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BUILDING TRUST AND RESPECT: TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES WITH SCHOOL LEADERS

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ABSTRACT

Anchored on the Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) Theory, this study aimed to explore the lived experiences of public elementary school teachers in building trust and respect with their school leaders in the Monkayo West District, Philippines. The LMX Theory emphasizes the importance of individualized relationships between leaders and subordinates, highlighting how high-quality exchanges foster mutual respect, trust, and professional growth. Utilizing a qualitative research design and a phenomenological approach, the study investigated how eight (8) public school teachers developed trust-based relationships with their school heads, the challenges they encountered, the coping mechanisms they employed, and the insights they gained throughout the process. Through in-depth interviews, the research identified initial difficulties such as communication gaps, inconsistent leadership decisions, and feelings of undervaluation. Despite these challenges, teachers adopted coping strategies including maintaining professionalism, practicing empathy, initiating open dialogue, and fostering peer collaboration. The findings revealed that trust and respect were cultivated through consistent leadership behaviors, transparent communication, and inclusive decision-making. Teachers transitioned from passive recipients of directives to active contributors in school development, emphasizing the importance of ethical leadership, emotional support, and shared responsibility. Their insights highlighted the transformative impact of respectful and trusting relationships on teacher morale, professional growth, and school climate. The study concludes that fostering trust and respect in schools requires intentional leadership practices, supportive structures, and a commitment to relational and reflective pedagogy.

KEYWORDS: *Educational Administration, Trust, Respect, Teacher-Leader Relationships, Instructional Leadership, Phenomenological Research*

INTRODUCTION

Trust and respect between teachers and school leaders are important for creating effective, collaborative, and growth-oriented school environments. Research highlights that instructional leadership practices such as modelling effective teaching strategies and offering constructive feedback significantly promote teacher development and learning (Kilag & Sasan, 2023). However, teachers may hesitate to fully engage or collaborate due to past negative experiences, feelings of undervaluation, fear of judgment, or limited opportunities for open and honest dialogue.

In Pakistan, as noted by Manzoor and Ghafoor (2024), the limited trust extended by educational leaders leads to diminished professional commitment, as teachers feel unsupported in their roles, hesitant to collaborate, and uncertain about the safety and well-being of their students. This lack of institutional trust affects mutual respect and weakens the foundation for an organised teaching community. Similarly, in Cambodia, Meyer et al. (2022) highlight that trust and respect are compromised when teachers are excluded from meaningful participation in decision-making processes, often relegated to passive roles through steering groups or top-down directives. This exclusion fosters a sense of disempowerment and erodes the respect necessary for a collaborative and motivated teachers.

In the Philippines, specifically in the Division of Bulacan, teachers are lacking a coherent autonomy and limited involvement in shared decision-making which made it difficult for them to fully trust and respect their school leaders. Many teachers felt that their ideas and opinion are not valued despite the best efforts of school leader to create a supportive environment that affected their sense of worth and belonging within the school (Faundo et al., 2023).

In Monkayo West District, the researcher observed that teachers have problem with building trust and respect toward their school leaders due to a lack of open dialogue, unresolved conflicts, and little recognition of their professional contributions. These issues often lead to feelings of isolation and disconnection, which affected their enthusiasm for collaboration and professional growth. As a result, the absence of strong trust affected the development of supportive school culture that is needed for educational success.

While recent studies of Puspitadani et al. (2022) explored the impact effective leadership in teacher, there is a limited study on

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the personal and professional challenges teachers face in building trust and respect within their institutions. This gap highlights the need to conduct a study related to the lived experiences of teachers in building trust and respect to understand teacher-leader relationships in the educational setting better; hence, there is a need to conduct this study.

This phenomenological study aimed to explore the experiences of eight public school teachers from the Monkayo West District in building trust and respect with their school leaders. Specifically, the study sought to understand how teachers perceived the efforts of school heads in fostering trust and respect, the challenges they encountered, such as feelings of undervaluation, fear of judgment, and past negative experiences, as well as the strategies they employed to cope with or overcome these challenges. Through in-depth interviews, the study captured the lived experiences of teachers in developing trust-based relationships with their school leaders. The findings provided insights into how leadership behaviors influenced the building of trust and respect, teacher professional growth, and the overall school climate.

Research Questions

This research study aimed to explore and describe the lived experiences of teachers in building trust and respect with their school leaders. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What were the lived experiences of teachers in building trust and respect with their school leaders?
2. What did teachers encounter the challenges in building trust and respect with their school leaders?
3. What coping mechanisms did teachers use in building trust and respect with their school leaders?
4. What insights did teachers gain from building trust and respect with their school leaders that could be shared with others?

Methodology

This part discusses the research design, research participants, role of the researcher, data sources, data collection procedures, data analysis, the trustworthiness of the study, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

This study used a phenomenological research design, which aimed to understand and describe the essence of the lived experiences of public school teachers concerning the phenomenon being investigated. Phenomenology allowed the researcher to discover the authentic voices of teachers and provided valuable insights into their personal and professional experiences in cultivating trust and respect with their school leaders (Luis, 2024).

In addition, the researcher also used a qualitative research design to explore the lived experiences of public school teachers in building trust and respect with their school leaders. The qualitative design was a methodology focused on understanding complex human experiences and the meanings individuals assigned to them (Alam, 2024). This approach was considered most appropriate, as it allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the perspectives, behaviors, and interpretations of teachers within their natural professional environment. It enabled the study to gain deeper insights into how teachers perceived, experienced, and managed trust and respect in their relationships with school leaders.

Role of the Researcher

The eagerness of the researcher to explore the lived experiences of public school teachers in building trust and respect with their school leaders guided the researcher's role throughout the study. In this research, the researcher followed the seven roles outlined by Fink (2000), which included designing, interviewing, transcribing, thematizing, analyzing, verifying, and reporting. These roles ensured a systematic and thorough approach to capturing and interpreting the participants' experiences.

As a *designer*, the researcher structured the research framework by developing strategies for participant selection, data collection, and study execution. The researcher outlined the methodological procedures, ensuring coherence and feasibility throughout the research process. In this study, the researcher determined how to engage public school teachers as participants and selected appropriate qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews, to capture their insights on building trust and respect with school leaders.

As an *interviewer,* the researcher conducted structured and in-depth interviews using open-ended questions to extract qualitative insights. The researcher created a comfortable and respectful environment that encouraged participants to share their experiences, challenges, and strategies in developing trust-based relationships with their school leaders. This approach ensured meaningful and detailed responses that reflected their authentic professional experiences.

As a *transcriber,* the researcher converted recorded interviews and field notes into written text, ensuring the accuracy and preservation of data. The researcher maintained the essence of participants' narratives, capturing their voices and perspectives in preparation for analysis. This step was crucial in preserving the integrity of the data and supporting a faithful interpretation of their lived experiences.

As a *thematizer,* the researcher identified the research problem, established the objectives, and selected an appropriate methodological approach to ensure a clear and structured investigation. The researcher defined what was studied, explained why it was important, and determined how the study was conducted, forming the foundation of the research process. This phase provided a deeper understanding of the challenges, strategies, and impacts of leadership behaviors on trust and respect.

As a *data analyst*, the researcher systematically organized and interpreted the data to identify patterns, relationships, and emerging themes. The researcher coded and categorized

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responses to construct meaningful insights that aligned with the research objectives. Through this process, the researcher examined the different approaches used by school leaders and how these influenced teacher morale, engagement, and professional growth.

As a *verifier,* the researcher assessed the reliability and validity of the research findings to ensure their accuracy and credibility. The researcher employed verification strategies such as member checking and triangulation to confirm the consistency and applicability of the results. These methods ensured that the interpretations accurately reflected the realities faced by public school teachers in their professional relationships with school leaders.

As a *reporter,* the researcher synthesized and presented the research findings in a structured written document. The researcher ensured clarity, coherence, and relevance in conveying the results and interpreting the data in relation to the research objectives. The final report provided a detailed discussion of how public school teachers built trust and respect with their school leaders, the challenges they encountered, and the strategies they used to foster positive professional relationships.

Research Participants

In this study, the researcher used purposive sampling to select eight public school teachers from the Monkayo West District, Division of Davao de Oro. This approach ensured that participants had relevant experiences in building trust and respect toward their school leaders, which was central to the focus of the study. Phenomenological studies typically involved sample sizes ranging from five to fifteen participants, allowing for a rich and in-depth exploration of lived experiences and a detailed understanding of the phenomenon (Park & Kim, 2022). This sample size enabled the researcher to capture meaningful insights into how trust and respect were developed in teacher-leader relationships.

Data Gathering Procedure

In this study, the researcher adhered to strict ethical guidelines throughout the research process, ensuring compliance with established ethical standards. An ethical review process was followed, and informed consent was obtained from all participants to safeguard their confidentiality and privacy regarding the information they shared. The researcher also prioritized fairness in all research practices to maintain the integrity of the study.

After obtaining ethical clearance, the researcher proceeded to seek approval from the research adviser and panelists to ensure that the study aligned with the approved research design, objectives, methodology, and academic standards. Following this, approval from the Dean of the Graduate School was secured to confirm that the study adhered to the academic and ethical guidelines of the institution. After all internal approvals were granted, the researcher formally requested permission from the Office of the Division of Davao de Oro to conduct the study in public elementary schools within the Monkayo West District.

Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and their decision to withdraw was respected without penalty. If a participant chose to withdraw, any data they had provided were excluded from the final analysis, ensuring the integrity and ethical standards of the study.

Face-to-face in-depth interviews were scheduled with each participant at a time and location convenient for them. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and thirty minutes and was guided by open-ended questions designed to explore the experiences, challenges, and strategies of public school teachers in building trust and respect toward their school leaders. The data collected during these interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed to identify emerging themes that reflected the perspectives of participants on how trust and respect were developed, maintained, or challenged in their professional relationships with school leaders.

Thematic analysis was conducted to examine the data and identify patterns and insights related to the behaviors of teachers that influenced the building of trust and respect with their school leaders. This analysis focused on how specific leadership actions either supported or hindered the development of trust and respect in teacher-leader relationships. The findings offered valuable insights into effective leadership practices in public elementary schools, particularly those that strengthened trust and respect from teachers, thereby contributing to a more positive and supportive school environment.

Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis, a method commonly used in qualitative research to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns within the data. This process involved systematically coding responses from public school teachers to discover recurring themes related to their experiences, challenges, and strategies in building trust and respect toward their school leaders. Thematic analysis allowed the researcher to uncover meaningful insights into how specific leadership actions influenced the development, maintenance, or hindrance of trust and respect in teacher-leader relationships.

After data collection, the responses were organized, reviewed, transcribed, and analyzed. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative data analysis followed a structured process in which data collection and analysis occurred sequentially. The data analysis process included preparing and organizing data, transcribing responses, coding, categorizing themes, and maintaining transparency throughout the analysis.

In this study, thematic analysis began with the preparation and organization of data, in which responses from public school teachers, including interview recordings and notes, were systematically arranged. The recorded interviews were then transcribed to ensure accuracy and completeness. After

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completing the transcriptions, the researcher thoroughly reviewed and familiarized themselves with the data to gain a deeper understanding of the insights shared by participants regarding trust- and respect-building with their school leaders.

The next step involved coding the responses, with a focus on identifying key insights related to how teachers built trust and respect toward their school leaders. This process highlighted the perceptions of teachers regarding leadership behaviors, the challenges they encountered in developing trust and respect, and the strategies they used to maintain these professional relationships. Based on the coded data, major themes were formulated to capture the common experiences, challenges, and effective practices that supported the building of trust and respect from teachers to their school leaders. To ensure accuracy and consistency in interpreting the results, the researcher also sought guidance from the research adviser and consulted with a data analyst.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

The quality, authenticity, and reliability of qualitative research findings were found within the concept of trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004). Trustworthiness ensured that the interpretations accurately represented the experiences of participants. According to Costa et al. (2022), the credibility of the findings enhanced the confidence of readers. This study ensured trustworthiness by focusing on credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability.

Confirmability. This guaranteed that the data and interpretations genuinely represented the experiences of participants in building trust and respect with their school leaders. Throughout the research process, the researcher kept an audit trail to record decision-making, data gathering, and analysis activities. Maintaining this documentation promoted transparency and dependability, ensuring that the results were based on the authentic voices of the participants rather than being shaped by the researcher's personal biases.

Dependability. This was achieved by maintaining consistency throughout the research process. Systematic methods of data collection and analysis were employed to allow future researchers to replicate the study or compare results in similar contexts focused on trust and respect between teachers and school leaders. Participants also had the opportunity to review and confirm the accuracy of their shared experiences, further strengthening the reliability of the findings.

Transferability. This referred to the extent to which the research findings could be applied to other settings. This study aimed to offer insights that would be meaningful in similar educational contexts where building trust and respect between teachers and school leaders was emphasized. To support transferability, the researcher provided detailed descriptions of the research setting, including the school environment and the specific ways teachers built trust and respect among their school leaders.

Ethical Considerations

This qualitative study carefully adhered to ethical considerations, including voluntary participation and the protection of privacy and confidentiality. Ethics, as defined by Indriawati et al. (2023), referred to the prescribed standards or rules within a specific professional organization that governed the behavior of its members. The following ethical considerations were observed throughout the data collection process:

Social Value. The researcher ensured that the design, methodology, and data collection processes were structured to generate relevant information aligned with the objectives of the study. Social value was achieved through a comprehensive dissemination plan included in the research protocol. Sharing the findings was considered essential, as it provided the educational community and the Department of Education with insights into how teachers built trust and respect toward their school leaders. These insights may help inform leadership development programs and school improvement initiatives.

Informed Consent. Before conducting the study, the researcher ensured that all participants provided informed consent. Consent forms were sent individually through Messenger and Department of Education email accounts. Participants were asked to read the consent form thoroughly to understand the nature of their involvement in the study. The researcher guaranteed that participation was entirely voluntary and that participants had the right to withdraw at any time without consequence.

Risks, Benefits, and Safety. The researcher ensured that participants were not exposed to any form of harm or risk. To prioritize safety and comfort, participants were given the option to participate in either face-to-face interviews or online sessions, depending on their preference and convenience. All safety protocols were followed to protect participants' well-being throughout the research process.

Privacy, Confidentiality, and Confidentiality of Information. The researcher maintained the privacy and confidentiality of all participants, including the handling of consent forms and interview data. All collected data were securely stored in a password-protected digital folder accessible only to the researcher and authorized personnel. The findings were presented in thematic summaries rather than individual-level data. After analysis, the results were returned to participants for validation to ensure accuracy and faithful representation of their experiences.

Justice. The principle of fairness was upheld by ensuring that participants were selected based on the needs of the research rather than convenience. No participant was subjected to unfair treatment, and all interview questions were free from bias. Informed consent also included provisions regarding care, compensation, and reimbursement, if applicable. The researcher ensured that any benefits resulting from the study were made available to the participants. Furthermore, the results were

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reported honestly and shared with participants for confirmation before final reporting.

Results and Discussions

Eight public school teachers served as participants in the study. They were selected through purposive sampling based on their relevant experiences in cultivating trust and respect with their school leaders. In-depth interviews were conducted to gather qualitative data, allowing the researcher to capture the authentic voices and perspectives of the participants.

To ensure the credibility and depth of the findings, the study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design. This approach enabled the researcher to explore the essence of the participants' lived experiences through one-on-one interviews, thematic analysis, and triangulation of data.

The presentation of the discussions follows the sequence of the research questions outlined in the interview guide. The discussions are organized into four thematic areas: a) lived experiences, b) challenges, c) coping mechanisms, and d) insights. Each theme is supported by direct narratives from participants and corroborated with related literature and studies.

Moment or Experience that First Made Teachers Feel a Sense of Trust or Respect Toward their School Leader. The emerging subthemes in this structured theme are handling concerns with professionalism, listening to worries, being open-minded, and showing passion and commitment to serve. These were the initial experiences that shaped teachers' trust and respect toward their school leaders.

Teachers revealed that their trust began when leaders addressed concerns professionally and respectfully. For instance, one informant shared that their leader handled a late report submission with kindness and guidance rather than public reprimand, which fostered respect and admiration.

Another informant emphasized how being listened to and having their perspectives acknowledged made them feel valued. The presence of empathy and fairness in leadership was consistently highlighted as a foundation for trust.

These findings support the idea of Kilag and Sasan (2023), who emphasized that effective instructional leadership and professional feedback foster mutual respect. Similarly, Burns and Martin (2022) noted that consistent, open communication and shared educational goals are key to building trust.

Interactions that Shaped Perceptions of Trust and Respect over Time. The emerging subthemes include consistent communication, professionalism, support, and clarity in leadership. Teachers described how ongoing interactions with their school leaders gradually strengthened their trust and respect.

One teacher noted that each meaningful interaction, especially those involving honest feedback and collaborative decision-making—reinforced their belief in the leader's integrity. Another shared that their leader's consistent behavior, fairness, and clarity during stressful situations built a sense of partnership rather than hierarchy.

This is supported by Shie & Chang (2022), who found that organizational trust and commitment mediate the relationship between leadership and teacher well-being. Heenan et al. (2023) also emphasized that transformational leadership increases staff motivation and fosters a positive school culture.

Leadership Behaviors that Made Teachers Feel Valued and Respected. The emerging subthemes are acknowledgment of work, empathy, involvement in decision-making, and transparent communication. Teachers felt respected when leaders recognized their efforts, listened attentively, and provided constructive feedback.

One informant shared that simple affirmations like "good job" or "thank you" made a significant impact. Another emphasized the importance of being involved in decision-making processes and having their ideas respected.

These experiences reflect the findings of Vikaraman et al. (2021), who noted that ethical leadership practices earn high levels of trust. Gningue et al. (2022) also highlighted that supportive leadership fosters teacher-to-teacher interactions and personal growth.

Overall Relationship Between Teachers and School Leaders in Terms of Trust and Mutual Respect. The emerging subthemes include collaboration, approachability, transparency, and shared goals. Teachers described their relationships with school leaders as built on mutual respect, open communication, and a shared commitment to student success.

One teacher described the relationship as "definitely excellent," while another emphasized the importance of a "give and take" dynamic. These relationships were strengthened by leaders who were approachable, transparent, and supportive.

This aligns with Islam et al. (2020), who emphasized that trust and respect are essential for cultivating a positive and productive school environment. Collie (2023) also noted that trust mediates the relationship between leadership qualities and teacher engagement.

Specific Difficulties Encountered in Building Trust or Respect. The emerging subthemes in this structured theme are communication gaps, inconsistency in leadership, lack of transparency, and time needed to build trust. These were the common challenges teachers faced in establishing trust and respect with their school leaders.

Teachers shared that unclear communication and top-down decision-making made it difficult to feel heard and respected. One informant noted that inconsistent leadership styles led to confusion and mistrust, while another emphasized that building

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trust takes time and effort, especially when initial interactions are strained.

These findings are supported by Musengamana et al. (2024), who emphasized that hierarchical decision-making structures limit teacher voice and erode mutual respect. In connection, Markides (2022) highlighted that outdated evaluation systems hinder authentic relationships, making it difficult for teachers to feel genuinely valued.

Impact of Communication Styles and Leadership Decisions on Trust and Respect. The emerging subthemes include lack of clarity, omission of teacher voices, authoritarian approaches, and unclear expectations. Teachers described how leadership decisions and communication styles directly influenced their ability to trust and respect their school leaders.

One teacher shared that ambiguous messaging and decisions made without teacher input created a sense of disconnection. Another noted that sudden changes in policies and assumptions about teacher readiness led to cramming and stress, undermining trust.

This supports the findings of Petro and Gega (2023), who emphasized that failure to provide adequate resources and clear communication disrupts collaboration and weakens mutual respect. Similarly, Thomson et al. (2021) found that during crises, quick and complex decision-making without transparency can erode trust in leadership.

School Policies or Leadership Structures That Hindered Trust and Respect. The emerging subthemes are rigid structures, lack of flexibility, inconsiderate policies, and centralized decision-making. Teachers expressed that inflexible policies and leadership structures often excluded their input, making it difficult to build trust.

One informant described how decisions made solely by grade-level heads without teacher consultation led to feelings of powerlessness. Another noted that overly lenient or inconsistent enforcement of policies caused confusion and reduced morale.

These challenges are echoed by Felten et al. (2023), who argued that without structured frameworks for trust-building, leadership actions may be misinterpreted. As emphasized by Gabriel and Medina (2022), the lack of stability and direction in implementing reforms can affect professional relationships and hinder trust.

Strategies Used to Handle Challenges in the Relationship with School Leaders. The emerging subthemes in this structured theme are maintaining professionalism, adjusting and building rapport, open communication, and understanding leadership context. These strategies helped teachers navigate difficulties and gradually build trust and respect.

Teachers shared that cultivating patience, initiating open dialogue, and remaining professional were key to overcoming misunderstandings. One informant emphasized the importance of empathy and understanding the leader's personal challenges, which helped foster a more respectful relationship.

These findings supported the findings of Arar and Saiti (2022), who emphasized that ethical leadership built on fairness and cultural sensitivity helps teachers cope with institutional challenges. Similarly, Harahap et al. (2022) found that context-sensitive decision-making and effective coordination strengthen professional relationships and trust.

Techniques That Helped Maintain Professionalism and Emotional Well-Being. The emerging subthemes include self-discipline, mindfulness, setting boundaries, and peer support. Teachers described how they managed stress and maintained professionalism despite leadership-related difficulties. One teacher shared that practicing mindfulness and focusing on student success helped them stay grounded. Another emphasized the importance of separating personal emotions from work to maintain clarity and professionalism.

These coping techniques align with the findings of Oberle and Schonert-Reichl (2017), who found that teachers with strong social-emotional competence are better equipped to manage stress and foster positive relationships. Portia et al. (2024) also highlighted the role of mental health resources and supportive school culture in strengthening teacher-leader relationships.

Role of Peer Support and Collaboration in Coping with Leadership Challenges. The emerging subthemes are emotional comfort, shared experiences, collective problem-solving, and informal support systems. Teachers expressed that peer collaboration helped them feel less isolated and more resilient.

One informant described how small group discussions during breaks led to shared strategies and distributed workloads. Another noted that even light conversations with colleagues helped ease stress and build solidarity.

These insights supports the ideas of Versfeld et al. (2022), who emphasized that structured time for relationship-building among teachers promotes resilience and trust. Inouye et al. (2023) also found that collaborative professionalism fosters mutual support and strengthens school culture.

Professional Development Activities That Helped Build Trust and Respect. The emerging subthemes include team-building, reflective practices, shared learning experiences, and participation in leadership activities. Teachers noted that engaging in professional development with their school leaders helped foster mutual understanding and respect.

One teacher shared that co-facilitating workshops and attending seminars with their leader created opportunities for bonding and collaboration. Another emphasized that informal activities like shared meals during team-building events helped humanize leadership and build trust.

These findings supports the study of Bryant and Walker (2022), who found that intentional, school-based professional learning structures support leadership development and relational trust.

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Ilham (2021) also highlighted that school leaders who shape a culture valuing collaboration and growth improve relationships with teachers.

Lessons Learned About Building Trust and Respect to Share with Fellow Teachers. The emerging subthemes in this structured theme are importance of communication, credibility and professionalism, respect despite challenges, and mutual understanding. These lessons reflect the personal growth and realizations of teachers through their experiences with school leaders.

Teachers emphasized that trust and respect are built through consistent communication, honesty, and kindness. One informant shared that maintaining professionalism and choosing kindness even during disagreements helped preserve respectful relationships. Another noted that trust is a long process requiring cooperation and understanding.

These insights supports the findings of Sipayung and Cheng (2023), who emphasized that trust extends beyond the classroom and into the broader school community, including relationships with families. In connection, Venema-Steen et al. (2023) also highlighted that leaders who address external challenges with care and accountability foster environments where trust can grow.

Leadership Qualities or Practices Found Most Effective in Fostering Trust and Respect. The emerging subthemes include transparency, empathy, fairness, and respect for boundaries. Teachers identified specific leadership traits that helped build strong relationships and a positive school climate.

One teacher shared that leaders who listen without interrupting and respect personal space create a safe and trusting environment. Another emphasized that fairness and consistency in leadership decisions foster mutual respect and cooperation.

These findings align with Baștea and Catalano (2023), who found that leaders who engage in reflective practices and demonstrate moral integrity help counteract impersonal system procedures. Nazaretsky et al. (2022) also noted that transparency in decision-making, even in technological contexts, enhances trust in leadership systems.

Influence of Trust and Respect on Teaching Practices and Professional Growth. The emerging subthemes are confidence, collaboration, innovation, and positive work environment. Teachers described how trust and respect from their leaders directly impacted their motivation, teaching strategies, and overall professional development.

One informant shared that feeling respected boosted their confidence to innovate in the classroom. Another noted that a respectful environment reduced stress and encouraged collaboration among colleagues.

These experiences are supported by Meidelina et al. (2023), who found that transformational leadership behaviors such as individualized consideration and inspirational motivation enhance teacher well-being and motivation. Siswanto and Yuliana (2022) also emphasized that idealized influence in leadership improves job satisfaction and team cohesiveness.

Advice for School Leaders to Build Stronger Relationships with Teachers. The emerging subthemes include kindness, active listening, balanced leadership, and open communication. Teachers offered practical advice for school leaders aiming to strengthen relationships with their staff.

One teacher advised leaders to always choose kindness and maintain a positive atmosphere. Another emphasized the importance of being approachable and fair, while also being firm and consistent in decision-making.

These recommendations supports the ideas of Keravnos and Symeou (2024), who found that open-door communication and confidentiality deepen trust in leadership. Awwad-Tabry and Levkovich (2024) also highlighted that fostering self-compassion among teachers enhances respectful engagement and emotional resilience.

Implications for Practice

Based on the findings, the following implications for practice are presented:

On Interactions That Shaped Perceptions of Trust and Respect Over Time. As noted in the findings, consistent communication, reliability, and openness in leadership strengthened teachers' trust and respect over time. These interactions fostered a sense of partnership rather than hierarchy. School leaders should prioritize transparent communication and collaborative engagement to maintain and deepen trust. Regular feedback and inclusive decision-making are essential to sustaining respectful relationships.

On Leadership Behaviors That Made Teachers Feel Valued and Respected. It can be reckoned that teachers felt valued when leaders acknowledged their efforts, involved them in decisions, and provided constructive feedback. These behaviors affirmed their professional identity. School leaders must recognize the importance of verbal affirmations, equitable treatment, and shared leadership. Creating a culture of appreciation and growth enhances teacher morale and commitment.

On Overall Relationship Between Teachers and School Leaders in Terms of Trust and Mutual Respect. As noted in the findings, relationships built on collaboration, transparency, and shared goals fostered mutual respect and trust. Teachers felt more confident and motivated in such environments. School leaders should cultivate a culture of openness and shared responsibility. Trust must be nurtured through consistent actions that reflect fairness, support, and genuine concern for teacher well-being.

On Specific Difficulties Encountered in Building Trust or Respect. It can be reckoned that communication gaps, inconsistent leadership, and lack of transparency were major barriers to building trust. These challenges led to feelings of exclusion and frustration. School leaders must address these issues by establishing clear communication channels and

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consistent leadership practices. Trust is fragile and must be protected through intentional and inclusive actions.

On Impact of Communication Styles and Leadership Decisions on Trust and Respect. As noted in the findings, unclear messaging and unilateral decisions negatively affected teachers' ability to trust their leaders. Teachers felt disconnected and undervalued. School leaders must ensure that communication is clear, inclusive, and respectful. Leadership decisions should be explained and involve teacher input to foster a sense of ownership and respect.

On School Policies or Leadership Structures That Hindered Trust and Respect. It can be reckoned that rigid policies and centralized decision-making structures hindered trust-building efforts. Teachers felt powerless and unappreciated. School leaders must revise policies to be more flexible and inclusive. Leadership structures should empower teachers and promote shared governance to strengthen trust and collaboration.

On Strategies Used to Handle Challenges in the Relationship with School Leaders. As noted in the findings, teachers used professionalism, empathy, and open communication to navigate challenges. These strategies helped maintain respectful relationships despite difficulties. Schools should provide training on emotional intelligence and conflict resolution. Leaders must also be receptive to teacher feedback and foster a culture of mutual understanding.

On Techniques that Helped Maintain Professionalism and Emotional Well-Being. It can be reckoned that mindfulness, boundary-setting, and peer support were key techniques in maintaining professionalism. These practices safeguarded teachers' emotional health. Schools should integrate wellness programs and promote mental health awareness. Leaders must support teachers' well-being through empathetic leadership and resource provision.

On the Role of Peer Support and Collaboration in Coping with Leadership Challenges. As noted in the findings, peer collaboration provided emotional comfort and practical solutions. Teachers felt more resilient and connected through shared experiences. Schools should encourage team-based initiatives and peer mentoring. Leaders must recognize the value of informal support systems and create opportunities for collaboration.

On Professional Development Activities That Helped Build Trust and Respect. It can be reckoned that joint professional development and team-building activities fostered mutual respect between teachers and leaders. Shared learning experiences strengthened relationships. Schools should prioritize collaborative training and reflective practices. Leaders must actively participate in these activities to build rapport and trust.

On Lessons Learned About Building Trust and Respect to Share with Fellow Teachers. As revealed by the study, communication, professionalism, and mutual respect were key lessons learned. Teachers emphasized the importance of kindness and understanding. Schools should promote these values through leadership training and peer sharing. Leaders must model respectful behavior and encourage open dialogue.

On Leadership Qualities or Practices Found Most Effective in Fostering Trust and Respect. It can be found that transparency, empathy, and fairness were the most effective leadership traits. These qualities created safe and respectful environments. School leaders must embody ethical leadership and respect personal boundaries. Training programs should focus on developing these core competencies.

On Experience with Trust and Respect Influence Teaching Practices or Professional Growth. As revealed that trust and respect enhanced teacher motivation, innovation, and collaboration. Teachers felt more confident and engaged in their roles. Schools should foster environments where trust is central to professional development. Leaders must support teacher autonomy and recognize their contributions.

On the Advice for School Leaders to Build Stronger Relationships with Teachers. It can be reckoned that kindness, active listening, and balanced leadership were key recommendations from teachers. These practices build strong and respectful relationships. School leaders must be approachable, fair, and consistent. Leadership development should emphasize relational skills and emotional intelligence.

Implications for Future Research

In as much as the study was limited to the responses of teachers from a single school context, the following implications for future research are considered:

First, future research may be conducted in different schools which both urban and rural, to investigate how contextual factors such as location, school size, and community culture influence the development of trust and respect between teachers and school leaders.

Second, a longitudinal study may be conducted to re-interview the same research participants after some time to examine whether their perceptions of leadership and relational trust have evolved due to changes in leadership practices or school culture.

Third, further research could be done to explore the same phenomenon in private schools, where leadership structures, teacher expectations, and organizational culture may differ significantly from public schools.

Fourth, future studies may include perspectives from school leaders themselves to gain a more holistic understanding of the relational dynamics and challenges in fostering trust and respect within the school environment.

Finally, future researchers may consider expanding the sample to include a broader group of teachers from various grade levels and departments within the same school to explore whether experiences of trust and respect differ across roles and responsibilities.

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Concluding Remarks

Trust and respect served as the main focus of this study, as well as the understanding of teachers regarding their relationships with school leaders was highlighted. The experiences of teachers, drawn from their daily interactions, challenges, and coping mechanisms, offer meaningful insights into how school leadership can shape a positive and collaborative school environment. Teachers, as professionals and partners in school development, thrive in environments where they feel heard, supported, and respected.

Trust and respect in schools are essential components of a healthy organizational climate. These values influence not only teacher morale and performance but also the overall effectiveness of the school. To that effect, it would be of great help that any understanding of trust and respect could serve as a basis for leadership training programs, the development of inclusive school policies, and the promotion of a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility. School administrators are encouraged to foster open communication, provide consistent support, and model ethical leadership to strengthen relationships with their teachers.

Ultimately, the findings of this study reinforce the idea that trust and respect are not merely ideals but essential practices that must be cultivated intentionally and consistently within the school setting.

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