data on teacher work-related stress were obtained by distributing a questionnaire consisting of 18 positive statement adopted from a previous study conducted by Agung et al. (2024). Participants responded to each item using a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). To ensure clarity and cultural relevance, all questionnaire items were presented in the Indonesian language. Sample items from the Indonesian version include: "I feel overwhelmed by the amount of work I have to do every day" and "I feel like my energy and thoughts are very emotionally drained at the end of the school day."

Data related to school principal leadership were collected by adapting items from the *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) Form 6S* from Bas and Avolio (1997) into 12 positively worded statements. Participants were asked to rate their responses using a four-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). To enhance comprehension, all questionnaire items were presented in the Indonesian language. Examples of the items in English version include the following: "The school principal fosters a positive and enjoyable atmosphere for teachers" and "The school principal actively supports teachers in their personal and professional development."

Data on teachers' working conditions were collected using a questionnaire of 16 items adopted from a study by Wea et al. (2020). Participants rated their responses on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). To ensure better understanding, all items were administered in the Indonesian language. Examples of items in the English version include: "My co-workers really respect me" and "The principal seems to really care about me as a person."

Obtained data were subjected to statistically analysis using simple and multiple linear regression. Simple linear regression analysis technique was employed to address the first two research questions, that are: (a) Does principal leadership significantly impact teacher work-related stress in Catholic elementary schools in Merauke Regency, Papua Province, Indonesia? and (b) Do working conditions significantly impact teacher work-related stress

in Catholic elementary schools in Merauke Regency, Papua Province, Indonesia? Meanwhile, the multiple linear regression analysis technique was employed to address the third research question: "Do principal leadership and working conditions jointly impact teacher work-related stress in Catholic elementary schools in Merauke Regency, Papua Province, Indonesia?"

To ensure the precision and reliability of the analytical process, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 was utilized. SPSS offers a robust and systematic platform for conducting statistical analyses and supports clear interpretation and effective presentation of findings. The use of SPSS highlights our commitment to employing industry-standard tools for rigorous data analysis, thereby enhancing the credibility of our research outcomes and conclusions.

## RESULTS

This study aimed to explore the influence of school principal leadership and working conditions on teacher work-related stress in Catholic elementary schools in South Papua Province, Indonesia. As previously mentioned, the research data were analyzed using SPSS software to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the findings. The key results of the statistical analysis are clearly presented in Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3.

**Table 1. The Impact of Principal Leadership on Teacher Work-Related Stress**

N	R <sup>2</sup>	t		Sig.
		t <sub>-count</sub>	t <sub>-table</sub>	
		0,05		
95	.799	19.218	1.9858	.000

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Principal\_Leadership
- b. Dependent Variable: Teacher\_Stress

The data presented in Table 1 indicate a computed t-value of 19.218, which substantially exceeds the critical t-table value of 1.9858. This result provides strong statistical support for the research hypothesis, confirming that school principal leadership has a significant effect on teacher work-related stress in Catholic elementary schools in South Papua Province, Indonesia. Conversely, the null hypothesis is not supported. Furthermore, Table 1 reports an R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.799 and a significance (Sig.) value of 0.000. These findings indicate that, at a 0.05 alpha level, 79.9% of the variance in teacher work-related stress can be explained by the influence of school principal leadership. The remaining 20.1% is attributed to other relevant factors beyond the scope of this study.

**Table 2. The Impact of Working Conditions on Teacher Stress**

N	R <sup>2</sup>	t		Sig.
		t <sub>-count</sub>	t <sub>-table</sub>	
		0,05		
95	.205	4.895	1.9858	.000

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Working\_Conditions
- b. Dependent Variable: Teacher\_Stress

The data presented in Table 2 indicate a computed t-value of 4.895, which substantially exceeds the critical t-table value of 1.9858. This result provides strong statistical support for the research hypothesis, confirming that school working conditions have a significant effect on teacher work-related stress in Catholic elementary schools in South Papua Province, Indonesia. Conversely, the null hypothesis is not supported. Furthermore, Table 2 reports an R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.205 and a significance (Sig.) value of 0.000. These findings indicate that, at a 0.05 alpha level, 20.5% of the variance in teacher work-related stress can be explained by the influence of the school working conditions. The remaining 79.5% is attributed to other relevant factors beyond the scope of this study.

**Table 3. Simultaneous Impact of Principal Leadership and Working Conditions of Teacher Work-Related Stress**

N	R <sup>2</sup>	F		Sig.
		F <sub>count</sub>	F <sub>table</sub>	
		0,05		
95	.808	193.181	3.095433	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Teacher\_Stress

b. Predictors: (Constant), Principal\_Leadership, Working\_Conditions

The data presented in Table 3 indicate a computed F-value of 193.181, which substantially exceeds the critical F-table value of 3.095433. This result provides strong statistical support for the research hypothesis, confirming that the school principal leadership and working conditions have a significant effect on teacher work-related stress in Catholic elementary schools in South Papua Province, Indonesia. Conversely, the null hypothesis is not supported. Furthermore, Table 3 reports an R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.808 and a significance (Sig.) value of 0.000. These findings indicate that, at a 0.05 alpha level, 80.8% of the variance in teacher work-related stress can be explained by the influence of the school principal leadership and working conditions. The remaining 19.2% is attributed to other relevant factors beyond the scope of this study.

## DISCUSSION

Teachers play a pivotal role in shaping students' lives, as learners spend a significant portion of their day at school and are strongly influenced by their interactions with teachers (Werang et al., 2019). To perform their professional duties effectively, teachers must experience a high level of well-being. Furthermore, improving students' performance requires a deliberate focus on teacher well-being, as the productivity and quality of any education system fundamentally depend on its teachers (Kruger, 2019). A decline in teacher well-being can significantly impact the quality of support provided to students, ultimately affecting their academic outcomes. Numerous studies have shown that reduced teacher well-being—often linked to stress and burnout—correlates with a decline in student academic performance (Alam, 2012; Alvi et al., 2021; Buggs, 2021; Herman et al., 2018). When teachers are overwhelmed or emotionally exhausted, their capacity to engage students effectively, deliver meaningful instruction, and create a

positive classroom environment is diminished, thereby hindering student success.

School principals play a pivotal role in ensuring the effective functioning of schools and promoting teacher well-being (Darmody & Smyth, 2016; Radinger, 2014). A growing body of research on leadership behaviour approves that effective principals foster a positive school culture by providing supportive resources that can shield the impact of work-related stressors (Boyd et al., 2011; Manna, 2015; Price, 2012; Tickle et al., 2011; Walker & Slear, 2011). Remarkably, the perceived quality of working conditions often has a greater influence on teacher job satisfaction and retention decisions than factors such as school demographics, student performance, or salary levels (Kraft et al., 2016; McCarthy et al., 2010; Sutcher et al., 2016). Building on these insights, the present study examined how principal leadership and school working conditions contribute to work-related stress among teachers in Catholic elementary schools in South Papua Province, Indonesia. This focus is informed by a substantial body of literature that emphasizes the capacity of school leaders to reduce teacher stress and prevent burnout through emotional, professional, and organizational support (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Collie et al., 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017).

The findings of this study reaffirm the central role of school principals in influencing teacher stress levels, particularly through their leadership styles and administrative practices (Mbonu & Nikemdilim, 2021). Notably, the results demonstrated that principal leadership has a positive and statistically significant impact on teacher work-related stress, as evidenced by an R<sup>2</sup> coefficient of 0.799 and a significance value of 0.000. This indicates that supportive and effective leadership can substantially reduce stress and contribute to the creation of a healthier, more sustainable school environment. Conversely, when leadership is ineffective or unsupportive, it may intensify teacher stress and negatively affect their professional well-being.

Blasé (1986) highlights that a principal's leadership style can greatly affect teacher stress, satisfaction, and performance. When teachers view their principal's behavior positively, they tend to perform better. Similarly, Jackson et al. (1986) found that high levels of teacher stress and burnout are often linked to principals who fail to involve teachers in decision-making, show little concern for teacher and school issues, or offer inadequate support. Calabrese (1987) and Blasé and Kirby (1992) also stress that principals play a key role in either reducing or increasing teacher stress. While supportive principals can help reduce stress, poor leadership can be a major source of it. Their research shows that many teachers leave the profession because of stress, often caused by negative relationships with their principals. This finding is in line with Mudzakir's (2019) and Yuliasih et al.'s (2023) research finding that principal leadership affect teacher work-related stress positively and significantly.

The results of data analysis also demonstrated that working conditions has a positive and statistically significant impact on teacher work-related stress, as evidenced by an R<sup>2</sup> coefficient of

0.205 and a significance value of 0.000. This suggests that supportive and conducive working conditions can significantly reduce teacher stress and promote a healthier, more sustainable school environment. In contrast, poor or unsupportive working conditions may heighten stress levels and undermine teachers' professional well-being. Existing research has highlighted a wide range of factors within school environments that contribute not only to teacher turnover but also to elevated levels of work-related stress. These factors include systemic pressures stemming from education policies and the perceived status of the teaching profession (Nguyen et al., 2019; Perryman & Calvert, 2020), as well as challenging school-level conditions, such as inadequate leadership support, excessive workloads, and lack of professional autonomy (Heffernan et al., 2022; Rahimi & Arnold, 2024). These stress-inducing conditions often erode teachers' well-being and may ultimately influence their decision to leave the profession.

## CONCLUSION

School teachers play a vital role in shaping students' success, and their well-being is crucial to the overall effectiveness of the educational process. Among the various factors influencing teacher well-being, school principal leadership and working conditions stand out as significant contributors to teacher work-related stress. The findings of this study indicate that both school principal leadership and working conditions have a substantial impact on the level of stress experienced by teachers in Catholic elementary schools in South Papua Province, Indonesia.

The results of this study underscore the critical role of school principals in fostering a supportive and conducive school environment that helps mitigate teacher stress and promotes overall school success. Given the limited number of empirical studies addressing this topic within the Papua region in general—and South Papua in particular—this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by offering valuable insights into teacher work-related stress and its influencing factors within this specific context. By focusing on Catholic elementary schools in South Papua Province, Indonesia, the findings provide region-specific data that can inform future research, policy decisions, and targeted interventions aimed at improving teacher well-being in underserved and under-researched areas.

Despite the valuable insights offered by this study, the findings should be meticulously interpreted due to certain limitations. First, the research was conducted exclusively in Catholic elementary schools within South Papua Province, involving a relatively small sample size. Second, the study focused only on two predictors of teacher work-related stress: school principal leadership and working conditions. These limitations may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts. Therefore, future research is strongly encouraged to include a broader range of school types and larger, more diverse samples. It would also be beneficial to examine additional potential predictors of teacher stress, such as workload, job satisfaction, and school culture.

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