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The Relationship between School Culture and Principals' Leadership Style in Secondary Schools of Bishoftu Town

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ABSTRACT : This study examined the relationship between school culture and principals' leadership styles in secondary schools under the Bishoftu Town Administration. To achieve this objective, a mixed-methods approach was employed, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data. A total of 158 participants including school heads, teachers, and supervisors were selected through stratified random and purposive sampling techniques, using probability proportion to size. Primary data were obtained through survey questionnaires and key informant interviews, while secondary sources included government reports, books, and educational journals. For analysis, descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (t-test and correlation) were applied using SPSS Version 27. The findings revealed that most secondary schools lacked a strong work culture and committed leadership, which hindered the overall performance of the school system. Weak enforcement of norms, values, and rules by school leaders emerged as a major factor contributing to poor school culture, thereby limiting the achievement of institutional goals. Furthermore, the study found that laissez-faire leadership was the most commonly practiced style, followed by democratic and autocratic approaches. Although inadequately applied, democratic leadership demonstrated a strong association with school culture, suggesting that improvements in school culture could positively reinforce democratic leadership practices. In light of these findings, the study concluded that without a well-established school culture supported by appropriate leadership particularly democratic leadership school performance will continue to decline, eroding community trust in the capacity of school leaders to drive meaningful change. Accordingly, the study recommended that the Bishoftu Education Office, in collaboration with training institutes, should provide professional development for principals on leadership styles and organizational culture. Moreover, school leaders should be encouraged to adopt democratic or participative leadership strategies, supported by annual forums and experience-sharing programs.

Keywords: *School culture, leadership style, democratic leadership, Bishoftu Town*

I. INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions play a central role in shaping future generations, and their effectiveness is strongly influenced by school culture and leadership. Principals, like leaders in other organizations, must sustain institutional goals while fostering environments conducive to learning (Northouse, 2007). In many developing countries, including Ethiopia, the alignment between school culture and leadership style remains problematic, often constraining performance outcomes.

Culture, broadly defined as the shared values, norms, and practices transmitted across generations, shapes organizational behavior and leadership expectations (Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Taylor, 1871; Brinkman, 1999). Within schools, organizational culture influences leaders and followers, shaping personality traits, work values, and acceptable leadership behaviors (Hofstede, 2001). Consequently, leadership practices are often unconsciously guided by cultural norms, which determine how authority is exercised and how collaboration is fostered.

Leadership in education has evolved from hierarchical management to instructional and transformational approaches. Early models emphasized control, compliance, and formal communication, whereas later frameworks highlighted instructional leadership, focusing on student achievement and staff support (Schein, 1992; Steinbach et al., 1999; McEwen, 1998). By the 1990s, transformational leadership emerged, characterized by collaborative decision-making and teacher empowerment (Leithwood et al., 1999). Strong principal leadership, therefore, entails both knowledge of teaching and learning processes and the ability to motivate stakeholders toward shared goals (Bandura, 1993). Globally, school leadership has become central to educational reform and policy development (Lam & Pang, 2003). Recent scholarship further emphasizes that leadership must adapt to complex and uncertain contexts, requiring integrative and participatory approaches that

foster flourishing school cultures (Karakose, Tülübaş, & Papadakis, 2024; Özdemir, Gümüş, Kılınç, & Bellibaş, 2024).

Globally, school leadership has become central to educational reform and policy development (Lam & Pang, 2003). In Ethiopia, successive educational policies since the 1990s have underscored leadership and organizational culture as drivers of quality improvement and systemic transformation. Strategies from 2017–2020 emphasized delivering relevant, high-quality education supported by inspiring school cultures and effective leadership. However, empirical evidence remains limited and fragmented. Existing studies have largely emphasized administrative efficiency, resource management, or policy implementation, while overlooking the cultural dimensions of leadership in secondary schools. This narrow focus has constrained understanding of how leadership styles interact with school culture to influence performance outcomes. International evidence demonstrates that school culture significantly shapes effectiveness, with inclusive and participatory leadership fostering trust, collaboration, and improved outcomes (Ismail, Khatibi, & Azam, 2022; Plaku, 2025).

Within Bishoftu Town Administration, secondary schools continue to face persistent challenges such as weak organizational cultures, inconsistent leadership practices, and limited professional development opportunities for principals. Although transformational and democratic leadership styles are widely acknowledged as effective in fostering collegiality, trust, and shared vision, their application in Ethiopian schools remains inadequately documented. The prevalence of laissez-faire leadership further undermines efforts to build strong school cultures, resulting in low staff morale, limited collaboration, and diminished student achievement. These findings suggest that while Gandaa reforms and broader educational policies have introduced structural improvements, sustainable progress requires embedding leadership practices that cultivate inclusive cultures, align professionalization with sectorial expertise, and strengthen downward accountability.

This misalignment between policy aspirations and practical realities creates a critical gap. National education strategies emphasize the need for inspiring school cultures and effective leadership, yet principals often lack the training, support, and contextualized frameworks necessary to translate these aspirations into practice. Without empirical evidence on the relationship between leadership style and school culture in Ethiopian secondary schools, particularly in rapidly urbanizing contexts such as Bishoftu, policymakers and practitioners risk continuing reforms that are disconnected from the lived realities of schools. Therefore, this study is justified by the need to:

- Identify the organizational culture, vales and belief being practice among school principal in Bishoftu secondary schools,
- Analyze the School Principals' Roles in Maintaining Good Relationship and Success Criteria in Bishoftu secondary schools,
- Provide empirical insights into the dominant leadership styles and school cultures in Bishoftu secondary schools.
- Examine how leadership practices align or fail to align with cultural norms and organizational expectations.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Organizational culture is widely recognized as a key determinant of institutional effectiveness. Rooted in social anthropology, culture encompasses the shared values, beliefs, and practices transmitted across generations, shaping interactions within organizations (Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Brinkman, 1999). In educational settings, culture provides a framework for decision-making, accountability, and collective identity, thereby influencing leadership practices and overall performance (Robbins, 2005; Schein, 2002). Recent scholarship underscores that school culture is not static but evolves through societal values, external influences, and organizational factors such as history, leadership, and professional norms (Ismail, Khatibi, & Azam, 2022). These dynamics often generate subcultures among teachers, administrators, and students. While diversity can foster innovation, misalignment with institutional goals may fragment schools and weaken cohesion (Trice & Beyer, 1993). Thus, the strength and coherence of school culture are critical for sustaining effectiveness.

Scholars classify organizational cultures in diverse ways. Handy (1993), for example, distinguishes power cultures centered on authority, role cultures marked by bureaucracy, task cultures driven by expertise and results, and person cultures dominated by individual identity. Such frameworks highlight how values and structures shape organizational behavior and leadership effectiveness. School culture manifests through values, norms, stories, language, and symbols that reinforce identity and cohesion (Schein, 1992; Yukl, 2006). Norms such as collegiality, trust, high expectations, and open communication are particularly vital for instructional improvement and collaboration (Saphier & King, 1985). Strong cultures reduce complexity, provide consistency, and socialize new members, while weak cultures undermine accountability and effectiveness (Mullins, 1999).

Leadership and culture are inseparable. Leaders shape culture by instilling values and assumptions, while culture defines acceptable leadership behaviors (Schein, 1992). In schools, principals play a central role in

nurturing norms that sustain collaboration and trust. Without effective leadership, culture cannot adapt or drive improvement (Yukl, 2006). The interaction between leadership style and culture is especially significant in education. Democratic leadership aligns with participatory cultures, fostering trust and shared responsibility. In contrast, laissez-faire leadership often reflects weak accountability and fragmented norms. Autocratic and transformational styles also exert distinct influences, with transformational leadership encouraging innovation and collective vision (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999). Effective leaders adapt their styles to cultural expectations, ensuring that organizational values support instructional improvement and student achievement.

Recent studies further highlight the intellectual evolution of educational leadership research, emphasizing integrative approaches that respond to complex and uncertain contexts (Özdemir, Gümüş, Kılınç, & Bellibaş, 2024). Leadership is increasingly viewed as a multidimensional process that not only manages structures but also cultivates flourishing school cultures (Karakose, Tülübaş, & Papadakis, 2024). Empirical evidence demonstrates that leaders play a decisive role in shaping school culture, with strong leadership fostering collegiality, trust, and shared vision, while weak leadership undermines morale and performance (Plaku, 2025). These insights reinforce the argument that leadership and culture must be studied together, as their interaction determines the sustainability of reforms and the effectiveness of schools.

The conceptual framework of this study (Figure 1) builds on these perspectives, situating leadership style and organizational culture as interdependent variables that jointly influence school effectiveness. By integrating global scholarship with local challenges, the framework underscores the need for Ethiopian schools to strengthen leadership practices that cultivate inclusive, participatory, and resilient cultures.

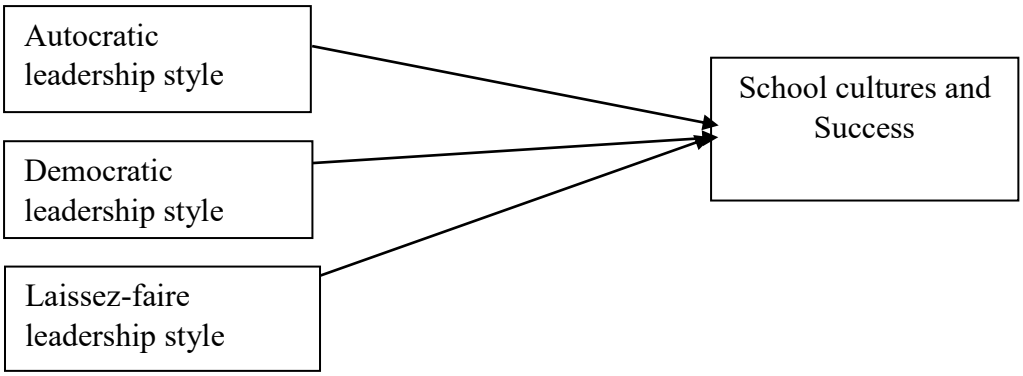


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the Study (Source: Review of related literatures, 2024)

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design and Approach

This study employed a descriptive survey design, which provided a structured framework for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. Survey designs are particularly effective in capturing perceptions, attitudes, and opinions from geographically dispersed groups, while also enabling triangulation through questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions (Creswell, 2009; Zikmund, 2003). By integrating multiple sources of evidence, the design facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between school culture and principals' leadership styles.

A mixed-methods approach was adopted to strengthen the inquiry. Quantitative data offered measurable insights into patterns and relationships, while qualitative data provided depth and contextual interpretation. The integration of these approaches allowed for a holistic analysis, as neither alone could adequately capture the complexity of the research problem (Kothari, 2004; Creswell & Plano, 2007).

Data Source and Sampling Techniques

Data were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected from principals, supervisors, department heads, and teachers through structured questionnaires and key informant interviews. Secondary data were drawn from books, government reports, and peer-reviewed journals, ensuring that findings were grounded in both empirical evidence and theoretical perspectives. To determine the appropriate sample size, the researcher applied **Kothari's (2004) formula**, as recommended by Cohen et al. (2007) for educational research:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 * p * q * N}{(e^2(N-1)) + (Z^2 * p * q)}$$

Where:

- n = required sample size
- Z^2 = abscissa of the normal curve (e.g., 3.841 at 95% confidence level, with Z=1.96)

- N = population size
- p = population proportion (assumed 0.5 for maximum sample size)
- q=1−p
- e = desired precision (0.05 margin of error)

Applying the formula to a population of 267 teachers yielded a sample size of **158 respondents**, ensuring statistical reliability. The study population included teachers, supervisors, and principals from three government secondary schools in Bishoftu Town. One newly established school was excluded due to insufficient data. Teachers were selected through simple random sampling**,** giving each member an equal chance of participation, while principals and supervisors (n = 39) were included through purposive sampling due to their direct involvement in leadership activities.

Data Collection Procedures and Methods of Data Analysis

Data collection employed structured questionnaires containing both closed- and open-ended items, supplemented by semi-structured interviews. This combination allowed for standardized responses while also capturing nuanced perspectives. The use of multiple instruments enhanced validity and reliability by enabling cross-verification of findings across different sources.

Data analysis followed a systematic process. Quantitative data were coded, cleaned, and analyzed using SPSS v27. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize responses, while inferential statistics, including t-tests and Pearson's correlation coefficients, examined relationships between variables. Regression analysis further explored the link between school culture and leadership styles, particularly democratic leadership, providing predictive insights into their interaction.

Besides, qualitative data from interviews and open-ended responses were analyzed thematically through content analysis, grouping recurring words and ideas into meaningful categories that complemented the statistical findings. This integrated analytical strategy ensured that the study captured both the measurable dimensions and the interpretive nuances of the relationship between school culture and principals' leadership styles.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perceived Organization or Principal School Culture

The results on perceived organizational culture reveal two interrelated dimensions: values and beliefs, and leadership culture expressed through stories and symbols. Respondents reported relatively low agreement on the presence of shared values and beliefs, indicating weak cohesion and limited collective norms within schools. In contrast, storytelling and symbolic practices by principals were rated slightly higher, suggesting some effort to align leadership with school culture and foster harmony.

Table 1: Result of variables of organizational culture (value and beliefs)

No	Items	Teachers		Principals and Supervisor		Total		t-test	P-Value
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
1	The school is very pleasant place, which like an extended family, people seen their shares	2.61	0.95	2.70	1.21	2.63	1.005	0.506	0.613
2	The school have strong value system	2.26	1.03	2.53	0.83	2.32	0.997	1.623	0.106
3	The school is a very result oriented. A major concern is with getting the job done. People are very competitive and achievement-oriented	2.49	1.26	2.42	1.35	2.48	1.278	-0.327	0.744
4	The school have strong belief system on school culture	2.40	1.28	2.42	1.24	2.40	1.271	0.102	0.919

Source: Own survey result, 2025

Across the four dimensions of organizational culture, no statistically significant differences were observed between teachers and administrators, though overall agreement remained modest. The highest mean score was recorded for the statement *"the school is a very pleasant place"* (M = 2.63, SD = 1.005), while the lowest was for the reflection of organizational values and beliefs (M = 2.32, SD = 0.997). These findings suggest that schools are generally perceived as pleasant environments but lack strong, cohesive cultural values, with individualistic tendencies prevailing over collective norms. This aligns with Ismail, Khatibi, and Azam (2022),

who found that weak cultural coherence undermines school effectiveness despite positive perceptions of the environment.

Regarding leadership culture expressed through stories and symbols, three of the four domains were rated similarly by both groups (M = 2.16), except for item three. The t-test revealed a significant difference in responses to the first item ($t(158,36) = 1.988$, $p < 0.05$), with supervisors (M = 2.49, SD = 1.33) more strongly agreeing than teachers (M = 2.07, SD = 1.20) that leadership exemplifies monitoring, facilitation, or nurturing. Item three received the highest mean score (M = 2.32, SD = 1.07), indicating that leadership was perceived as fostering school culture through storytelling and symbolic practices. This finding resonates with Plaku (2025), who emphasizes the role of leaders in shaping school culture through symbolic actions and narratives that reinforce shared values.

Taken together, these results suggest that while schools are viewed as somewhat pleasant, their organizational culture remains loosely structured. Supervisors tend to perceive leadership more positively than teachers, particularly in relation to supportive and culture-building practices. This divergence underscores the need for principals to strengthen value-driven and symbolic leadership to build cohesive and effective school cultures. As Karakose, Tülübaş, and Papadakis (2024) argue, leadership in complex educational contexts requires integrative approaches that foster flourishing cultures and systems. Similarly, Özdemir, Gümüş, Kılınç, and Bellibaş (2024) highlight the intellectual evolution of educational leadership research, stressing that leadership effectiveness increasingly depends on its ability to cultivate organizational culture as a foundation for sustainable improvement. These findings reinforce global scholarship that positions leadership and culture as interdependent drivers of school performance (Ismail et al., 2022; Karakose et al., 2024; Özdemir et al., 2024; Plaku, 2025).

Principals' Roles in Maintaining Good Relationships and Success Criteria

The results on principals' roles in maintaining good relationships reveal consistently low levels of agreement across the four items, with no statistically significant differences between teachers and supervisors. Loyalty and mutual trust received mean scores of 2.31 (SD = 1.38) from teachers and 2.53 (SD = 1.26) from principals/supervisors, yielding an overall mean of 2.36 (SD = 1.36). Similarly, commitment to innovation and development was rated 2.47 (SD = 1.43) by teachers and 2.70 (SD = 1.26) by principals/supervisors, with an overall mean of 2.52 (SD = 1.39). Achievement and goal accomplishment, however, received the lowest ratings (M = 1.97, SD = 1.03), while reliance on formal rules and policies was rated slightly higher (M = 2.46, SD = 1.02). These findings suggest that principals are perceived to contribute modestly to fostering loyalty, innovation, and policy adherence, but their role in driving achievement remains weak, pointing to the need for more balanced leadership practices.

Table 2: School principal role in maintaining good relationship

No	Items	Teachers		Principals and Supervisors		Total		t-test	P-Value
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
1	The school principal role that holds the school together is loyalty and mutual trust. Commitment to this school runs high.	2.31	1.38	2.53	1.26	2.36	1.36	0.972	0.332
2	The school principal role that holds the school together is commitment to innovation and development. There is an emphasis on being on the cutting edge.	2.47	1.43	2.70	1.26	2.52	1.39	0.943	0.347
3	The school principal role that holds the school together is emphasized on achievement and goal accomplishment.	1.92	1.02	2.12	1.07	1.97	1.03	1.085	0.279
4	The school principal role that holds the school together is formal rules and policies. Maintaining a smooth running school is important.	2.43	1.02	2.53	1.05	2.46	1.02	0.573	0.567

Source: Own survey result, 2025

In parallel, the criteria by which schools define success were also rated at relatively low levels, with no significant differences between teachers and supervisors. Success defined in terms of human resource development, teamwork, and concern for people received the highest overall mean score (M = 2.43, SD = 1.105), followed by academic achievement (M = 2.35, SD = 1.375). By contrast, success based on market competitiveness and surpassing competition was rated lower (M = 2.06, SD = 1.087), while efficiency—measured through dependable delivery, smooth scheduling, and cost-effectiveness—was rated lowest (M = 1.97, SD = 0.994). Taken together, these results indicate that schools in the study area place greater emphasis on people-centered and learning-oriented outcomes, while giving limited attention to competitiveness and operational efficiency.

This overall pattern underscores the need for leadership to broaden its definition of success by integrating trust, innovation, achievement, and efficiency to strengthen institutional performance and sustainability. Evidence from comparative studies suggests that schools with strong, people-centered cultures achieve higher effectiveness, as collegiality and concern for human development foster collaboration and long-term improvement (Ismail, Khatibi, & Azam, 2022). At the same time, leadership research highlights that success in complex educational contexts requires integrative approaches that balance human development with innovation, efficiency, and adaptability (Karakose, Tülübaş, & Papadakis, 2024).

School Leadership Style

The results on school leadership styles reveal varying levels of practice across democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire approaches.

Democratic Leadership Style

Respondents rated democratic leadership style across 14 items, and the results consistently revealed relatively low mean scores, indicating limited practice of participatory leadership in the schools studied. Although teachers and supervisors provided similar ratings, supervisors tended to report slightly higher agreement, though these differences were not statistically significant.

Communication of the school's mission and vision was modestly rated (M = 2.02, SD = 0.69), reflecting limited clarity in leadership communication. Likewise, principals' communication skills with staff and students (M = 2.11, SD = 0.63), supportive behaviors such as fostering relationships (M = 2.09, SD = 0.65), and encouraging group decision-making (M = 2.01, SD = 0.66) all scored low, pointing to gaps in collaborative practices.

Table 3: Democratic Leadership Style measured with its elements

No.	Item	Teachers		Principals & Supervisors		Total		T-test	P-Value
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
1	The mission and vision of the school are well communicated to staff and students.	2.01	0.61	2.16	0.41	2.02	0.69	1.706	0.071
2	Leaders demonstrate excellent communication skill with teacher/student	2.02	0.56	2.23	0.45	2.11	0.63	1.712	0.061
3	His/her behavior develops supportive personal with the staff	2.04	0.61	2.27	0.49	2.09	0.65	1.801	0.067
4	His/her behavior changes the attitude, belief,& values of school	2.11	0.68	2.24	0.43	2.07	0.62	1.798	0.096
5	His/her behavior favors decision making by the group rather than individuals	2.09	0.67	2.14	0.41	2.01	0.66	1.758	0.098
6	His/her behavior motivates teachers by delegating the tasks	2.03	0.63	2.25	0.55	2.04	0.68	1.749	0.095
7	Principals take in to consideration staff members' interest and needs	2.05	0.69	2.31	0.51	2.05	0.69	1.750	0.096
8	The principal services as role model	2.02	0.65	2.28	0.49	2.04	0.67	1.748	0.093
9	Principals have greater willingness to take risks	2.07	0.68	2.27	0.52	2.02	0.64	1.747	0.092

10	Principals uses influence to enhance the education program rather than personal gain	2.04	0.61	2.19	0.45	2.04	0.70	1.709	0.071
11	Principals treat school community fairly and equitability with dignity and respect	2.06	0.69	2.25	0.46	2.08	0.72	1.799	0.069
12	Principals acknowledge appropriately the earned achievements of other	2.07	0.74	2.29	0.45	2.09	0.72	1.803	0.072
13	Principals encourage open communication among members and maintain respect for opinion	2.10	0.78	2.31	0.46	2.10	0.73	1.804	0.073
14	Establishing high expectation of achievements is communicated to students, teachers and parents.	2.09	0.77	2.30	0.47	2.13	0.72	1.802	0.071

Source: Own survey result, 2025

Other elements, including motivating teachers through delegation (M = 2.04, SD = 0.68), considering staff interests (M = 2.05, SD = 0.69), and serving as role models (M = 2.04, SD = 0.67), were similarly modest. Even risk-taking (M = 2.02, SD = 0.64) and using influence for educational improvement rather than personal gain (M = 2.04, SD = 0.70) showed limited endorsement. Fair and equitable treatment of the school community received one of the relatively higher ratings (M = 2.08, SD = 0.72), yet still fell below strong agreement.

Taken together, these findings suggest that while elements of democratic leadership are present, they remain weakly practiced and inconsistently perceived. Strengthening communication, collaboration, and participatory decision-making is therefore essential for principals to foster a more democratic and supportive school culture.

Autocratic Leadership Style

Respondents assessed autocratic leadership across 13 items, and the results demonstrate that this style is more strongly practiced than democratic leadership in the schools studied. Overall, mean scores were relatively high, and t-test results revealed statistically significant differences between teachers and supervisors ($p < 0.05$), with teachers consistently reporting higher agreement.

Key elements of autocratic leadership were prominently endorsed. Principals' emphasis on planning and implementation (M = 3.09, SD = 0.81), rejection of teacher or student initiatives (M = 3.13, SD = 0.83), and reliance on strong personal motivation for school success (M = 3.11, SD = 0.79) were rated highly. Similarly, behaviors such as giving detailed instructions (M = 3.26, SD = 0.73), centralized decision-making (M = 3.26, SD = 0.79), and close monitoring to avoid mistakes (M = 3.25, SD = 0.79) further underscore the dominance of directive practices. Although principals were also perceived to encourage responsibility and show personal interest in staff promotion, these actions were framed within a highly control-oriented approach. Taken together, the findings suggest that autocratic leadership is firmly embedded in the schools, characterized by centralized authority, limited initiative, and prioritization of compliance over collaboration.

This pattern highlights the need for leadership development strategies that balance directive authority with participatory practices to enhance school culture and performance. Evidence from comparative contexts shows that schools with strong participatory and people-centered cultures achieve higher effectiveness, as collegiality and shared responsibility foster collaboration and innovation (Ismail, Khatibi, & Azam, 2022). However, the persistence of autocratic tendencies in Ethiopian schools reflects a broader challenge in educational leadership, where hierarchical traditions often overshadow democratic and transformational practices. As Karakose, Tülübaş, and Papadakis (2024) argue, leadership in complex times requires integrative approaches that combine directive authority with participatory and adaptive strategies to ensure flourishing institutions.

Table 4: Autocratic Leadership Style measured with its elements

No	**Items**	**Teachers**		**Principals & Supervisors**		**Total**		**T-test**	**P-value**
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
1	The principals take into consideration planning and the implementation of the plan	3.32	0.76	3.11	0.61	3.09	0.81	-2.231	0.021

2	The principal does not accepts the initiative of teachers or students	3.41	0.79	3.14	0.63	3.13	0.83	-2.213	0.023
3	The success of the school is the result of the principals strong motivation	3.43	0.80	3.16	0.62	3.11	0.79	-2.222	0.024
4	His/her behavior takes the initiative for coordination	3.41	0.78	3.12	0.60	3.16	0.77	-2.231	0.021
5	Principals tell the detail what and how teachers /students to do tasks	3.44	0.72	3.13	0.61	3.26	0.73	-2.321	0.022
6	Decision- making is fast, with principals at the center of operation	3.34	0.71	3.21	0.63	3.26	0.79	-2.221	0.020
7	It keeps information to him/her self	3.33	0.70	3.22	0.62	3.24	0.74	-2.212	0.024
8	Principals encourage teachers or students to assume greater responsibility on the job	3.29	0.68	3.24	0.59	3.25	0.71	-2.335	0.021
9	Principals take personal interest in the promotion of workers who work hard	3.32	0.67	3.19	0.54	3.16	0.70	-2.212	0.020
10	Staff receives direct and immediate assistance towards achieving their goals.	3.29	0.66	3.15	0.55	3.19	0.68	-2.213	0.025
11	A principal encourage workers to assume greater responsibility of job	3.19	0.64	3.23	0.57	3.15	0.67	-2.222	0.023
12	A principals maintain definite standard of performance	3.21	0.65	3.24	0.59	3.17	0.69	-2.211	0.022
13	Principals monitoring of teacher to ensure no mistake are made.	3.44	0.66	3.35	0.68	3.25	0.79	-2.233	0.021

Source: Own survey result, 2025

Furthermore, the intellectual evolution of educational leadership research demonstrates that reliance on rigid, control-oriented styles is increasingly incompatible with contemporary demands for innovation, collaboration, and resilience (Özdemir, Gümüş, Kılınç, & Bellibaş, 2024). Leaders must therefore redefine their roles not only as managers of compliance but also as shapers of school culture. Symbolic and value-driven practices—such as storytelling, recognition, and modeling collaborative norms—are critical for embedding trust and cohesion within schools (Plaku, 2025).

Laissez-Faire Leadership Style

Respondents evaluated laissez-faire leadership across 12 items, and the results indicate relatively high mean scores, suggesting that this style is more strongly practiced than democratic leadership. Although differences between teachers and supervisors were not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), teachers consistently reported slightly higher ratings.

Key aspects of laissez-faire leadership were prominently endorsed. Granting maximum freedom to teachers and students ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.52$), maintaining high staff morale ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.50$), and fully utilizing staff knowledge and experience ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 0.49$) were rated highly. Similarly, principals' confidence in teachers ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.48$), loose control over staff ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.53$), and avoidance of direct leadership ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.54$) further highlight the prevalence of laissez-faire tendencies.

Additional items, such as staff making decisions independently ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.55$) and principals waiting for issues to resolve themselves ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.51$), reinforce the perception of limited directive leadership. Collectively, these findings suggest that principals in the study area often adopt a laissez-faire style characterized by minimal intervention, high autonomy for staff, and weak organizational control. While this approach may foster independence and initiative, it also risks undermining order, accountability, and long-term institutional effectiveness.

Summary of School Principal Leadership Style

The summary of Table 5 shows that principals' leadership styles vary in strength across the three domains. Democratic leadership was rated lowest overall ($M = 2.17$, $SD = 0.72$), reflecting limited practice of participatory and collaborative approaches. Autocratic leadership, by contrast, received the highest ratings from teachers ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 0.86$) but lower from supervisors ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 0.65$), with the difference found to be statistically significant ($p = 0.025$). This indicates a stronger reliance on directive and control-oriented practices among teachers' perceptions compared to supervisors. Laissez-faire leadership was also rated

relatively high (M = 3.87, SD = 0.56), suggesting that principals often adopt a hands-off approach, granting staff considerable autonomy. Collectively, these results highlight that autocratic and laissez-faire styles dominate in the schools studied, while democratic leadership remains weakly practiced.

Table 5: Summary of School Principals' Leader Styles

No	Leadership Style	Teachers		Principals and Supervisors		Total		t-test	P-Value
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
1	Democratic	2.12	0.77	2.34	0.47	2.17	0.72	1.804	0.073
2	Autocratic	3.47	0.86	3.15	0.65	3.40	0.83	-2.251*	0.025
3	Laissez-faire	3.91	0.53	3.74	0.66	3.87	0.56	-1.688	0.093

*. Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

This pattern has important implications for school culture and effectiveness. Evidence from comparative contexts demonstrates that schools with strong participatory and people-centered cultures achieve higher effectiveness, as collegiality and shared responsibility foster collaboration and long-term improvement (Ismail, Khatibi, & Azam, 2022). However, the dominance of autocratic and laissez-faire styles in Ethiopian schools reflects a leadership imbalance: directive authority constrains initiative, while excessive autonomy risks fragmentation and weak accountability. As Karakose, Tülübaş, and Papadakis (2024) argue, leadership in complex educational contexts requires integrative approaches that balance authority with participatory practices to cultivate flourishing institutions.

Moreover, the intellectual evolution of educational leadership research underscores that reliance on rigid or passive styles is increasingly incompatible with contemporary demands for innovation, collaboration, and resilience (Özdemir, Gümüş, Kılınç, & Bellibaş, 2024). Leaders must therefore redefine success not only in terms of compliance or autonomy but also through the cultivation of strong organizational cultures. Symbolic and value-driven practices—such as storytelling, recognition, and modeling collaborative norms—are critical for embedding trust and cohesion within schools (Plaku, 2025).

Pearson Correlation Statistics of Variables

The Pearson product–moment correlation coefficient was employed to examine the relationship between school culture and leadership styles. This statistic measures both the strength and direction of association between two variables, ranging from –1 to +1. A positive coefficient indicates a direct relationship, while a negative coefficient reflects an inverse association (Leary, 2004). Applying this method is essential for determining whether variations in school culture are systematically related to principals' leadership styles democratic, autocratic, or laissez-faire.

Table 6: Pearson Correlation Statistics

		Leadership styles	School Culture
Leadership style	Pearson correlation	1	980
	Sign(2_tailed)		.000
		197	197
School culture	Pearson correlation	.980	1
	Sign(2_tailed)	.000	
		197	197

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2.tailed).

As shown in Table 2, the correlation analysis revealed a very strong positive relationship between school culture and leadership styles ($r = .980$, $p < 0.05$). This result indicates that improvements in school culture are closely associated with corresponding changes in leadership practices. In other words, principals' leadership approaches are significantly shaped by the prevailing organizational culture, suggesting that fostering a positive and

cohesive school culture can directly enhance the effectiveness of leadership styles and, ultimately, school performance.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the relationship between school culture and principals' leadership styles in government secondary schools of Bishoftu Town Administration. The findings revealed that organizational culture is loosely structured, with limited shared values and beliefs but some reliance on symbolic practices. Principals' roles in fostering loyalty, innovation, and policy adherence were modestly acknowledged, while their contribution to achievement and goal accomplishment remained weak. Success criteria emphasized human resource development and academic achievement, with little focus on competitiveness and efficiency. Leadership styles varied: democratic leadership was weakly practiced, autocratic leadership was strongly embedded, and laissez-faire leadership was widely adopted. Importantly, the strong positive correlation between school culture and leadership styles underscores their interdependence in shaping school performance. Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed:

- Principals should shift from laissez-faire and autocratic tendencies toward participatory approaches that emphasize communication, collaboration, and shared decision-making, embedding organizational values and beliefs into practice.
- Comprehensive training programs should be organized by the Bishoftu Town Education Office in collaboration with the Regional Education Bureau to strengthen principals' conceptual, technical, and interpersonal leadership skills.
- Qualified individuals with backgrounds in educational leadership should be appointed to principal positions to ensure leadership effectiveness aligns with professional standards.
- **Ex**Annual forums at the town or regional level should be established to facilitate exchange of experiences, address challenges, and promote best practices in leadership and school culture.
- **Further Research:** Broader studies across different levels of the education system should be conducted to deepen understanding of school culture and leadership styles, thereby informing policy and practice.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no competing interests.

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