

Factors Affecting Teachers' Perception of Principal Leadership Behavior in International Schools of Thailand

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Abstract

Given the increasing diversity and competitiveness of international schools, understanding how leadership behaviors influence teachers' professional well-being is essential. The study aimed: (1) to identify the current level of principal leadership behavior as perceived by teachers; (2) to examine the effects of teachers' demographic characteristics on these perceptions; and (3) to analyze the relationships and direct and indirect effects among principal leadership behavior, school climate, teacher self-efficacy, and job satisfaction. Data were collected from 535 full-time teachers working in four large international schools representing American, British, International Baccalaureate, and other national curricula through purposive sampling method. The findings revealed that teachers perceived principal leadership behavior, school climate, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction at high levels. Nationality and years of teaching experience significantly influenced teachers' perceptions of principal leadership behavior, while gender, age, and educational background showed no significant differences. Correlation and path analyses demonstrated that principal leadership behavior had significant direct effects on teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction. Furthermore, school climate partially mediated the relationships between leadership behavior and both teacher outcomes. The proposed model explained substantial variance in teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction. This study contributes an integrated leadership-climate-outcome framework applicable to multicultural international school contexts. The findings highlight the importance of relational, instructional, and participatory leadership practices in fostering supportive school climates and enhancing teachers' professional well-being. The results provide practical implications for leadership development and school improvement strategies in international education settings.

Keywords: Principal leadership behavior; School climate; Teacher self-efficacy; Teacher job satisfaction; International schools; Thailand

Introduction

Educational leadership has long been recognized as a central determinant of school effectiveness, teacher performance, and student learning outcomes. Among various leadership roles within schools, the principal's leadership behavior plays a particularly critical role in shaping instructional quality, organizational climate, and teachers' professional experiences. Empirical research consistently demonstrates that leadership does not influence school success directly; rather, it exerts its impact through organizational and psychological mechanisms such as school climate, teacher motivation, and professional efficacy (Leithwood et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2008). Therefore, understanding how teachers perceive principal leadership behavior becomes essential for evaluating leadership effectiveness and promoting sustainable school improvement.

In contemporary international school settings, leadership challenges have become increasingly complex. International schools are characterized by multicultural teaching staff, diverse curriculum systems, varied professional expectations, and competitive educational markets. In Thailand, the rapid expansion of international schools over the past decade has intensified competition in areas such as teacher recruitment, professional development, school accreditation, and student enrollment. As a result, principals in these schools are required not only to manage instructional processes but also to cultivate supportive school climates and maintain teacher satisfaction within culturally diverse environments. However, despite the growth of international education in Thailand, limited empirical research has examined principal leadership behavior from teachers' perspectives in this specific context.

Existing leadership research has predominantly focused on public or national school systems. While studies have established relationships between principal leadership, school climate, teacher self-efficacy, and job satisfaction, these variables have often been examined separately rather than within an integrated analytical framework. Moreover, the mediating role of school climate in linking leadership behavior to teacher psychological outcomes has not been sufficiently tested using structural modeling approaches, particularly in international school environments. This gap limits our understanding of how leadership operates within multicultural educational contexts and how organizational conditions shape teacher well-being.

Teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction are critical indicators of professional sustainability and educational quality. Grounded in social cognitive theory, teacher self-efficacy reflects teachers' beliefs in their capability to effectively manage instructional tasks and student engagement (Bandura, 1997). High self-efficacy is associated with persistence, innovation, and resilience. Similarly, teacher job satisfaction is strongly linked to retention, organizational commitment, and overall school stability (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). In competitive international schools, maintaining high levels of teacher efficacy and satisfaction is essential not only for instructional quality but also for institutional reputation and long-term development. Therefore, identifying leadership behaviors that foster positive school climate and enhance teacher outcomes holds significant practical and societal importance.

In addition, teachers' demographic characteristics such as nationality and professional experience may shape how leadership behaviors are interpreted and evaluated. International schools employ teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds, and leadership practices may be perceived differently across cultural and professional groups. Without empirical investigation, school administrators may overlook important variations in leadership perception that affect organizational harmony and teacher engagement.

Given these considerations, this study seeks to address the need for a comprehensive examination of principal leadership behavior in international schools in Thailand. Specifically, the study aims to identify current levels of leadership behavior as perceived by teachers, examine the influence of demographic factors, and test a structural model integrating principal leadership behavior, school climate, teacher self-efficacy, and teacher job satisfaction. By synthesizing transformational leadership theory, organizational climate theory, and social cognitive theory, this research proposes an integrated leadership-climate-outcome framework applicable to multicultural international school settings.

This study contributes to academic knowledge by extending leadership research into underexplored international school contexts and empirically validating the mediating role of school climate. Furthermore, the findings provide practical guidance for educational leaders in designing leadership development programs, fostering positive school climates, and enhancing teacher professional well-being. In a rapidly globalizing education landscape, understanding effective leadership in culturally diverse environments has become not only an academic priority but also a societal necessity.

Research Objectives

1. To identify current level of principals' leadership behavior from teachers' perspective in international schools of Thailand.
2. To determine the effects of teachers' demographic factors on teachers' perception of principals' leadership behavior in international schools of Thailand.
3. To determine the relationships among the teachers' perception of principals' leadership behavior, efficacy, job satisfaction, and school climate, in international schools of Thailand.
3. To explore the impacts of teachers' efficacy, job satisfaction, and school climate on principals' leadership behavior in international schools of Thailand.

Literature Review

Several studies have emphasized the significant impact of the principal on teaching quality, teacher motivation, and the effectiveness of the school overall. Nonetheless, all of this research is still disconnected. It mainly focuses on leadership behaviour, school climate, and teacher psychological outcomes. More importantly, all of this research is mainly from international school contexts. This literature review is structured into three thematic areas to clarify the research gap and theoretical foundation.

1. Principal Leadership Behavior in School Settings

The evolution of educational leadership studies changed from task-oriented, trait-like influences to behavioural, relational and transformational influences. The Ohio State leadership studies, which were conducted early in the history of leadership studies, identified two important dimensions of leadership behaviour initiating structure and consideration (Yukl, 1998). Since the next educational leadership research surfaced, a literature raising the importance of instructional leadership and transformational leadership, where principals assist on the curriculum, supports instruction and motivate teachers. (Hallinger, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2008)

Research has established that teacher performance and school effectiveness are positively associated with leadership behaviours which are supportive, trusting and participative in nature (Robinson et al., 2008; Sergiovanni, 2009). Most of these studies were undertaken in governmental or national school systems and limited attention was paid to international schools. The leadership challenges posed in international schools were intensified due to cultural diversity and varying professional expectations of teachers.

2. School Climate as a Mediating Organizational Context

The link between leadership behaviors and the impact on teachers and students has mostly been attributed to school climate. Conceptualization of School Climate as the continuous internal characteristics of an organization; Hoy and Miskel (2005). Scholarly researches have shown that supportive leadership behaviours contribute to the development of positive school climate defined by trust, collaboration with others and professional respect (Cohen et al. 2009; Hoy et al. 1991).

It has been proposed by a few studies that the leadership indirectly affects teacher attitudes and behaviours through the school climate (Fullan, 2014; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Nonetheless, there remains very little empirical research explicitly measuring the mediating role of school climate, i.e., this is especially true when it comes to nations that have international schools. (Nalipay, 2023).

3. Teacher Self-Efficacy and Job Satisfaction as Leadership Outcomes

Teacher self-efficacy, grounded in Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, refers to teachers' beliefs in their capacity to effectively perform teaching tasks. High levels of self-efficacy are associated with persistence, instructional innovation, and professional resilience (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Leadership support and positive school climate have been identified as important contextual factors influencing efficacy beliefs.

Similarly, teacher job satisfaction has been linked to leadership behavior, professional autonomy, and organizational support (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). While prior research has examined leadership-efficacy and leadership-satisfaction relationships independently, few studies have integrated both outcomes within a single analytical framework, especially in the context of international schools.

4. Summary of the Literature Review and Knowledge Gap

In summary, existing literature confirms that principal leadership behavior, school climate, teacher self-efficacy, and job satisfaction are closely interconnected. However, three major gaps remain. First, prior studies have largely focused on public or national school systems, leaving international schools underexplored. Second, the mediating role of school climate in linking leadership behavior to teacher outcomes has not been sufficiently tested using structural modeling approaches. Third, limited research has simultaneously examined leadership behavior, school climate, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction within an integrated theoretical framework.

To address these gaps, the present study synthesizes transformational leadership theory, organizational climate theory, and social cognitive theory to examine the structural relationships among principal leadership behavior, school climate, teacher self-efficacy, and job satisfaction in international schools in Thailand. By doing so, this research extends existing leadership literature and provides empirical evidence relevant to multicultural and international educational contexts.

Conceptual Framework

This research is a research study, aiming to examine teachers' demographic factors and the factors relating to teachers' perception of principals' leadership behavior from teachers' perspective, to identify the significant effects of teachers' demographic factors on their perception of principals' leadership behavior in international schools of Thailand, as well as to determine the significant multi-relationships and impacts among the principals' leadership behavior, efficacy, job satisfaction, and school climate, from teachers' perspective in international schools of Thailand. Figure 1 below presents this study's conceptual framework.

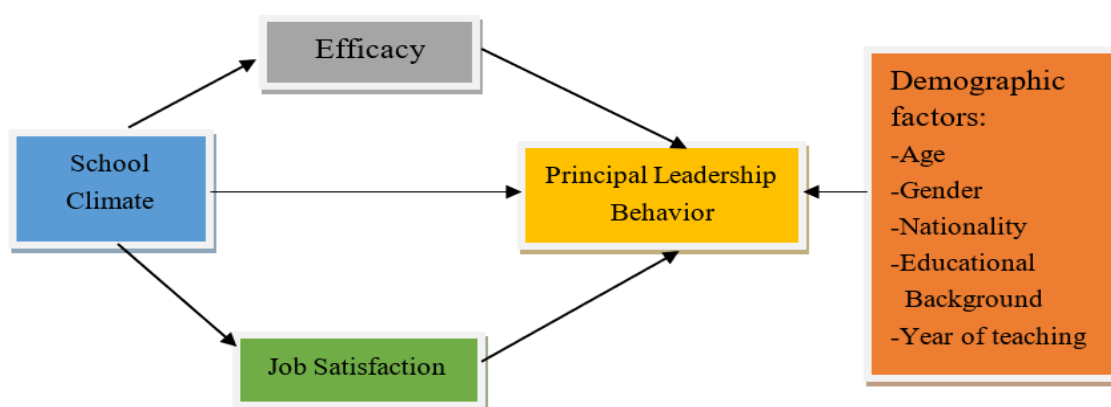


Figure.1 Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional research design to examine teachers' perceptions of principal leadership behavior and to analyze the structural relationships among principal leadership behavior, school climate, teacher self-efficacy, and teacher job satisfaction in international schools in Thailand.

The population of the study consisted of full-time teachers employed in large international schools in Thailand during the 2025 academic year. In order to ensure representation of the major curriculum systems operating in Thailand, purposive sampling was employed. Four well-

established international schools were selected to represent American, British, International Baccalaureate (IB), and other recognized national curricula. The selected schools shared common characteristics, including offering complete K–12 education programs, employing more than 120 full-time teachers, being established prior to 2008, and holding accreditation from the International Schools Association of Thailand (ISAT). A total of 608 teachers from these four schools were invited to participate in the study. Among them, 535 teachers completed the questionnaire, resulting in a response rate of 88 percent. This sample size was considered adequate for multivariate statistical analysis and structural modeling, providing sufficient statistical power to examine both group differences and causal relationships among variables.

Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire designed to measure the main constructs of the study. The instrument consisted of four major sections. The first section gathered demographic information, including gender, age, nationality, educational background, and years of teaching experience. The second section measured teachers' perceptions of principal leadership behavior, drawing upon established leadership behavior dimensions such as consideration, initiating structure, instructional support, and participatory decision-making. The third section assessed school climate, focusing on collegial support, professional collaboration, and trust within the organization. The final section measured teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction, grounded respectively in social cognitive theory and organizational behavior literature. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The instrument was reviewed by experts in educational leadership and research methodology to ensure content validity and conceptual alignment with the study framework.

Data collection was conducted during the second semester of the 2025 academic year. After obtaining permission from school administrators, questionnaires were distributed electronically via email and QR code links to eligible participants. Teachers were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that participation was voluntary. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed, and respondents were advised that their responses would be used solely for academic research purposes. Completed questionnaires were screened for completeness before being included in the analysis.

The collected data were analyzed using statistical software in several stages aligned with the research objectives. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were first calculated to determine the current levels of principal leadership behavior, school climate, teacher

self-efficacy, and job satisfaction. Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was then employed to examine whether teachers' demographic characteristics significantly influenced their perceptions of principal leadership behavior. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to explore the strength and direction of relationships among the major variables. Finally, path analysis was performed to test the direct and indirect effects among principal leadership behavior, school climate, teacher self-efficacy, and job satisfaction, and to evaluate the mediating role of school climate within the proposed conceptual framework. The explanatory power of the model was assessed using coefficient of determination (R^2) values.

Research Results

This section presents the findings of the study in accordance with the four research objectives. The results are reported systematically to ensure clear alignment between the objectives and the statistical analyses conducted.

Identify the Current Level of Principal Leadership Behavior, School Climate, Teacher Self-Efficacy, and Job Satisfaction.

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted using mean scores and standard deviations. The results indicate that teachers perceived principal leadership behavior at a high level ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 0.58$). Among the dimensions of leadership behavior, consideration behavior received the highest mean score ($M = 3.87$), followed by instructional support ($M = 3.79$) and decision-making facilitation ($M = 3.68$), while initiating structure showed slightly lower but still high levels ($M = 3.54$). These findings suggest that principals in international schools tend to emphasize relational and instructional leadership behaviors rather than strictly task-oriented approaches.

Similarly, teachers reported high levels of school climate ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.57$), teacher self-efficacy ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 0.55$), and job satisfaction ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.62$). The consistently high mean scores across all key variables indicate that international schools in Thailand generally provide positive organizational and professional environments. Therefore, Objective 1 is supported, demonstrating that teachers perceive leadership behavior and related professional outcomes at favorable levels.

Examine the Effects of Teachers' Demographic Characteristics on Perceptions of Principal Leadership Behavior.

To address the second objective, Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was performed to determine whether teachers' demographic characteristics significantly influenced their perceptions of principal leadership behavior.

The results as showed in Table 1, revealed statistically significant differences based on nationality (Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.957$, $p = 0.004$) and years of teaching experience (Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.948$, $p = 0.001$). Teachers from different national backgrounds and varying levels of professional experience perceived principal leadership behavior differently. In contrast, no statistically significant differences were found based on gender, age, or educational background.

Table 1 MANOVA Results: Effects of Demographic Factors on Perceived Principal Leadership Behavior

Demographic Variable	Wilks' Λ	F	df	p-value	Effect
Age	0.982	1.41	4, 551	0.231	Not Significant
Gender	0.994	0.86	2, 553	0.424	Not Significant
Nationality	0.957	3.28	6, 549	0.004	Significant
Educational Background	0.989	1.02	4, 551	0.397	Not Significant
Years of Teaching	0.948	4.11	6, 549	0.001	Significant

These findings indicate that cultural background and professional experience play meaningful roles in shaping how leadership behavior is interpreted in international school contexts. Thus, Objective 2 is supported, confirming that certain demographic factors significantly affect teachers' perceptions of principal leadership behavior.

Determine the Relationships Among Principal Leadership Behavior, School Climate, Teacher Self-Efficacy, and Job Satisfaction.

The third objective focused on examining the interrelationships among the major variables of the study. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to assess the strength and direction of associations.

The results in Table 2 showed that principal leadership behavior was positively and significantly correlated with teacher self-efficacy ($r = 0.41$, $p < .001$), job satisfaction ($r = 0.38$, $p < .001$), and school climate ($r = 0.46$, $p < .001$). These findings indicate moderate positive relationships among the constructs. Teachers who perceived stronger leadership behavior also reported more positive school climate, higher self-efficacy, and greater job satisfaction.

None of the correlation coefficients exceeded commonly accepted thresholds for multicollinearity, suggesting that the constructs are distinct yet meaningfully related. Therefore, Objective 3 is supported, confirming that principal leadership behavior, school climate, teacher self-efficacy, and job satisfaction are significantly interrelated.

Table 2 Pearson Correlation Analysis Results

Variables	Principal Leadership Behavior	
	Correlation coefficient	Sig.
Teacher Self-Efficacy	0.41	< .001
Job Satisfaction	0.38	< .001
School Climate	0.46	< .001

Explore the Direct and Indirect Effects Among the Variables.

To examine the structural relationships and mediating effects proposed in the conceptual framework, path analysis was conducted. Table 3–4 showed the direct and indirect effects among the variables. The results proved that principal leadership behavior had significant direct effects on teacher self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < .001$) and job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < .001$). In addition, leadership behavior had a significant positive effect on school climate ($\beta = 0.46$, $p < .001$).

School climate also significantly influenced teacher self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < .001$) and job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.34$, $p < .001$). Indirect effect analysis showed that school climate partially mediated the relationship between principal leadership behavior and both teacher self-efficacy (indirect effect = 0.13) and job satisfaction (indirect effect = 0.16). The total effects of leadership behavior on both teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction were 0.54.

The model demonstrated satisfactory explanatory power, accounting for 21% of variance in school climate, 29% in teacher self-efficacy, and 31% in job satisfaction. These findings confirm that principal leadership behavior influences teacher outcomes both directly and indirectly through school climate. Therefore, Objective 4 is fully supported.

Table 3 Path Analysis Results: Direct Effects

Path	Standardized β	t-value	p-value
Leadership $\rightarrow$ Teacher Self-Efficacy	0.41	7.92	< .001
Leadership $\rightarrow$ Job Satisfaction	0.38	7.15	< .001
Leadership $\rightarrow$ School Climate	0.46	8.87	< .001
School Climate $\rightarrow$ Job Satisfaction	0.34	6.48	< .001
School Climate $\rightarrow$ Teacher Self-Efficacy	0.29	5.36	< .001

Table 4 Indirect and Total Effects of Principal Leadership Behavior

Outcome Variable	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect (via Climate)	Total Effect
Teacher Self-Efficacy	0.41	0.13	0.54
Job Satisfaction	0.38	0.16	0.54

Note: R^2 (School Climate) = 0.21; R^2 (Teacher Self-Efficacy) = 0.29; R^2 (Job Satisfaction) = 0.31

In summary, all the findings demonstrated that teachers in international schools in Thailand perceive principal leadership behavior and related professional conditions at high levels. Demographic differences exist based on nationality and teaching experience. Principal leadership behavior is positively associated with school climate, teacher self-efficacy, and job satisfaction, and school climate partially mediates the relationship between leadership behavior and teacher outcomes. Collectively, the results validate the proposed leadership–climate–outcome framework and provide empirical evidence supporting the structural relationships among the variables.

Discussions

This study examined how principal leadership behavior influences teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction in international schools in Thailand, with school climate functioning as a mediating mechanism. This discussion focuses on the most significant results as follows:

Leadership Behavior and School Climate

One of the most important findings of this study is the strong positive relationship between principal leadership behavior and school climate. The path analysis demonstrated that leadership behavior significantly predicted school climate, confirming that leadership practices are fundamental in shaping organizational conditions. This result aligns with organizational climate theory (Hoy & Miskel, 2014), which posits that leadership behaviors directly influence the internal characteristics of schools, including trust, collaboration, and professional respect.

The finding is also consistent with transformational and instructional leadership research, which suggests that leaders who demonstrate consideration, provide instructional support, and encourage participation cultivate more supportive and collegial school environments (Leithwood et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2008). In the context of international schools—where teachers originate from diverse cultural and professional backgrounds—relational leadership behaviors appear particularly influential. This reinforces the argument that leadership effectiveness in multicultural

settings depends not only on structural management but also on interpersonal and participatory practices (Walker & Qian, 2021).

Mediating Role of School Climate

Another significant contribution of this study lies in confirming the partial mediating role of school climate between principal leadership behavior and teacher outcomes. While prior studies have suggested indirect pathways, empirical testing of this mediation within international schools has been limited. The findings demonstrate that leadership does not merely affect teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction directly; rather, it operates by shaping the organizational climate in which teachers work. This supports change-oriented leadership perspectives such as Fullan's theory, which emphasizes relational capacity and coherence-building as foundations for sustainable improvement. Recent empirical studies also highlight that teachers' perceptions of collegiality, trust, and professional support significantly influence their well-being and motivation (Nalipay, 2023; OECD, 2024). By empirically modeling school climate as a mediating variable, this study extends previous leadership research and provides structural evidence for the leadership-climate-outcome pathway.

Leadership Influence on Teacher Self-Efficacy and Job Satisfaction

The direct effects of principal leadership behavior on teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction further confirm the psychological dimension of leadership impact. Consistent with Bandura's social cognitive theory, supportive leadership behaviors may strengthen teachers' confidence in their instructional capabilities by providing feedback, professional guidance, and recognition. This aligns with meta-analytic findings suggesting that leadership enhances teacher efficacy by creating enabling conditions for professional growth (Ozdogru et al., 2025).

Similarly, the positive association between leadership and job satisfaction corresponds with existing literature demonstrating that professional autonomy, organizational support, and participatory leadership are key predictors of teacher satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). In competitive international school markets, maintaining teacher satisfaction is particularly important for retention and institutional sustainability. Therefore, leadership behaviors emphasizing relational and instructional support may serve as strategic mechanisms for improving long-term organizational stability.

New Knowledge from Research

This study generates new knowledge by empirically validating an integrated leadership–climate–outcome structural model within the context of international schools in Thailand. The findings demonstrate that principal leadership behavior functions as a primary antecedent variable influencing teacher self–efficacy and job satisfaction both directly and indirectly through school climate as a partial mediating mechanism. By structurally modeling these relationships, the study clarifies that leadership effectiveness in multicultural educational environments operates through a relational–organizational–psychological pathway, where leadership behaviors shape school climate, which in turn strengthens teachers’ professional confidence and satisfaction. Unlike prior research that examined these variables separately or primarily within public school systems, this study synthesizes transformational leadership theory, organizational climate theory, and social cognitive theory into a unified explanatory framework applicable to culturally diverse international school contexts. The model provides a conceptual and empirical foundation for understanding how leadership practices translate into sustainable teacher outcomes in globally oriented educational institutions.

Conclusion

This study confirms that principal leadership behavior significantly influences teacher self–efficacy and job satisfaction in international schools in Thailand, both directly and indirectly through the mediating role of school climate. The findings validate an integrated leadership–climate–outcome model, demonstrating that relational and instructional leadership practices contribute to positive organizational conditions and enhanced teacher well–being. Demographic differences further highlight the importance of culturally responsive leadership in multicultural settings. Overall, the study provides empirical evidence that effective leadership in international schools operates through organizational climate mechanisms to sustain teacher professional development and institutional stability.

Suggestions

Based on the validated leadership–climate–outcome model, international school administrators should prioritize relational, instructional, and participatory leadership practices that foster positive school climates. Since school climate partially mediates the influence of leadership on teacher self–efficacy and job satisfaction, principals are encouraged to strengthen professional

trust, collegial collaboration, and shared decision-making processes within their institutions. Leadership development programs for international schools should therefore emphasize intercultural communication, instructional guidance, and climate-building competencies to address the diverse expectations of multicultural teaching staff.

Given the significant differences found across nationality and years of teaching experience, school leaders should adopt culturally responsive leadership strategies that recognize varied professional norms and perceptions of authority. Regular climate assessments and teacher well-being surveys may assist administrators in monitoring organizational conditions and proactively addressing emerging challenges.

For future research, longitudinal designs are recommended to examine how leadership behavior and school climate influence teacher outcomes over time. Comparative studies across countries or curriculum systems may further extend understanding of leadership effectiveness in international education contexts. Additionally, future models may incorporate variables such as teacher work engagement, organizational commitment, or student achievement to expand the explanatory framework.

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