How School Leadership Affects Teachers' Professionalism via Trust in Administrator in Bureaucratic School Structures

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Abstract

School leadership is a concept being discussed in recent studies regarding educational administration. This study examines the relationship between school leadership and teacher professionalism, focusing on the mediating effects of trust in the administrator on the relationship between school leadership and teacher professionalism. The study has adopted a cross-sectional survey design. The sample consists of 269 (Türkiye) and 134 (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus) teachers. The structural equation model was used to test the direct and indirect effects of the variables. Considering the findings of the study, school leadership is positively related to teacher professionalism as mediated by trust in the school administrator. In conclusion, the researchers recommend that school leaders implement practices that encourage powerful trust among teachers in their administrators.

Keywords: school leadership, trust, teacher professionalism, educational administration

Introduction

School organizations and educational settings face intense challenges and pressures from rapidly transforming external environments due to global, economic, and technological changes. Presently, the most important element in enabling organizations to overcome these challenges is human capital. In this regard, the improvement of schools and the role of teachers' professional development remains an important topic for all education systems (Creemers et al., 2012, p. 3). In much of the Western world, as well as Türkiye and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), the need for teachers has increased. As a result, the professional criteria for becoming a teacher have become less selective in

order to meet this demand (Price & Weatherby, 2018; Walters, 2000, p. 252). In the current globally competitive environment, demands for high-quality education show the importance of teacher professionalism (Goodwin, 2020; Liew, 2012).

Scholars see teacher professionalism as a substantial trait (Price & Weatherby, 2018). Teacher professionalism refers to teachers taking their work seriously and showing commitment and effort beyond minimum expectations to satisfy student needs and improve school outcomes (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Teacher professionalism has become an important focus of research for the purpose of improving the quality of teachers' work, supporting students' learning process, increasing teacher effectiveness, and improving teacher performance (Demirkasımoğlu, 2010; Kılınç, 2014; Koşar, 2015; Özdemir, 2020; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006; Yalçın & Ereş, 2021). Over the past two decades, research findings have shown that teacher professionalism has a positive influence on school outcomes, including student achievement, student learning, teacher performance, and the quality of education (Day, 2002; Sweetland & Hoy, 2000; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006). Therefore, a strong emphasis is placed on the professional development of teachers in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) international assessments (e.g., PISA, TIMMS, and TALIS) to increase the quality of education in international standards, to ensure economic productivity, and to attain worldwide competitiveness (Ledger et al., 2019; Covay Minor et al., 2016; Schleicher, 2017). Particularly under the shadow of political and academic quality debates, such as the globalization of standards and the marketization of education (Akiba & Le Tendre, 2018, p. 1), researchers have focused on teacher professionalism to improve education systems, although researchers vary greatly in different contexts (Russell & Martin, 2016, p. 175). To overcome certain challenges, schools should be designed with a structure that supports teachers in adapting to changing conditions beyond their mechanical, bureaucratic, and hierarchical conditions. Fostering teacher professionalism, grounded in trust, and transforming schools into professional learning communities are important practices for educational quality. Studies reveal that one of the many factors affecting teacher professionalism is school leadership styles (Day et al., 2011, p. 10; Joo, 2020; Tschannen-Moran, 2009).

School leadership has become a primary topic for contemporary researchers studying in the area of Educational Administration and Leadership (EAL) from 2010 to 2023. Previous studies in this area aimed at revealing the parameters of effective school leadership. Discussions were mostly centered on different leadership styles, such as instructional leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Özdemir & Yalçın, 2019), transformational leadership (Atasoy, 2020; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Sun & Leithwood, 2012), and distributed leadership (Çoban & Atasoy, 2020; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Özdemir & Demircioğlu, 2015). To redesign a more inclusive and holistic form of these leadership styles, focusing on the different functions of school leadership, Leithwood (2012) proposed a new dimension by emphasizing the complex nature of leadership as a catalyst, an indispensable component for all other parameters, and drew attention to the importance of direct and indirect influences on school outcomes under the school leadership scheme. Whereas previous studies focused on school effectiveness or teacher capacity and school administrator capacity to improve classroom practices, Leithwood et al. (2019) studied the influence of school leadership on school outcomes within a framework of variables including rational, emotional, and organizational dimensions. They also discussed the effects of school leadership in a holistic structure.

Research findings suggest that such an inclusive and holistic approach to school leadership is central to promoting school management and teachers' professional development (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 208;

Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Özdemir & Yalçın, 2019; Robinson et al., 2008; Vanblaere & Devos, 2016). School leaders try to enable teachers' professional development through factors like trust among teachers, teacher collaboration (Day, 2002; Sweetland & Hoy, 2000; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006), teacher professionalism, and job satisfaction (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Goddard et al., 2015; Joo, 2020). In order to increase teacher professionalism in schools with strong bureaucratic structures, conditions encouraging trust between teachers and school leaders should be created (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Research findings show that teachers' trust in school administrators has a considerable effect on their professional behavior (Dean, 2011; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Koşar, 2015).

Even though the existing research offers some evidence concerning school leadership and teacher professionalism, it remains unclear which mediating processes behind this leadership explain the impact on teachers' professional development. International evidence shows that teacher professionalism remains a disputed area, and researchers recognize that professionalism that considers opportunities for developing teachers' practice and improving school systems is required in most thriving educational systems (British Educational Research Association [BERA] and the Royal Society for the Encouragement of the Arts [BERA-RSA], 2014, pp. 8, 19). Although limited evidence exists in the context of the emotional path to identify the relationships between school leadership and teacher professionalism in Türkiye and TRNC, the mediating model constructed with trust in school leaders is expected to anchor these linkages. The impact of school leadership practices in Türkiye and TRNC has significance on the development of teacher professionalism. However, limited studies exist on school leadership in both countries. Thus, this study aims to help researchers and education policymakers understand the mediating effects of trust in the administrator on the relationship between teacher professionalism and school leadership.

Because the ultimate target of improving teacher professionalism is to increase student learning (Supovitz et al., 2010; Thoonen et al., 2011), this research can provide guiding evidence for future studies investigating the relationship between teacher professionalism and student achievement through considering school leadership practices. The results of this study may also offer a conceptual framework for understanding sociocultural contexts and school-based realities to develop teacher professionalism in countries with rigid bureaucracy. Apart from defining theoretical concepts in the literature, few studies have been conducted on the impacts of these concepts on teacher professionalism in Türkiye and TRNC (Cerit, 2012; Kılınç, 2014; Koşar, 2015; Polat, 2020). In this context, the researchers hope to contribute to the literature by analyzing the effect of school leadership and teachers' trust in administration on teacher professionalism in a school context. These variables may also influence school effectiveness and teaching efficacy. Thus, the current study focuses on building relationships of trust among school members as a crucial step toward improving the school and creating effective classroom outcomes. It also focuses on understanding school members' trusting relationships, improving school leadership practices, and identifying perceptions of teachers' professionalism within the school atmosphere.

The cultural context shapes educational structuring and the order of societies. Research indicates that the approaches of Turkish citizens and TRNC citizens differ in the dimensions of uncertainty avoidance and individualism/collectivism (Kitapçı, 2009; Malach-Pines & Kaspi-Baruch, 2008; Şekerli & Gerede, 2011). Influenced by Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, English, Turkish, Greek, and bicommunal structures throughout the historical process (Kitapçı, 2009), we see a strong possibility of developing a synthesis motif in the cultural context of TRNC. There is evidence showing that individualism/collectivism,

uncertainty/avoidance, masculinity/femininity, and power/distance have a significant effect on management supply, organizational culture, and job commitment in TRNC (Adeshola et al., 2021; Şekerli & Gerede, 2011; Yıldızlar, 2010). Considering that cultural and social aspects of school structure in Türkiye and TRNC are quite distinct from those in Western countries and that their school structure has a more rigid hierarchy, this research becomes noteworthy as it is centered on Western theories and models. Given that the terms of school leadership, trust in the administrator, and teacher professionalism have lately become popular in the area of educational administration, this study contributes greatly to the literature by demonstrating the structural relationship of school leadership on teacher professionalism mediated by trust in the administrator. The research questions that have shaped this study are listed below:

1. Does school leadership directly affect teacher professionalism?
2. Does school leadership indirectly affect teacher professionalism mediated by trust in the administrator?

Theoretical Framework

The conceptual model of this research is derived from certain theoretical and empirical studies in the area of EAL (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Conceptual Model
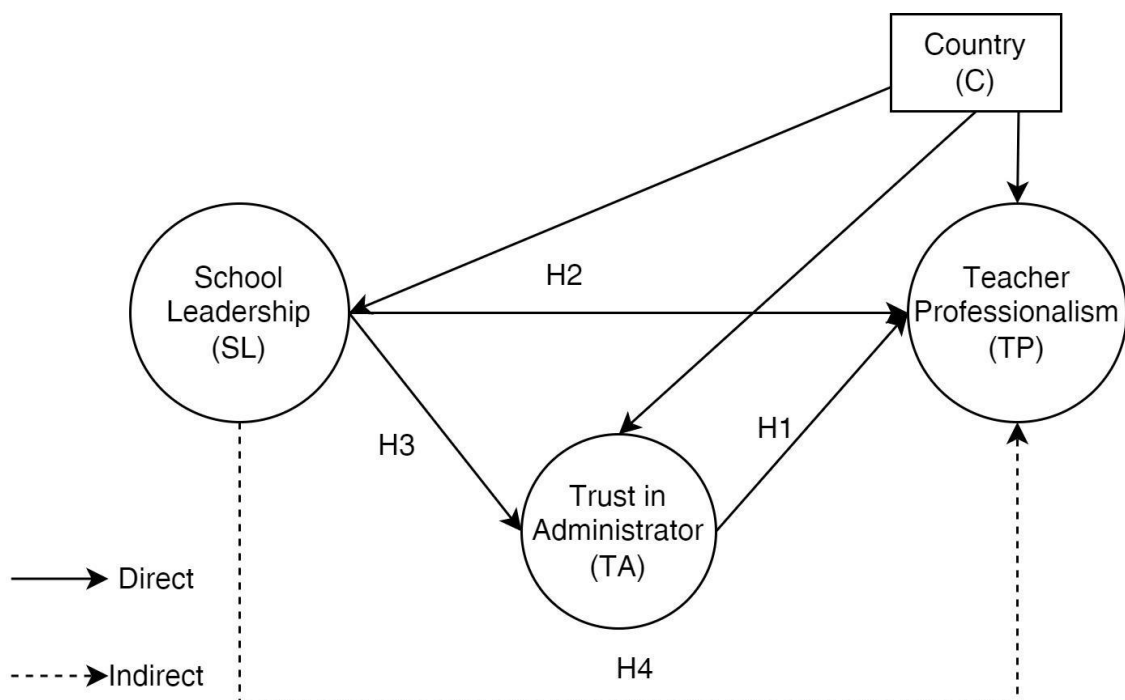
The conceptual model involves four hypotheses. In this article, a discussion of theoretical and empirical studies for each term in the model is presented, which provides a basis for each hypothesis. The model in question (see Figure 1) primarily refers to the findings of previous research, revealing that school leadership is directly related to teacher professionalism through a mediated effect of trust in the administrator. The theoretical framework of this study also relies on the organizational learning theory, which provides insights into designing fruitful professional development programs to meet teachers' needs at all stages of their careers (Morrison, 2002, pp. 17, 111). This study is particularly related to the relational context. Therefore, motivational theory is also included in the study. Social studies have examined the states of feelings and dispositions, like trust and teacher professionalism, within the framework of an emotional path model (Leithwood, 2012, p. 47; Leithwood et al., 2019). This model is focused on the principle that if school principals create a positive school climate based on trust, they contribute to teachers' willingness to improve themselves in their teaching processes. This emotional path draws attention to the motivational backdrop of effective schools. This means that the emotional path comprises the sentiments, tendencies, or affective states of teachers, which form the nature of their school settings. Studies point out that leaders' attachment to four paths (i.e., set directions, develop people, develop the organization, and improve the instructional program) boosts student learning (Leithwood et al., 2010; Sun & Leithwood, 2015; Leithwood et al., 2017, p. 1). The emotional path particularly, including trust in the school leader and teacher professionalism, is critical in this model in shaping leaders' success and in improving rational, organizational, and family paths. It also appears that the emotional path indirectly affects stakeholders at schools (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood & Louis, 2012, pp. 19, 34; Robinson et al., 2008). The hypotheses claimed in this study are listed below:

H_1: Trust in the administrator has a positive impact on teacher professionalism.
H_2: School leadership has a positive impact on teacher professionalism.
H_3: School leadership has a positive impact on trust in the administrator.
H_4: School leadership has a positive indirect effect on teacher professionalism.

Literature Review

Teacher Professionalism

School leaders can make teachers feel valued and committed to their profession by involving them in decision-making processes, increasing their job satisfaction, and improving working conditions (Price & Weatherby, 2018). Research on the meaning of teacher professionalism began in the 1980s (Lai & Lo, 2007). In these early studies, teacher professionalism emerged as one of the sub-dimensions of collegial leadership and academic and environmental pressure composing a school climate (Sweetland & Hoy, 2000; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Tschannen-Moran (2009) explained teacher professionalism as "colleagues take their work seriously, demonstrate a high level of commitment, and go beyond minimum expectations to meet the needs of students" (p. 232). Teacher professionalism involves teachers' perceptions about their colleagues and is characterized by respecting their colleagues' competence and expertise, working collaboratively, holding high expectations to be influential innovators (Leithwood et al. 1999, p. 19), exhibiting a high level of commitment, and being engaged in the teaching and learning processes enthusiastically (Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Teacher professionalism is also characterized by possessing a powerful technical culture (knowledge foundation), service ethic (committed to meeting students' needs), professional commitment (powerful, personal, and communal identity), and professional autonomy (autonomy over classroom practices; Day, 2002). According to Furlong (2001, p. 118), teacher professionalism covers professional knowledge, which improves teaching and autonomy. In summary, teachers' professional behavior contributes to learning and teaching through providing school improvement.

Trust in Administrators

Trust, one of the most essential elements of organizational behavior, is acknowledged as a vital concept at academically vigorous and effective schools. A multifaceted and complex concept, trust is defined by Baier (1986) as "reliance on others' competence and willingness to look after, rather than harm, things one cares about which are entrusted to their care." Trust is characterized and identified by Tschannen-Moran (2014), who is considerably inspired by 16 different and sometimes overlapping conceptualizations, as a "willingness to make oneself vulnerable to someone else in the belief that your interests or something that you care about will not be harmed." This means that, for school principals, being trustworthy to teachers means confirming, allowing, and to some degree accepting teachers' demonstrations of vulnerability toward them. School administrators can extend trust by exhibiting a degree of vulnerability to other teachers in order to foster trust among all school staff. Based on the common findings of researchers, trust can be identified as a multifaceted structure that includes the willingness to accept risk by judging a reliable party as helpful, fair, open, trustworthy, and capable.

Teachers' trust supports school goals set for student learning and school improvement. It is conceptualized as the belief or expectation toward the teacher's principal, colleagues, students, and parents in the context of the emotional path model. Trust is a mutual, dynamic, and indispensable basis for school leadership, school improvement (Bryk & Schneider, 2003), systemic change (Louis, 2007),

and professional development. For an effective school, leaders must believe that teachers act in the best interest of students. Similarly, teachers must acknowledge that their principals act to reach organizational goals, including school improvement.

School leaders who generate bonds of trust form a working environment that inspires teachers to improve professional learning skills and act individually and collaboratively to reach higher levels of effort and student success (Forsyth & Adams, 2014, p. 95; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). By building a trustworthy school climate among staff, school leaders can prompt teachers to take risks concerning school improvement processes by sharing ideas or initiating groundbreaking practices (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). To reach school' goals, they should build trust by ensuring personalized support, modeling, and setting high-performance goals (Ross & Gray, 2006). If school leaders succeed in establishing effective and open communication with teachers based on trust, then they strengthen the teachers' belief that there are no practices hidden from them at school and increase the quality of education (Yılmaz, 2005). In this respect, school leaders can provide teachers with confidence in their behaviors by establishing interpersonal interactions and positive communication.

School Leadership

Because of rapidly increasing responsibilities, roles, and functions of school principals in recent decades, school leadership has been defined by researchers in different ways. Current studies on EAL focus on examining new leadership styles, such as instructional leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 1996), transformational leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Sun & Leithwood, 2012), and distributed leadership (Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Özdemir & Demircioğlu, 2015). The influences of school principals on processes, structures, and outputs at school have also been redefined. To redesign a more inclusive and holistic form of these leadership styles, which concentrate on different functions of school leadership, Leithwood (2012) proposed a new perspective. The concept of school leadership used in this research is rooted in the Integrated Leadership Model (Printy et al., 2009) and Ontario Leadership (Leithwood, 2012, p. 3), outlined in studies that consider leadership approaches as a whole. The school leadership framework focuses on four leadership areas: setting direction for stakeholders via the behavior of the principal, building relationships among people, improving the organization to back up desired practices, and developing the teaching program (Leithwood et al., 2017, pp. 137–154; Leithwood et al., 2019). Research findings suggest that such an inclusive and holistic approach to school leadership is central to promoting school improvement and student learning (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 134; Hallinger & Heck, 1996). In fact, studies on school leadership focus on academic achievement. Yet these studies lack empirical evidence regarding the effects on teacher variables (Leithwood, 2012, p. 5; Leithwood et al., 2019; Özdemir & Yalçın, 2019; Robinson et al., 2008).

Relationship between Trust in Administrator and Teacher Professionalism

Trust has been positively associated with school efficacy (Goddard et al., 2001), school atmosphere (Hoy et al., 1996), well-being, and its relative effect on student outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2010). Evidence concerning trust in school leaders by teachers is emphasized as a key contributor to school improvement (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). School principals can create positive

school climate by promoting collaborative teamwork among teachers, providing options and support for their career development, and engaging in teacher monitoring, evaluation, and professional development. Previous studies point out that trust is linked with teacher professionalism to characterize a successful school (Dean, 2011; Koşar, 2015). If school leaders give teachers the confidence to develop the types of support they need for risk-taking and professional development, they will focus on thinking about innovative ways to adapt to new situations rather than blindly adhering to rules and regulations (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Cloke & Goldsmith, 2002, p. 46; Louis & Kruse, 1995, pp. 36–38). Teachers' emotional path can be consistently understood by considering the dimensions of trust that include goodness, reliability, honesty, capacity, beliefs, and openness (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998). However, empirical evidence to support these claims is insufficient. The purpose of this study is to contribute to this evidence. So, it is hypothesized that trust in the school administrator predicts teacher professionalism (H_1).

Relationship between School Leadership and Teacher Professionalism

Research on school leadership suggests that teachers' professional development is critical to school improvement and educational reform focusing on students' learning goals (Leithwood, 2012, pp. 34, 35; Leithwood et al., 2019). Moreover, evidence is found that leaders impact teaching practices and learning processes through their effective leadership behaviors (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood & Louis, 2012, p. 34; Robinson et al., 2008). There is even more research that emphasizes teacher professionalism (Kent, 2004), relationships between teacher professionalism and school leadership (Day et al., 2011, p. 10), school culture (Kılınç, 2014; Stoll & Louis, 2007, p. 112), school improvement (Cansoy & Parlar, 2017), views of teachers regarding professionalism (Ifanti & Fotopoulopou, 2011), the necessity for collective teacher efficiency (Hoy et al., 2006), and (mediated) influences of leadership on teacher professionalism (Heck & Hallinger, 2009). Research also demonstrates that school leaders can build a professional learning community by explaining school goals, providing collaborative opportunities, and genuinely participating in school decisions (Brinson & Steiner, 2007, p. 3; Leithwood et al., 2019; Li et al., 2016; Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017). Some research findings reveal that a direct negative relationship is found between school leadership and teacher professionalism (Joo, 2020; Leithwood et al., 2009). More evidence is needed from different cultures and different educational systems to reveal the influences of school leadership on teacher professionalism. School leaders concentrate on students' achievement and learning to improve school outcomes, and they structure their decisions and behaviors according to this goal (DuFour, 2002; Leithwood & Sun, 2012). Leaders contribute to the professional development of teachers by managing and sustaining a professional learning culture among teachers in their schools (Haiyan et al., 2017). Previous research evidence indicates that school leadership greatly affects teachers' professional development (e.g., Hallinger et al., 2014; Özdemir, 2019; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). In line with the aims of the study, we define school leadership as a model used by school principals to create a learning vision, provide learning support, guide the curriculum, and increase teacher professionalism and student achievement. In this research, it is hypothesized that school leaders' behaviors predict teacher professionalism (H_2). In addition, the present study also concentrates on the mediated effect of trust in school administration on the relationship between school leadership and teacher professionalism (H_4).

Relationship between School Leadership and Trust in Administrator

To ensure more effective teaching in school settings, school leaders can take a critical role in developing and sustaining relational trust (Tschannen Moran, 2009), which procures autonomy for the teachers (Lai & Lo, 2007). Findings of some studies point out that teachers' trust in their school principals is linked with multifaceted dimensions, such as leadership practices at school, teaching standards, and school efficacy (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Hoy et al., 1992; Koşar & Yalçınkaya, 2013; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998). Other studies claim that the level of trust in school leaders strengthens cooperation (Cerit, 2009), organizational commitment (Akın & Orman, 2015; Lee et al., 2011; Türköz et al., 2013), and motivation of teachers while working with their colleagues (Altunay, 2017; Cantaş & Kavas, 2015). In this research, it is hypothesized that school leadership attitudes of administrators predict trust in the administration (H_3).

Method

Research Model

The current study aims to analyze direct and indirect relationships among school leadership, trust in the school administrator, and the level of professional behavior of teachers. A cross-sectional survey design was used to study the influences of school leadership on teacher professionalism and school performance in Türkiye. Trust in the administrator was regarded as the mediating variable.

Sampling

The context of the study included teachers at secondary schools in the Karaköprü, Haliliye, and Eyyübiye districts of Şanlıurfa province in Türkiye and the Lefkoşa, Gazimagosa, and İskele districts of TRNC during the 2020–2021 academic year. The sample was formed with teachers at public secondary schools in Türkiye (269) and TRNC (134) by using a random sampling method. The demographic information of the teachers examined within the scope of the research is given in Table 1.

Table 1

The Sampling of the Study

Variables	Subgroup	N	Percent (%)
Country	Türkiye	269	66.7
	TRNC	134	33.3
Gender	Male	146	36.2
	Female	257	63.8
Education Level	Graduate	336	83.4
	Postgraduate	67	16.6
Seniority (years)	1–5	180	44.7
	6–10	58	14.4
	11–15	60	14.9
	16 and more	105	26.1
Working Time with Current Principal (years)	0–1	145	36.0
	2	116	28.8
	3–4	89	22.1

5 and more	53	13.2

Data Collection and Instrumentation

The data collection method applied within the scope of the research consists of two parts. In the first part, a personal information form was employed that included country (0 = TRNC; 1 = Türkiye), gender (0 = male; 1 = female), education level (1 = graduate; 2 = postgraduate), seniority (1 = 1–5 years; 2 = 6–10 years; 3 = 11–15 years; 4 = 16 years and above), and working time with current principal (1 = 0–1 years; 2 = 2 years, 3 = 3–4 years; 4 = 5 years or more). In the second part of the data collection method, school leadership, trust in administrator, and teacher professionalism scales were used by the teachers in the sample. In this study, the country variable, which is thought to have affected the variables, was taken as the control variable. Necessary permissions were obtained from relevant authorities, such as Şanlıurfa Directorate of National Education and TRNC Ministry of National Education and Culture. Research data were collected with a prepared online form.

School Leadership Scale (SL)

We used a school leadership scale developed by Leithwood (2012) and adapted to the Turkish context by Yalçın and Atasoy (2021). We employed this scale to analyze the leadership behaviors of school leaders. The scale comprises of four sub-dimensions and 22 items. The sub-dimensions are Set Directions (e.g., "To what extent do your school leaders give staff a sense of overall purpose?"), Develop People (e.g., "To what extent do your school leaders model a high level of professional practice?"), Develop the Organization (e.g., "To what extent do your school leaders ensure carefully coordinated participation in decisions about school improvement?"), and Improve the Instructional Program (e.g., "To what extent do your school leaders help staff improve their instructional programs based on student data?"). In the past, this scale was repeatedly used with relatively high reliability, such as .94 and .98, as reported in studies by Yalçın and Atasoy (2021). In our study, teachers gave responses to a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 "never agree" to 5 "totally agree." We calculated the Cronbach Alpha value of the school leadership in this study as .98.

Teacher Professionalism Scale (TP)

This scale was originally designed by Tschannen-Moran et al. (2006) and adapted to the Turkish context by Cerit (2012). We used this scale to examine teachers' professional behaviors. The original form of the TP scale consists of one dimension and eight items. Due to the explanatory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), the Turkish version included only seven items in this study. Thus, an EFA was performed on seven items of the scale. The analysis results determined Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test as .88, and the explained variance was found as 64,678. The scoring options on the scale ranged from 1 "never agree" to 5 "totally agree." Some items on the scale are as follows: "Teachers in this school can make professional decisions" and "Teachers are dedicated to helping students."

Trust in Administrator (TA)

The trust in administrator scale used in this study was developed by Yılmaz (2005) as a sub-dimension of the four-dimensional (sensibility to workers, trust in administrator, openness to modernity, and communication climate) organizational trust scale. This scale originated to analyze trust-based relationships between school leaders and teachers and consisted of one dimension and 12 items. The scoring options on the scale ranged from 1 "never agree" to 6 "totally agree." Some items on the scale are as follows: "School administrator is straightforward and honest" and "Performance evaluations are carried out fairly and objectively."

Yılmaz (2005) determined the reliability of the subscale to be .95, and the distribution of the factor loads of the items were found to be between 0.641 and 0.810. In this study, the factor structure of the scales was tested with CFA, based on the data collected for validity and reliability analyses of the scales. Results, standardized load values, ranged between .428–.918 for school leadership, .696–.922 for trust in administrator, and .568–.876 for teacher professionalism. The validity results for each scale are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Fit Indices Based on CFA Results

Scales	$\chi^2(df)$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
SL	587.739 (227)	.944	.937	.063	.059
TA	171.912 (54)	.953	.943	.074	.024
TP	39.982 (13)	. 975	.960	.072	.031

In Table 2, total fit indices reveal that the measurement model fits the data: $\chi^2/df < 5$; the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is < .080; comparative fit index (CFI) is > .900; Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) is > .900; and standardized root mean square residual value (SRMR) is < .050 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). To detect reliability of the scale, items' correlations with each other, total score of the scale and the item subtotal, and Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients were calculated (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). We found the Cronbach alpha coefficient values as .980 for school leadership, .973 for trust in administrator, and .908 for teacher professionalism (p < .05). Regarding the data in the current study, the scales are reliable.

Data Analysis

Means, standard deviations, scale reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha), and bivariate correlations among all variables of scales were analyzed using IBM SPSS 25. We also performed DFA analyses through Mplus 8.3 to test each research hypothesis. Moreover, before the analysis of the data set, the presence of outliers in the data was determined by using frequency values and Mahalanobis distances. Although we included the country as a control variable when analyzing the research model, we also conducted a Multiple Group Confirmatory Factor Analysis (MGCFA) to test whether the scales revealed similar response

patterns across the two countries. For each overarching scale or factor, configural, metric, and scalar invariance was attained, since for each country the values of RMSEA were determined to be smaller than .08 and the values of CFI were higher than .90, and $.01 \geq \Delta CFI \geq -.01$ (Brown et al., 2017; Kyriakides et al., 2019). The findings of the MGCFA further underpinned our decision to test the impact of school leadership on trust in the administrator and teacher professionalism by performing separate within-country analyses. Finally, structural equation modeling (SEM) was done via Mplus 8.3 (Muthén & Muthén, 2019, p. 55) to analyze the indirect influence of school leadership on teacher professionalism as mediated by trust in the school administrator and controlled by the teacher's country.

Findings

First, we conducted a t-test, descriptive statistical analysis, and a Pearson correlation analysis.

Table 3

Results of the T-test Based on Countries

Scales	Country	N	M	SD	*df*	*t*	*p*
SL	Türkiye	269	3.93	.91	401	4.417	.000*
	TRNC	134	3.51	.85			
TA	Türkiye	269	5.14	1.07	401	1.412	.159
	TRNC	134	4.99	1.04			
TP	Türkiye	269	4.13	.70	401	2.854	.005*
	TRNC	134	3.92	.66			

Notes. N = 403; M = Mean; SD = standard deviation; SL = school leadership; TA = trust in administrator; TP = teacher professionalism. $*p < .001$

When the t-test results of the countries are examined according to the variables, school leadership and teacher professionalism differ significantly in favor of Türkiye. In contrast, the scores of trust in the administrator do not differ significantly between countries (see Table 3).

Table 4 presents the means, standard deviations, results of reliability analysis, and Pearson correlations among the variables.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Correlations among Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	α	1	2	3
1. SL	3.79	.91	.98	1	.80**	.59**
2. TA	5.09	1.06	.97		1	.55**
3. TP	4.12	.71	.91			1

Notes. n = 403; SD = standard deviation; α = Cronbach alpha; SL = school leadership; TA = trust in administrator; TP = teacher professionalism. ∗∗$p < .01$.

Table 4 illustrates that all scales have acceptable Cronbach's alpha coefficients (α), ranging from .91 to .98. The reliability of the scales is well above the .70 value (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994, p. 265) that is accepted as the limit in many studies. The mean responses to school leadership, trust in the administrator, and teacher professionalism show relatively high agreement (3.79–5.09). When the correlation coefficients between the variables are examined, a positive and highly significant relationship between school leadership and trust in the administrator is seen ($r = .80$, $p < .01$). The Pearson correlation results illustrate a positive and moderate relationship between school leadership and teacher professionalism ($r = .59$, $p < .01$), and a low-level positive significant relationship between school leadership and country ($r = .22$, $p < .01$). A positive and moderately significant relationship between trust in administrator and teacher professionalism variables is observed ($r = .55$, $p < .01$). After preliminary analyses, we conducted a SEM to understand the contribution of direct and indirect influences on teacher professionalism. Parameter estimates for the model are given in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Standardized Model Results
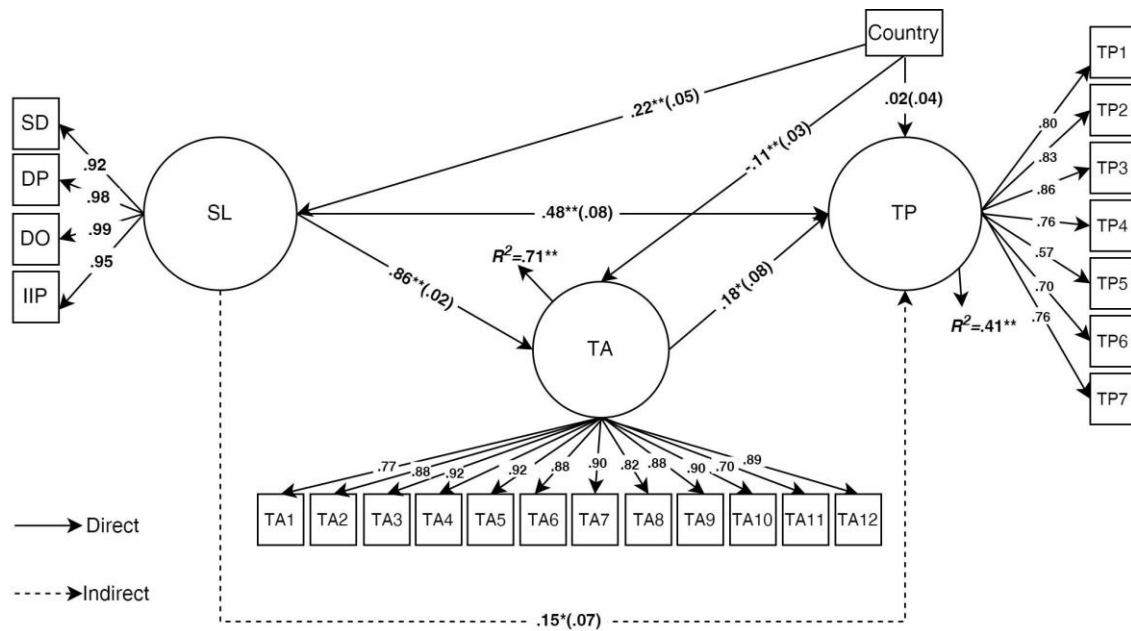
The fit indices for SEM in Figure 2 are as follows: χ^2 ($df = 809$) = 2374.309, RMSEA = .069, SRMR = .043, CFI = .92, TLI = .91. When the fit values of the model are evaluated, we see that the χ^2/df ratio is below 5, the RMSEA value is below .08, the SRMR value is below .05, and the CFI and TLI values are above .90. In this context, the analyzed model is in agreement with the research data.

Table 5

SEM Estimates, Standard Errors, and Confidence Intervals for the Model

Construct	Coefficient		95% Confidence Interval		p
	Estimate	SE	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
Direct effects					
TA → TP	.177	.084	.039	.315	.035*
SL → TP	.477	.084	.339	.616	.000**
SL → TA	.862	.017	. 834	.890	.000**
C (Türkiye) → TP	.024	.044	-.048	.096	.577
C (Türkiye) → TA	-.112	.030	-.161	-.063	.035*
C (Türkiye) → SL	.215	.048	.135	.310	.000**
Indirect effects					

SL→ TA→TP	.153	.072	.033	.272	.035*

Notes. n = 403; SL = school leadership; TA = trust in administrator; TP = teacher professionalism; C = country; Türkiye is the reference group. ∗p < .05; ∗∗p < .01.

When Figure 2 and Table 5 are analyzed, it is observed that the country variable taken as the control variable in the study does not have an important influence on teacher professionalism (β = .02; se = .04; p > .05). However, regarding school leadership, it is in favor of Türkiye but at a low level (β = .22; se = .05; p < .01). It appears to have a low significant effect on trust in the administrator in favor of TRNC (β = .11; se = .03; p < .05). Considering this finding, although teachers' trust levels in school administrators are higher in TRNC than in Türkiye, school administrators in Türkiye have higher scores in terms of school leadership (p < .001). In contrast, teacher professionalism does not have a significant change by country (p > .05).

Another finding of the study reveals that teacher professionalism is directly associated with school leadership (p < .001) and trust in the administrator after controlling for the country (p < .05). Trust in the administrator has a positive and low-level direct influence on teacher professionalism, confirming H$_1$. These findings indicate that a one-unit increase in trust in the administrator causes an increase of .18 (se = .08; p < .05; 95% CI [.04, .32]) unit above the teacher professionalism level. School leadership has a positive and moderate direct effect on the teacher professionalism level, confirming H$_2$. This illustrates that a one-unit increase in school leadership causes .48 (se = .08; p < .01; 95% CI [.34, .62]) unit rise on the teacher professionalism level. These finding suggest that teachers in schools with high leadership behavior tend to have a higher level of professionalism. Another finding of the study shows that school leadership has a positive and high-level influence on trust in the administrator. A one-unit increase in school leadership causes an increase of .86 (se = .02; p < .01; 95% CI [.83, .89]) unit on the trust in administrator level, confirming H$_3$. Regarding the last hypothesis of the study, school leadership has an indirect effect on teacher professionalism through trust in the administrator, confirming H$_4$ (β =.15; se = .07; p < .05; 95% CI [.03, .27]). This result affirms that, for teachers and assistive actions among teachers, trust in the administrator takes a mediating role in the relationship between school leadership and teacher professionalism.

Results and Discussion

By using a SEM, we examined teacher perceptions on school leadership and its impact on teacher professionalism in Türkiye and TRNC. In this section, we show the study's main findings, debate limitations of the study, and recommend some implications for policy, practice, and further research. In this study, our control variable predicts an important relationship between teachers' countries and their perceptions on school leadership. The findings of the study demonstrate that, on average, Turkish teachers have a more positive school leadership perception when compared to that of TRNC teachers. This means that Turkish school leaders perform stronger leadership behaviors to guide and develop teachers and improve their schools to overcome school-based challenges. This finding also refers to the differences in individual and organizational behavior, although the TRNC education system and the Turkish education system have many similarities in terms of structure, content, and cultural contexts. The reason for the differences can be justified by TRNC teachers being influenced by different cultures, such as Turkish, English, and Cypriot cultures. According to the findings from the research, we think

the different administrative attitudes perceived by teachers toward school leadership in both societies are related to the cultural dimensions of the societies (individuality versus collectivity, uncertainty/avoidance, and power/distance). These results are consistent with other studies on these societies (Andrijauskienė & Dumčiuvienė, 2017; Hofstede, 1984, p. 260; 2001, p. 241; Şekerli & Gerede, 2011; Yıldızlar, 2010). We consider this difference may be because the TRNC society has lived under the dominance of societies with many different cultural structures in the historical process. This context supports our view that the difference between the levels of school leadership in Türkiye and TRNC is because Türkiye is more collectivist and has relatively higher power/distance, whereas the TRNC is mostly a result of individual culture and relatively lower power/distance.

Our findings affirm previous research that trust in school administrators affects positively teacher professionalism when the controlling variable is set as the country (H_1; Dean, 2011; Goddard et al., 2001; Koşar, 2015; Price & Weatherby, 2018; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Our results are identical to those in prevalent literature even though our data were collected in a centralized non-Western sample. The study contributes to existent literature in that it reveals trust in the school administrator and a perceived positive school climate support teachers in professionally strengthening themselves and creating environments that ensure change and development. As trust is an important factor in human relations in Eastern cultures, such a result can be easily drawn. Findings from Türkiye and TRNC have also shown that teachers need a school culture based on trust in administrators to exhibit professional behaviors, even in a centralized education system (Kılınç, 2014; Koşar, 2015). Moreover, findings indicate that a school leader who has gained the trust of teachers supports teachers' professional development and professional behaviors (Yılmaz, 2005).

Our findings also present evidence to confirm our second hypothesis that school leadership has a statistically significant positive effect on teacher professionalism (H_2). This finding can be supported with previous data in the literature (Day et al., 2011; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Kent, 2004; Stoll & Louis, 2007, p. 171). Other studies show that distributed leadership has a negative effect on teacher professionalism in Eastern countries (Joo, 2020; Leithwood et al., 2009). The fact that research conducted in countries with a rigid hierarchical structure reveals different results leads us to comprehend the social relations and dynamics among school leadership, human conditions, and structural conditions within the framework of organizational learning theory (Morrison, 2002, p. 111). When analyzing school leadership practice at schools, scholars should regard situational factors, including positive school culture, climate, teachers' job satisfaction, professional school structure, and working conditions at schools. Thus, research involving indirect relationships with these variables could be designed.

Our third hypothesis addresses the direct influence of school leadership on trust in the school administrator. The analysis shows that school leadership has an important positive direct influence on trust in the administrator (H_3). The findings reveal that leadership behaviors shown by the school principal are an important variable concerning the teachers' trust in the administrator (Akın & Orman, 2015; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Cerit, 2009; Hoy et al., 1992; Koşar & Yalçınkaya, 2013; Lee et al., 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998; Türköz et al., 2013). It may be effective for school principals to provide teachers with professional autonomy (Lai & Lo, 2007) in developing and sustaining relational trust (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Research findings also point out that positive, transparent, fair, and value-based leadership practices of school principals engender respect and trust in their school communities (Day, 2011; Moos, 2014). By giving confidence to teachers, school leaders can enable teachers to take a greater role in new practices and initiatives at schools.

This suggests that implementing school leadership practices improves relationships between teachers and school leaders, which, in turn, contributes to a better school climate based on trust. This finding confirms that school leadership has a key and crucial role in the emotional path to build, strengthen, and sustain an environment that emphasizes strong relationships between teachers and school leader. Core values in school settings promoted by school leaders, such as trust and improvement of the culture, can encourage a powerful basis for building, developing, and sustaining school atmospheres where teachers' morale, motivation, and willingness are enlivened and improved. It is previously stated that positive, transparent, fair, and value-based leadership practices of school principals engender respect and trust in their school communities (Day, 2011, p. 92; Moos, 2014). The current study confirmed that the trust-oriented school climate created by school leaders has an indirect positive effect on teacher professionalism.

Our final hypothesis predicts that school leadership is positively related to teacher professionalism as mediated by trust in the administrator (H_4). Our findings confirm this suggestion, as they reveal that principals' school leadership has a small influence on trust in the administrator via emotional paths. This complies with previous research arguing that school administrators' leadership styles influence trust in administrators indirectly (Joo, 2020; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Li et al., 2016). When important, indirect and overall influences of school leadership on teacher professionalism are taken into consideration. This finding indicates that school principals' leadership behaviors affect teacher professionalism through teachers' positive beliefs, feelings, and emotions toward school leaders. Moreover, to comprehend indirect influences on teacher professionalism, we should take the impact of different mediating variables into consideration. Thus, the mediator effects of the emotional path variables as well as the rational path, organizational path, and family path variables in Leithwood et al. (2019) should be examined so that the influence of school leadership on teacher professionalism can be studied in future research.

In practice, whenever teachers feel empowered by school leaders and allowed to participate in decisions and school improvement, they become more open to self-development and collective learning (Geijsel et al., 2009). This clearly illustrates the impact of trust-based school leadership. It seems rational and functional for school leadership, focused on improving the individual, school, and teaching practice, to exhibit leadership practices that prioritize the professional development of teachers. School principals' values, and strong and persistent visions to guide teachers in organizational structures, contribute to teacher development. Their daily interactions among staff encourage teachers' professionalism. Taking the responsibility of instructional leadership, school leaders can bolster teachers to transcend their habitual teaching methods and attempt innovative approaches or alternative practices.

Finally, our study's findings reveal an indirect relationship between school leadership and teacher professionalism, established through trust in the school principal. From this finding, we can presume that school leadership is effective in encouraging teacher professionalism within the framework of behavioral, attitudinal, and intellectual dimensions. For schools to encourage greater teacher professionalism, school principals should object to having a bureaucratic orientation, which results in implicit distrust. While exercising their administrative authority, they would be better served by a professional orientation, extending adaptive authority to teachers. In conclusion, they should have practices that give way to powerful trust among school stakeholders.

Disclosure Statement

The authors report no potential conflicts of interest.

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