

# Holistic Leadership in Lebanese Catholic Schools: Enhancing Teacher Engagement, Student Achievement and Institutional Efficiency

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## Abstract

**Background:** Holistic leadership has emerged as a critical approach in educational institutions, particularly in Catholic schools, where balancing faith-based traditions with modern educational demands is essential. Previous research highlights leadership as a key determinant of school success, influencing teacher engagement, student performance, and institutional efficiency. However, limited studies have explored the multidimensional impact of holistic leadership in faith-based educational settings.

**Objective:** This study examines the role of holistic leadership in Catholic schools affiliated with the Congregation of the Maronite Sisters of the Holy Family. It investigates the relationship between leadership practices and institutional success, focusing on teacher engagement, student achievement, and administrative efficiency.

**Methods and Materials:** A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. A stratified sample of 230 respondents (school directors, coordinators, teachers, and administrative staff) provided survey data, while 16 school leaders and 5 HR managers participated in semi-structured interviews. Statistical analyses, including correlation and regression models, assessed leadership's impact on school performance.

**Results:** Findings indicate a positive correlation ( $r = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between leadership effectiveness and teacher engagement and ( $r = 0.38$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) with student performance. Regression analysis revealed that leadership strategies explain 38% of variance in teacher well-being ( $R^2 = 0.38$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and 32% in student achievement ( $R^2 = 0.32$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

**Conclusion:** Holistic leadership fosters institutional resilience by enhancing collaborative governance, teacher development, and administrative efficiency. The study highlights the need for inclusive leadership models, technological integration, and professional training to sustain long-term educational success. Future research should explore the causal mechanisms linking leadership strategies to student learning outcomes.

**Keywords:** Holistic Leadership, Catholic Schools, institutional governance, teacher development, administrative efficiency

## 1. Introduction

Education is undergoing profound transformations driven by rapid technological advancements, evolving societal expectations, and increasing global competition. These changes require educational institutions to continuously adapt to maintain their relevance and excellence. Catholic schools, in particular, face a unique challenge: they must preserve their spiritual and moral foundations while simultaneously meeting contemporary educational standards. Leadership plays a fundamental role in shaping the adaptability and effectiveness of these institutions, making it imperative to adopt governance models that align with both tradition and innovation. Among these models, holistic leadership has emerged as a pivotal strategy for fostering an environment that supports not only academic success but also the well-being of the entire educational community (Leithwood et al., 2004; Fullan, 2001).

Holistic leadership is an integrative approach that extends beyond traditional administrative functions to encompass ethical governance, community engagement, sustainability, and teacher development. In educational settings, particularly in faith-based institutions, this leadership model is instrumental in aligning an institution's mission with modern educational imperatives (Canavesi & Minelli, 2021). It emphasizes shared vision, participatory

decision-making, and inclusivity, creating a school culture where leadership is distributed among multiple stakeholders (Nguyen et al., 2021; Leithwood, 2010; Day et al., 2010). Research indicates that schools led by holistic leaders exhibit greater teacher motivation, improved student engagement, and enhanced institutional resilience (Canavesi, & Minelli, 2021).

The theoretical foundations of holistic leadership can be linked to transformational and distributed leadership theories, both of which emphasize collaboration and shared responsibility within an organization (Kecharanata & Chompusri, 2023; Bass, 1985; Spillane, 2006). Transformational leadership focuses on inspiring and motivating educators to exceed expectations by fostering a sense of shared purpose and vision (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Distributed leadership, on the other hand, highlights the collective involvement of teachers, administrators, and students in decision-making processes, thus reducing the reliance on hierarchical governance structures (Harris, 2004; Spillane, 2006). By integrating principles from both transformational and distributed leadership models, holistic leadership creates an educational ecosystem that is dynamic, inclusive, and sustainable (Harris, 2008; Fullan, 2001).

Catholic schools have traditionally operated under structured leadership frameworks that prioritize discipline, moral guidance, and centralized decision-making (Grace, 2002). However, contemporary educational trends necessitate a re-evaluation of these approaches to ensure that faith-based institutions remain competitive and effective in the modern educational landscape (O'Keefe, 2011). Research suggests that progressive and inclusive leadership models enable Catholic schools to navigate these complexities successfully while maintaining their core values (Pesqueux, 2024). Flexible governance strategies that accommodate educational advancements, while preserving religious and ethical integrity, have been shown to improve institutional cohesion and overall school performance (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

One of the defining features of holistic leadership is its focus on a shared vision that integrates academic excellence, ethical stewardship, and professional development. Schools that embrace this leadership model encourage a participatory culture in which teachers and administrators collaborate to enhance institutional effectiveness (Fullan, 2001; Leithwood, 2010). This approach fosters higher levels of teacher engagement and institutional stability, as educators feel valued and supported in their professional growth (Chinomona et Moloi, 2014; Zepke et al., 2012). Furthermore, investment in teacher well-being has been linked to improved instructional quality, reduced turnover rates, and greater student performance (Day et al., 2010).

Holistic leadership also incorporates technology and sustainability as integral components of school governance. The adoption of digital management tools has been associated with increased administrative efficiency and data-driven decision-making (Hsieh, 2024; Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Moreover, sustainability-driven leadership ensures that schools are equipped to handle long-term challenges, aligning educational institutions with principles of social responsibility and ethical governance (Kumar, 2024; Chinomona et Moloi, 2014).

Empirical evidence supports the assertion that holistic leadership is positively correlated with student achievement, teacher engagement, and institutional efficiency. Schools that implement collaborative leadership models report higher levels of teacher engagement and student academic performance (Goddard et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2004). A recent study demonstrated that holistic leadership accounts for 32% ( $R^2 = 0.32$ ) of the variance in student achievement, underscoring its significance in shaping educational outcomes. Additionally, institutions prioritizing teacher development observed a 20% increase in overall job satisfaction, while those fostering collaborative governance reported a 12% rise in student achievement on standardized assessments (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Harris, 2008). These findings indicate that leadership strategies focused on well-being and professional development yield substantial benefits for institutional stability and effectiveness (Fullan, 2001; Day et al., 2010).

Furthermore, holistic leadership has been shown to enhance organizational efficiency. Schools that incorporate structured leadership training and digital transformation initiatives report greater institutional agility and a 47% increase in administrative efficiency ( $r = 0.47$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) (Leithwood, 2010; Harris, 2008). By integrating modern governance techniques, these institutions are better equipped to adapt to evolving educational landscapes and sustain long-term growth.

Given the increasing emphasis on leadership as a determinant of educational success, this study aims to examine the impact of holistic leadership on Catholic schools affiliated with the Congregation of the Maronite Sisters of the Holy Family. Specifically, it seeks to analyze how leadership strategies influence teacher engagement, student performance, and administrative efficiency. By integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies, this study aims to provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of holistic leadership in faith-based educational settings. The findings will contribute to the ongoing discourse on leadership models in education, offering insights into best practices for fostering institutional resilience and academic excellence.

## 2. Research Methodology

### 2.1 Study Design

This study employs a mixed-methods approach integrating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to explore the impact of holistic leadership in educational settings. The combination of these approaches allows for a more comprehensive understanding, ensuring that numerical data are complemented by contextual insights. The study follows an explanatory sequential design where quantitative data are collected and analyzed first, followed by qualitative data to deepen the interpretation of results. This methodological triangulation strengthens both the validity and reliability of findings.

### 2.2 Population and Sampling

The study targeted members of the educational staff across 25 schools affiliated with the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family Maronite. The research population comprised 820 individuals, including school directors, cycle coordinators, teachers, and administrative staff. To ensure representativeness, a stratified sampling technique was employed, ensuring that participants from different hierarchical levels and institutional backgrounds were included. The final sample consisted of 230 respondents to the questionnaire and 16 school leaders and 5 human resources managers for qualitative interviews. This diverse participant pool provided a multi-perspective understanding of leadership practices.

### 2.3 Data Collection

Data were gathered through structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and observational data. A 33-item online survey was distributed via Google Forms to assess perceptions of leadership effectiveness. The questionnaire combined closed-ended Likert-scale questions to quantify attitudes and open-ended questions to capture detailed reflections. Interviews were conducted with school directors, HR managers, and cycle coordinators to provide deeper insights into leadership styles, administrative challenges, and institutional governance. Observational data were also gathered to assess leadership practices within institutional settings, allowing for cross-validation of survey and interview data.

### 2.4 Instrumentation and Measures

The structured questionnaire covered multiple dimensions of holistic leadership, including leadership perception, director's role and competencies, leadership styles, implementation of leadership strategies, challenges and barriers, and technological integration in institutional governance. Leadership perception was assessed in terms of its importance in school effectiveness. The director's role and competencies were evaluated through scales measuring vision, management, communication, and empathy. Leadership styles were categorized into authoritative, participative, transformational, transactional, servant, and holistic leadership. The questionnaire also measured the level of adoption of holistic leadership practices and identified the main issues encountered in leadership execution. Additionally, the role of digital tools in governance and pedagogy was assessed.

### 2.5 Data Analysis

The data analysis followed a rigorous statistical and thematic approach. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, including descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions. Correlation analyses were conducted using Kendall's correlation for ordinal data, Spearman's correlation for relationships between leadership perception and teacher engagement, and Pearson's correlation for quantitative variables such as student performance and leadership effectiveness. Multiple linear regression models were applied to predict relationships between holistic leadership and teacher well-being, student academic success, and institutional governance efficiency. Qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic coding framework. Thematic coding involved initial identification of recurring ideas, grouping codes into broader themes, and contextual interpretation aligned with holistic leadership theory. Findings from surveys, interviews, and observations were triangulated to ensure robustness and consistency in results.

### 2.6 Research Setting and Institutional Context

The study was conducted in a diverse educational network comprising semi-private and private schools located in both urban and rural settings. The heterogeneity of these institutions in terms of student demographics, financial resources, and governance models provided a fertile ground for assessing leadership adaptability. Institutional structure varied from small primary institutions with under 300 students to large secondary schools exceeding 1000 students. Leadership composition combined secular and religious governance, where administrative responsibilities were shared between lay educators and religious administrators. The pedagogical approach emphasized a faith-based

but modernized curriculum promoting inclusive learning and social responsibility. Professional development was prioritized, with schools emphasizing continuous teacher training and leadership capacity-building programs.

### 2.7 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical research principles ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and non-maleficence. Participants were briefed on the study objectives and provided consent before participation. Data anonymity was maintained to protect respondent identities, and the study posed no harm to participants.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Importance of Educational Leadership

The findings indicate that an overwhelming majority of participants recognize the critical role of educational leadership in school success. Specifically, 70% of respondents rated it as "extremely important," while 25% considered it very important. Only 5% perceived it as moderately important, and no participants viewed it as unimportant. These results highlight the fundamental perception that effective leadership is a cornerstone of academic achievement and institutional efficiency.

### 3.2 Role of the School Director

The school director plays a central role in fostering a positive learning environment, as reflected in the responses. 65% of participants rated the role of the director as "extremely significant," while 30% viewed it as very significant. Only 5% perceived it as moderately relevant, confirming the consensus that a well-qualified and engaged school director is indispensable to student success and institutional development.

### 3.3 Leadership Strategies in Schools

The study explored the adoption of various leadership strategies to optimize administrative processes and support educators. The findings reveal widespread integration of structured leadership approaches: 85% of respondents reported using school information management systems, 75% highlighted continuous teacher training initiatives, and 70% acknowledged the integration of technology in classrooms. Additionally, 65% emphasized the importance of well-being programs for both teachers and students. These findings suggest that technology, professional development, and wellness programs are perceived as essential for effective leadership and institutional sustainability.

### 3.4 Impact of Leadership on Teacher Engagement and Student Performance

The relationship between leadership strategies and their impact on teacher engagement and student performance was assessed through survey responses. A significant portion of participants perceived these strategies as highly effective: 30% of respondents rated their impact as extremely high, 50% as very high, and 20% as moderate. These statistics reinforce the notion that holistic leadership strategies directly influence teacher motivation and student achievement, strengthening the school's academic performance.

### 3.5 Bivariate Analysis

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between leadership perception and key educational outcomes. The analysis identified a positive correlation ( $r = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between inclusive leadership styles and teacher engagement. This suggests that when educators perceive leadership as supportive and participatory, they are more likely to engage actively in their professional roles. Additionally, a positive correlation ( $r = 0.38$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) was found between leadership effectiveness and student academic performance, confirming the hypothesis that strong educational leadership fosters better student achievement.

Table 1. Leadership and Teacher Well-being

Correlation	Coefficient (r)	Significance (p)
Leadership and Teacher Engagement	0.45	< 0.01
Leadership and Student Performance	0.38	< 0.01

The study also investigated the impact of perceived leadership support on teacher well-being. A Spearman correlation analysis revealed a positive association ( $r = 0.42$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between leadership inclusivity and teacher well-being, suggesting that educators who feel supported in their professional growth report lower stress levels and

higher job satisfaction. This finding highlights the importance of leadership strategies that prioritize teacher development and work-life balance.

### 3.6 Regression Analysis

To further examine the influence of leadership practices, a multiple linear regression model was applied. The analysis assessed how leadership styles predicted teacher well-being and student performance. The model explained 38% of the variance in teacher well-being ( $R^2 = 0.38$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and 32% of the variance in student performance ( $R^2 = 0.32$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Table 2.

Predictor Variables	Standardized Beta (B)	Significance (p)
Perceived Leadership Quality (Teacher Well-being)	0.45	0.01
Administrative Support (Teacher Well-being)	0.30	0.03
Leadership Vision (Student Performance)	0.40	0.01
Teacher Engagement (Student Performance)	0.35	0.02

These findings confirm that leadership characterized by strong vision, strategic support, and inclusivity plays a crucial role in both enhancing teacher well-being and improving student outcomes.

### 3.7 Leadership and Administrative Efficiency

Another significant area explored in this study was the effect of leadership on administrative efficiency. A Kendall correlation analysis identified a strong association ( $r = 0.47$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between leadership practices and school management effectiveness. Schools that implemented technological tools, participatory governance, and structured professional development programs demonstrated higher efficiency in administrative operations.

Table 3.

Leadership Strategy	Correlation with Administrative Efficiency (r)	Significance (p)
Information Management Systems	0.50	0.01
Teacher Training Programs	0.40	0.02
Technological Integration	0.47	0.01

## 4. Discussion

The quantitative results of this study provide a detailed picture of the impact of holistic leadership on various aspects of school life within the schools of the Congregation of the Maronite Sisters of the Holy Family. Descriptive statistics, correlation analyses, and linear regressions identified significant trends and relationships between leadership practices and observed outcomes. The findings confirm that educational leadership is perceived as a critical factor in school success, with over 70% of respondents rating it as "extremely important." These results align with the research of Leithwood et al. (2004), which highlights school leadership as the second most important factor influencing student outcomes, following classroom instruction. This underscores the necessity of adopting effective leadership strategies to enhance teacher engagement and student performance.

The role of the school director was also highly valued, with 65% of respondents rating it as "extremely important." This finding supports Fullan (2001), who emphasized that school directors play a key role in fostering a positive and productive school culture that directly affects student achievement and overall school climate. These findings validate the hypothesis that holistic leadership strategies, emphasizing personal development and collaboration, increase teacher engagement and job satisfaction while reducing turnover rates and improving instructional quality.

### 4.1 Leadership Strategies and Their Effectiveness

The study identified various leadership strategies that significantly impact administrative processes and student outcomes. The most commonly used strategies included the adoption of school information management systems

(85%), continuous teacher training (75%), classroom technology integration (70%), and well-being programs for teachers and students (65%). These findings indicate a growing trend toward incorporating technology and professional development as essential tools for administrative efficiency and pedagogical support. These observations are consistent with the findings of Hsieh (2024), who demonstrated that technological integration and teacher training substantially enhance educational effectiveness.

The effectiveness of these strategies supports the hypothesis that holistic leadership improves academic performance and student well-being by fostering a sense of belonging and security within the school environment. Schools that prioritize structured leadership practices report greater administrative efficiency and enhanced teacher motivation, reinforcing the importance of a leadership model that integrates professional development and innovation.

#### *4.2 Teacher Engagement and Academic Performance*

The study results revealed a strong relationship between holistic leadership practices and both teacher engagement and student performance. Thirty percent of respondents rated the impact of leadership on engagement and academic performance as "extremely high," while 50% rated it as "very high." These findings confirm the hypothesis that leadership strategies emphasizing inclusivity, teacher support, and vision-driven management positively influence academic achievement.

Correlation and regression analyses further validate these findings. A significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.45$ ) was observed between perceived leadership effectiveness and teacher engagement, while a correlation of ( $r = 0.38$ ) was found between leadership and student academic performance. These results are consistent with prior research by Bryk and Schneider (2002), which demonstrated that school leadership significantly influences teacher motivation and student learning outcomes.

#### *4.3 Leadership and Administrative Processes*

The integration of digital management systems and ongoing teacher training demonstrated a substantial impact on administrative efficiency. Correlation analyses revealed a strong relationship ( $r = 0.47$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between the use of information management systems and improved organizational efficiency. Additionally, a correlation of ( $r = 0.43$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) was found between continuous teacher training and improved instructional quality. These findings suggest that schools leveraging technology and structured training programs are more effective in managing administrative tasks and supporting educators, leading to overall institutional success.

The findings of this study highlight the transformative potential of holistic leadership in fostering a thriving educational environment. The strong correlations between leadership effectiveness and teacher engagement, student performance, and administrative efficiency suggest that leadership is a multidimensional construct that extends beyond management to shaping organizational culture and learning dynamics.

A key scientific implication of this study is the confirmation that leadership functions as a catalyst for systemic change in education. When school leaders prioritize inclusivity, technological integration, and professional development, they create a self-sustaining cycle of improvement where engaged teachers lead to motivated students, and well-managed schools foster higher institutional performance.

Moreover, this study reinforces the importance of leadership styles that balance visionary guidance with participatory decision-making. The success of leadership strategies rooted in teacher well-being and administrative efficiency indicates that leaders who cultivate supportive environments contribute to long-term school stability and innovation.

Future research should explore the causal mechanisms underlying these relationships, particularly how leadership practices translate into measurable learning gains over time. Additionally, comparative studies in different cultural and economic contexts could provide deeper insights into the adaptability of holistic leadership models worldwide.

By integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies, this research offers a nuanced exploration of holistic leadership in Catholic educational institutions. The mixed-methods approach, robust statistical techniques, and in-depth thematic analysis ensure a comprehensive and evidence-based evaluation of leadership practices in school settings. This methodological framework allows for both empirical validation and contextual understanding, making it a reliable contribution to the field of educational leadership.

### **5. Conclusion**

This study underscores the crucial role of holistic leadership in enhancing school effectiveness. The findings reveal that leadership strategies focused on communication, collaboration, professional development, and inclusivity lead to improved teacher engagement, student performance, and administrative efficiency. The quantitative and qualitative analyses confirm that schools adopting structured and participatory leadership models experience higher levels of

satisfaction and success within their educational communities.

While this study provides valuable insights, it is essential to recognize certain limitations. First, the sample was limited to schools under the Congregation of the Maronite Sisters of the Holy Family, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts. Future studies should expand to a broader range of institutions to validate these results across different school systems.

Second, the study relies on self-reported data, which may introduce bias due to social desirability or subjective perceptions of leadership effectiveness. Triangulation with external performance indicators, such as standardized test scores or administrative records, could strengthen the reliability of future research.

Another limitation is the cross-sectional nature of this study, which captures a snapshot of leadership perceptions and outcomes at a single point in time. A longitudinal approach tracking leadership impact over multiple years would provide a more comprehensive understanding of long-term effects.

Future research should explore the long-term impact of holistic leadership on student achievement through longitudinal studies. Comparative analyses between different educational systems could provide further insights into the adaptability of holistic leadership across cultural and institutional contexts. Additionally, examining the role of leadership in supporting students with special educational needs would contribute valuable knowledge to the discourse on inclusive education.

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### Authors' Contributions

Lara Khoury, Dr. Josiane Abi Khattar were responsible for study design and revising. Lara Khoury was responsible for data collection. Dr. Josiane Abi Khattar drafted the manuscript and Dr. Dunya Nohra and Dr. Danie Khawaja was responsible for methodological issue and revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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### Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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