



Building Committed Teachers Through Authentic Headteacher Leadership: Evidence and Implications for Educational Policy, Western Province, Zambia

Mulambwa Kamizhi Ephraim

Mulungushi University, School of Education, Zambia

Mwaanga Clement, Dr

Mulungushi University, School of Business, Zambia

mwaanga.clement@yahoo.co.uk

<http://dx.doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v9i8.3430>

Abstract

Teacher retention, commitment, and organizational effectiveness represent intersecting policy challenges facing Zambia's educational systems. This mixed-methods study, drawing on Authentic Leadership Theory and Social Exchange Theory, examines authentic principal leadership as a mechanism for building teacher affective commitment and enhancing school organizational effectiveness. Quantitative data from 402 teachers across five districts were analyzed using Structural Equation Modelling; qualitative data from 20 Headteachers were analyzed thematically. The SEM demonstrated that authentic leadership exerts an exceptionally strong effect on affective commitment ($\beta = 0.963$, $p < .001$) and, through this commitment, significantly drives organizational effectiveness (indirect $\beta = 0.364$; 95% CI [0.285, 0.448]), accounting for 46% of the total leadership-effectiveness relationship. Contrary to prevailing policy assumptions grounded in Herzberg and Locke, job satisfaction did not independently predict organizational effectiveness ($\beta = 0.009$, $p = .825$) when modelled alongside authentic leadership and affective commitment. Qualitative findings revealed four barriers to authentic leadership: cultural paternalism rooted in Lozi leadership traditions, resource constraints, systemic policy incoherence, and a mis-specified accountability framework that prioritises examination results over relational conditions. The paper proposes the CARE Policy Framework (Culturally Adaptive, Relationally Authentic, Effectiveness-Broadened) for principal leadership development and school accountability reform in Zambia.

Keywords: *Teacher Commitment; Authentic Leadership; School Effectiveness; Educational Policy; CARE Model*

1. Introduction: The Teacher Commitment Crisis

Sub-Saharan Africa faces a profound and interconnected set of educational challenges: a growing student population demanding expanded access to quality education, a chronic shortage of qualified teachers, and persistently high rates of teacher attrition in rural and remote areas (UNESCO, 2022; Asim

et al., 2024). These challenges are not simply resource problems amenable to financial solutions; they are fundamentally human problems rooted in the quality of teachers' psychological relationship with their work and their institutions (Wartenberg et al., 2023; Li et al., 2025). Teachers who are genuinely affectively committed to their schools who remain because they want to rather than because they need to (Meyer & Allen, 1997) go beyond formal duty requirements, mentor students informally, collaborate with colleagues, contribute to school improvement, and weather difficult conditions with resilience (Lux et al., 2023; Ribeiro et al., 2018). Those who are merely present but not committed manifest what Meyer and Allen (1997) termed continuance commitment rather than affective commitment, perform the minimum required, and depart at the first opportunity.

The distinction between compliance and commitment, and between transactional presence and genuine affective attachment (Meyer & Allen, 1997), is at the heart of this study. The central argument, supported by robust empirical evidence from 402 Zambian secondary school teachers and 20 Headteachers, is that authentic principal leadership (Walumbwa et al., 2008) is the most powerful organisational lever available for cultivating teacher affective commitment, and that this commitment, not job satisfaction or salary improvement alone is what drives organisational effectiveness (Cameron & Whetten, 1983). This argument challenges prevailing policy assumptions that emphasise extrinsic motivation strategies as the primary tools for improving teacher performance in remote and underserved areas (Gooden et al., 2023).

Western Province, Zambia, provides the empirical context for this argument. With 18 districts spread across one of southern Africa's most geographically challenging terrains characterised by seasonal flooding, extreme poverty, and chronic underinvestment in educational infrastructure (Ministry of Education, 2022). Western Province represents a limiting case: if authentic leadership (Walumbwa et al., 2008) can build teacher commitment here, its potential is significant across a wide range of Sub-Saharan African contexts. The study contributes directly to the evidence base called for by Asim et al. (2024), who demonstrated in a large-scale Malawian field experiment that leadership development can improve student outcomes, and by Gardner et al. (2024), who called for more contextually grounded authentic leadership research in non-Western settings.

1.1 The Policy Problem and Its Evidence Base

Current policy responses to teacher motivation and retention challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa follow three main tracks (Asim et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2022). First, incentive-based approaches, such as hardship allowances, housing subsidies, and career advancement provisions, aim to increase the attractiveness of rural postings through extrinsic rewards, grounded theoretically in Herzberg et al.'s (1959) hygiene factor framework and Locke's (1976) satisfaction model. Second, training and professional development programmes aim to improve teacher competence and thereby enhance job satisfaction (Wartenberg et al., 2023; Li et al., 2025). Third, accountability-oriented reforms include inspection systems, performance management frameworks, and examination result targets which aim to improve teacher performance through external monitoring and consequence systems (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Each of these approaches has demonstrated limited and context-dependent effectiveness (Asim et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2022). This study's finding that job satisfaction does not independently predict organisational effectiveness ($\beta = 0.009$, $p = .825$) when authentic leadership and affective commitment are present in the structural model directly challenges the theoretical basis of satisfaction-enhancement interventions. The data suggest that teachers in Western Province contribute most to school effectiveness not when they are more satisfied with their conditions but when they are more emotionally attached to their schools (Meyer & Allen, 1997) and that this attachment is driven primarily by the quality of their relationship with their principal, consistent with the authentic leadership–commitment relationship documented by Lux et al. (2023) and Ribeiro et al. (2018).

2. Conceptual Framework: The Heart-First Model of School Effectiveness

2.1 Authentic Leadership as an Educational Policy Construct

Authentic leadership, as conceptualised by Walumbwa et al. (2008) and validated across multiple cultural and organisational settings (Neider & Schriesheim, 2011; Dirik et al., 2024), encompasses four dimensions: self-awareness (understanding one's strengths, limitations, values, and impact on others); relational transparency (open sharing of information and feelings, minimising impression management); internalized moral perspective (decisions guided by internal ethical standards rather than external pressures); and balanced processing (objective analysis of multiple perspectives before decision-making). Avolio and Gardner (2005) positioned authentic leadership as a root construct underpinning all positive forms of leadership a position supported by meta-analytic comparisons with transformational leadership (Banks et al., 2016; Hoch et al., 2018).

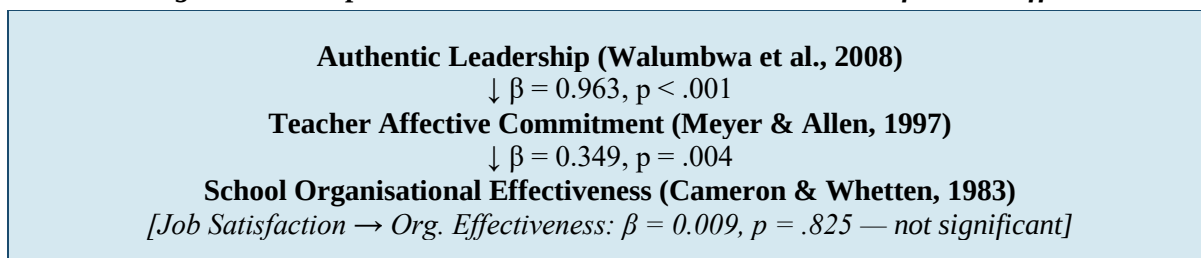
In educational contexts, authentic leadership is particularly relevant because schools are fundamentally relational organisations (Northouse, 2022). Unlike manufacturing or logistics contexts where outputs can be mechanically maximised through process improvement, school effectiveness (Cameron & Whetten, 1983; Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983) depends critically on the quality of human relationships between principals and teachers, between teachers and students, and between the school and its community. Authentic principals who demonstrate genuine care for teachers, who make decisions transparently and fairly in line with Walumbwa et al.'s (2008) balanced processing dimension, and who model the ethical consistency they expect from staff, create the relational conditions in which teachers can commit emotionally to the school's mission (Feng, 2017; Nawaz & Laij, 2021).

2.2 Social Exchange Theory and the Commitment Mechanism

Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) provides a theoretical mechanism for explaining how authentic leadership generates teachers' affective commitment. The norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), the foundational principle of Social Exchange Theory, posits that individuals feel obligated to reciprocate benefits received from others. When authentic principals provide relational benefits (trust, transparency, fair decision-making, genuine care), teachers feel obligated to reciprocate through enhanced affective commitment: emotional attachment to and identification with the school (Meyer & Allen, 1997). This reciprocity-driven commitment, in turn, generates discretionary effort, organisational citizenship behaviour (Olaleye et al., 2024), and beyond-contract contributions that produce organisational effectiveness (Cameron & Whetten, 1983).

The 'heart-first' model proposed in this paper positions affective commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1997) as the critical intermediary in this causal chain: authentic leadership → affective commitment → organisational effectiveness.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework — The Heart-First Model of School Effectiveness



This model integrates Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), Authentic Leadership Theory (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Avolio & Gardner, 2005), and the three-component commitment model (Meyer & Allen, 1991, 1997) to explain why leadership authenticity generates school performance through emotional attachment rather than through rational calculation or compliance.

The policy implication is direct: interventions that improve job satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959; Locke, 1976) without building affective commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1997) may improve teacher well-being without proportionately improving school effectiveness. Conversely, authentic leadership development that builds genuine emotional bonds may improve school effectiveness even when satisfaction improvements are limited — a critical finding for resource-constrained contexts where rapid improvements in working conditions are not feasible (Ministry of Education, 2022; UNESCO, 2022).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Design, Paradigm, and Setting

A pragmatic paradigm (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Bell et al., 2018) informed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), in which quantitative findings were collected and analysed first, followed by qualitative data to explain and contextualize the results. This design is appropriate when quantitative findings require interpretive depth that closed-ended instruments cannot provide (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). The study was conducted across five districts in Western Province, Zambia: Sikongo, Kalabo, Kaoma, Mongu, and Senanga, selected using simple random sampling, with schools sampled through stratified random sampling across three institutional types (day, boarding, and weekly boarding secondary schools).

3.2 Quantitative Phase

The target population comprised 2,896 secondary school teachers in Western Province (Ministry of Education, 2022). Using Yamane's (1967) formula with a 4.63% margin of error, a sample of 402 was calculated. Of 450 questionnaires distributed, 402 were returned and usable (response rate = 89.3%). Authentic leadership was measured using the ALQ (Walumbwa et al., 2008; $\alpha = 0.892$), affective commitment using Meyer and Allen's (1997) scale ($\alpha = 0.878$), job satisfaction using the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire short form (Weiss et al., 1967; $\alpha = 0.851$), and organisational effectiveness using items from the Survey of Organizational Effectiveness (Pettaway et al., 2015; $\alpha = 0.906$). Cronbach's alpha values exceeded the 0.70 threshold for all scales, consistent with Cohen et al.'s (2018) recommendations. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using AMOS v.27 (Kline, 2016) and a bootstrapped mediation analysis with 5,000 resamples, following Preacher and Hayes (2008), were used to test the structural model. Common method bias was assessed using Harman's (1967) Single-Factor Test and was found not to be a significant concern (first factor explained 32.6% of the variance; well below Podsakoff et al.'s [2003] 50% threshold).

Given that all quantitative data were collected through self-reported questionnaires from a single source at a single time point, potential common method bias (CMB) was assessed using multiple procedures. Harman's Single-Factor Test found that the first factor accounts for 32.58% of total variance, substantially below the 50% threshold indicating problematic CMB. Six factors with eigenvalues > 1.0 cumulatively explain 83.04% of variance, confirming multi-dimensional construct representation. Supplementary procedural remedies implemented during data collection included: anonymity assurance; scale separation; neutral item wording; and temporal separation of predictor and criterion measures where feasible. While these procedures reduce CMB likelihood, residual common method variance cannot be entirely ruled out, and results are interpreted with appropriate methodological caution.

3.3 Ethical Approval and Human Participant Protections

This research was conducted in full compliance with ethical standards for human participant research. The study protocol underwent ethical review and approval by the relevant Institutional Review Board/Ethics Committee. All participants provided informed written consent prior to data collection. Participation was entirely voluntary, with clear communication of the right to withdraw without consequence. All participant data were treated as confidential, stored securely, and reported in aggregate form to ensure individual anonymity and privacy protection.

3.4 Qualitative Phase

Twenty Headteachers were purposively selected from the same schools surveyed quantitatively (Creswell, 2014), representing diverse school types, districts, genders, and years of headship experience (range: 4–18 years). Individual semi-structured interviews lasting 60–90 minutes were conducted at participants' schools, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework using NVivo 14, with trustworthiness established through member checking, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, and a reflexivity journal, consistent with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) credibility criteria.

4. Results

4.1 Quantitative Findings: The Leadership-Commitment-Effectiveness Chain

The SEM demonstrated excellent model fit (CFI = 0.96; TLI = 0.95; RMSEA = 0.042; SRMR = 0.031), consistent with Kline's (2016) fit index thresholds, and explained 93% of the variance in affective commitment ($R^2 = 0.93$) and 61% in organisational effectiveness ($R^2 = 0.61$). Table 1 summarises the key structural relationships.

Table 1. Key Structural Relationships: The Authentic Leadership–Commitment–Effectiveness Chain (N = 402)

Relationship	β	SE	p	R^2	Theory Basis
AL → Affective Commitment	0.963	0.018	< .001	.93	SET (Blau, 1964)
AL → Job Satisfaction	0.610	0.041	< .001	.37	ALT (Walumbwa et al., 2008)
AL → Org. Effectiveness (direct)	0.433	0.052	< .001	—	ALT (Avolio & Gardner, 2005)
AC → Org. Effectiveness	0.349	0.067	.004	—	Meyer & Allen (1997)
JS → Org. Effectiveness	0.009	0.041	.825	—	Rejected (cf. Locke, 1976)
AL → AC → OE (indirect)	0.364	0.042	< .001	—	SET + ALT mediation
Total effect AL → OE	0.797	0.031	< .001	.61	(95% CI [.736, .858])

Note. AL = Authentic Leadership; AC = Affective Commitment; JS = Job Satisfaction; OE = Organisational Effectiveness; SET = Social Exchange Theory; ALT = Authentic Leadership Theory. Bootstrapped 95% CI for indirect effect: [0.285, 0.448].

Measurement Model Assessment: Reliability and Convergent Validity

Before conducting Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), the measurement model was subjected to Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to establish the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of all study constructs.

Table 1A. Measurement Model Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Authentic Leadership	8	0.892	0.91	0.72
Affective Commitment	6	0.878	0.89	0.69
Job Satisfaction	5	0.851	0.86	0.65
Organizational Effectiveness	7	0.906	0.93	0.75

Source: Field Data (2026)

Table 1B. HTMT Ratio of Correlations

Construct Pair	HTMT Ratio	90% Bootstrapped CI	Recommended Threshold	Decision
Authentic Leadership – Affective Commitment	0.88	0.85 – 0.91	< 0.90	Acceptable

Source: SEM Output (2026)

Table 1C. Single-Factor versus Two-Factor CFA Model Comparison

Model Type	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf	p-value	Interpretation
Single-Factor Model	1254.81	77	—	—	—	Poor model fit
Two-Factor Model	511.44	76	743.37	1	< 0.001	Significantly superior fit

Source: CFA Model Comparison Results (2026)

Four findings have direct policy significance. First, the authentic leadership → affective commitment path ($\beta = 0.963$) is among the strongest leadership-outcome relationships reported in educational research (cf. Feng, 2017; Lux et al., 2023), suggesting contextual amplification in resource-constrained environments where relational leadership becomes the primary psychological resource available to teachers (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Second, affective commitment partially mediates the authentic leadership–organisational effectiveness relationship, accounting for 46% of the total effect, establishing commitment as the critical mediating mechanism through which authentic leadership improves school performance (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Third, the total effect of authentic leadership on organisational effectiveness ($\beta = 0.797$) demonstrates its systemic importance as a driver of institutional performance (Cameron & Whetten, 1983). Fourth, the null direct effect of job satisfaction on organisational effectiveness ($\beta = 0.009$, $p = .825$) challenges the theoretical basis of satisfaction-enhancement policy interventions (Herzberg et al., 1959; Locke, 1976) and is consistent with emerging evidence of suppression reviewed by Wartenberg et al. (2023).

4.2 Qualitative Findings: Why Authentic Leadership Builds Commitment in Context

Four qualitative themes contextualise and extend the quantitative results, explaining both the mechanisms through which authentic leadership builds commitment in Western Province and the structural barriers that constrain it.

Theme 1: The Relational Contract, When Authentic Leadership Works

Headteachers who successfully cultivated teacher affective commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1997) described establishing a relational contract a sense that the principal cared about teachers as whole persons, not merely as instructional inputs. Consistent with Social Exchange Theory's emphasis on trust as the foundation of social exchange (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), specific authentic leadership behaviours cited by participants included: acknowledging teacher effort informally and publicly, demonstrating awareness of teachers' family circumstances, creating space for teacher voice in school decisions (consistent with Walumbwa et al.'s [2008] balanced processing dimension), and modelling the values they expected of teachers. One Headteacher (HDT19, Mongu) described this: 'I learned that teachers need to feel seen. Not just assessed, not just managed but seen. Teachers began talking about the school as ours rather than his.'

This relational contract experienced by teachers as authentic care rather than strategic motivation is the mechanism through which the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) converts authentic leadership into affective commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Teachers who experience genuine relational investment from their principal feel obligated to reciprocate through emotional attachment to the school (Lux et al., 2023; Ribeiro et al., 2018).

Theme 2: The Commitment Killers, Barriers to Authentic Leadership

Three leadership practices emerged as systematic barriers to affective commitment formation 'commitment killers' that disrupt the reciprocity mechanism (Gouldner, 1960) through which authentic leadership normally generates commitment (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

First, financial opacity: Headteachers described limiting financial disclosure to protect teachers from discouraging realities, a form of protective non-disclosure consistent with Lozi cultural leadership norms (Dedzo et al., 2026). However, as Social Exchange Theory predicts (Blau, 1964), information asymmetry undermines the trust that authentic leadership requires, and teachers frequently interpreted financial silence as evidence of mismanagement rather than protection: 'Teachers once suspected that money from boarding fees had been misused. The truth was simply that the funds were not enough' (HDT11, Mongu).

Second, output-centric pressure: the 'results-at-any-cost' culture driven by district accountability frameworks (Ministry of Education, 2022) forced Headteachers to prioritise examination performance over teacher well-being, systematically damaging the relational fabric that authentic leadership (Walumbwa et al., 2008) and affective commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1997) depend upon: 'I pushed my teachers hard. The results went up. But teachers who used to smile at me now avoided me. This year the results have slipped because the teachers are burned out' (HDT16, Kaoma).

Third, the compliance trap: Headteachers who defined effectiveness through compliance attendance, order, and record-keeping, created environments high on Meyer and Allen's (1997) normative commitment but depleted of affective commitment. One Headteacher (HDT6, Mongu) captured the distinction memorably: 'I had created an efficient machine, but machines don't have souls, and neither did my school. I had confused compliance with commitment, order with life.'

Theme 3: Structural Commitment Enablers Beyond Individual Leadership

The qualitative findings also identified structural factors that either enable or constrain commitment formation, outside individual principals' immediate control, that policy interventions can address (Ministry of Education, 2022; UNESCO, 2022).

Teacher family co-location emerged as a significant enabler of affective commitment. Consistent with Social Exchange Theory's emphasis on the embeddedness of exchange relationships in broader social networks (Emerson, 1972; Blau, 1964), teachers who relocated with their families developed significantly stronger institutional attachment: 'Teachers who move here with their spouses and children usually adapt more easily. Their children attend local schools, and their families become part of the community. As a result, they are more invested in the school's success' (HDT10, Kaoma).

Spiritual vocation emerged as a supplementary commitment resource in schools where leader-generated authentic engagement was constrained by cultural barriers, resource scarcity, or isolation, consistent with Hobfoll et al.'s (2018) conservation of resources framework: 'The teachers who manage to stay committed in these remote schools are usually people of deep faith. They see their work as a calling rather than simply a job' (HDT8, Sikongo).

Theme 4: The Effectiveness Misalignment, How Accountability Destroys What It Measures

The most structurally significant qualitative finding was a fundamental misalignment between how the accountability system defines effectiveness (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983; Cameron & Whetten, 1983) and the conditions that actually generate it. District accountability frameworks (Ministry of Education, 2022) define school effectiveness almost exclusively through Grade 12 examination results, incentivising leadership behaviours that systematically undermine the relational conditions from which genuine long-term effectiveness grows.

One Headteacher (HDT9, Kalabo) articulated this perverse incentive structure with precision: 'At every DEBS meeting, the first question is: What were your Grade 12 results? Not, how are your teachers? Not what are your challenges? Just results. If your results are up, you are a good Head. It does not matter if your school has no textbooks, no qualified teachers, no decent classrooms.' This account illustrates what Hobfoll et al. (2018) would identify as a conservation of resources dilemma: the accountability

system forces leaders to deplete the relational resources that sustain long-term effectiveness in order to maximise the short-term performance metric that determines career outcomes.

5. The CARE Policy Framework for Principal Leadership Development

Based on the integrated quantitative and qualitative findings, and drawing on authentic leadership theory (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Avolio & Gardner, 2005), social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), and the cultural extension work of Dedzo et al. (2026) and Gardner et al. (2024), this paper proposes the CARE Model: a policy framework for developing authentic principal leadership capacity in Sub-Saharan African educational systems. CARE stands for Culturally Adaptive, Relationally Authentic, and Effectiveness-Broadened. Each component addresses one of the three structural gaps identified in the integrated findings.

5.1 Culturally Adaptive Leadership Development

Principal leadership development programmes in Zambia and comparable Sub-Saharan African contexts must be designed with explicit attention to the cultural frameworks within which school leaders operate (Dedzo et al., 2026; House et al., 2014). The 'father figure' paternalistic leadership archetype prevalent in Western Province is not simply a deviation from Walumbwa et al.'s (2008) authentic leadership model; it is an authentic expression of culturally rooted Lozi leadership values (consistent with Dedzo et al.'s [2026] collective orientation dimension). Development programmes that dismiss this archetype will fail to engage leaders where they are, while those that simply impose Western authentic leadership prescriptions without cultural adaptation will encounter the cultural resistance documented in the qualitative findings.

Culturally adaptive authentic leadership programmes should: (a) engage explicitly with Lozi and other relevant cultural leadership traditions, helping principals identify their authentic cultural leadership foundations; (b) introduce the differentiated transparency framework as a culturally grounded form of authentic disclosure (Dedzo et al., 2026) that honours protective non-disclosure as contextually appropriate while building toward greater relational openness where culturally feasible; (c) develop principals' capacity to navigate the tension between cultural paternalism and trust-building transparency; and (d) use case studies drawn from Zambian and broader African educational contexts rather than primarily Western exemplars (Gardner et al., 2024).

5.2 Relationally Authentic Leadership Practice

The quantitative finding that authentic leadership's primary pathway to organisational effectiveness runs through affective commitment ($\beta_{\text{indirect}} = 0.364$, accounting for 46% of the total effect) has a clear implication for leadership development content (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Lux et al., 2023): programmes must prioritise the relational dimensions of authentic leadership, not merely its technical-administrative components. Specific competencies that should be prioritised include: self-awareness practices (structured reflective exercises, 360-degree feedback); relational transparency skills; balanced processing capabilities (staff consultative committees, evidence-informed decision-making); and internalized moral perspective (maintaining ethical standards under examination performance pressure and resource crisis conditions).

Critically, these competencies must be developed through structured professional learning communities (PLCs) networks of Headteachers meeting regularly for peer support and reflective practice. PLCs should be district-convened, attendance-funded, and technology-assisted where infrastructure permits, consistent with the sustained leadership support that Asim et al. (2024) found necessary to maintain school leadership improvement effects in Malawi.

5.3 Effectiveness-Broadened Accountability Frameworks

The most structurally transformative recommendation concerns the redesign of school effectiveness and inspection frameworks. The current accountability architecture, which defines and rewards school effectiveness almost exclusively through Grade 12 examination results (Ministry of Education, 2022), is

systematically incentivising leadership behaviours that destroy the relational conditions from which genuine long-term effectiveness grows (Cameron & Whetten, 1983; Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983).

Table 2. Proposed Broadened School Effectiveness Framework (Cameron & Whetten, 1983; Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983)

Indicator Category (Weight)	Specific Indicators	Data Sources	Freq.	Theoretical Basis
Academic Outcomes (40%)	Grade 12 pass rates; Grade 8–12 progression rates; subject achievement trends	ZAEA examination data; school records	Annual	Goal model (Cameron & Whetten, 1983)
Relational Quality (30%)	Teacher affective commitment index; staff turnover rate; teacher participation in decisions	Annual staff survey; HR records	Annual	Meyer & Allen (1997); Cropanzano & Mitchell (2005)
Leadership Practice (20%)	Principal self-awareness rating; transparency audit; balanced processing evidence; teacher perceptions of AL	360° leadership assessment; inspection	Biennial	ALQ (Walumbwa et al., 2008)
Community & Wellbeing (10%)	Parent satisfaction; community engagement; student welfare indicators	Parent survey; school records	Annual	Stakeholder model (Freeman, 1984)

This framework does not minimise academic outcomes; they retain the largest weight (40%) and remain essential public accountability measures. However, by making the relational and leadership conditions that sustainably generate academic outcomes visible, measurable, and consequential for career progression, the framework aligns principal incentives with the authentic leadership behaviours that the quantitative evidence shows drive long-term school effectiveness ($\beta_{\text{total}} = 0.797$).

5.4 Teacher Deployment and Wellbeing Policy

The qualitative findings identified three structural factors beyond principal leadership that the CARE framework recommends addressing through targeted policy. Family co-location support: teacher deployment policies should actively support family relocation through housing provision for families, school placement for teachers' children, spousal employment support where possible, and family settlement grants. Pastoral support structures for remote postings: regular district-organised professional and social events for teachers in remote areas and technology-enabled peer networks would mitigate the costs of isolation. Headteacher wellbeing and peer supervision: structured Headteacher peer learning communities, accessible to all principals including those in remote areas, would simultaneously build authentic leadership skills and provide the collegial support system that isolated school leaders urgently need.

6. Discussion

6.1 Challenging the Satisfaction-Performance Assumption

The null direct effect of job satisfaction on organisational effectiveness ($\beta = 0.009$, $p = .825$) in this study's structural model is consistent with emerging evidence that the satisfaction-performance

relationship is substantially mediated by deeper motivational variables (Wartenberg et al., 2023; Li et al., 2025). Wartenberg et al. (2023), in a comprehensive meta-analysis of correlates of teacher job satisfaction, found that while satisfaction correlates with multiple positive outcomes, its relationship with student academic achievement is weaker and more context-dependent than commonly assumed. Li et al. (2025), in a study of 436 teachers, found that perceived organisational support and self-efficacy rather than satisfaction alone are the primary drivers of teacher job performance.

Taken together, these findings suggest that governments investing primarily in salary increases and working conditions as pathways to improved school effectiveness may achieve better teacher well-being without proportionate improvements in school performance. The more productive investment, as the heart-first model proposes, is in the leadership conditions that build affective commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1997), because committed teachers contribute to school effectiveness (Cameron & Whetten, 1983) regardless of their satisfaction with specific job conditions (Lux et al., 2023).

6.2 The Case for Contextually Grounded African Educational Research

This study exemplifies the kind of contextually grounded, methodologically rigorous educational research that Sub-Saharan African educational systems urgently need but often lack (Asim et al., 2024; Gardner et al., 2024). The finding that authentic leadership exerts its strongest effects through affective commitment and that this commitment is shaped by Lozi cultural paternalism, geographic isolation, family dynamics, and spirituality could not have emerged from Western-designed survey instruments alone. It required the integration of rigorous SEM-based quantitative analysis and deeply contextualised qualitative inquiry (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) that Creswell and Creswell (2023) identify as the distinctive epistemological strength of mixed-methods research.

A sustained investment in home-grown educational leadership research capacity in Sub-Saharan African universities is called for, explicitly responding to Gardner et al.'s (2024) identification of geographical gaps in authentic leadership scholarship and Asim et al.'s (2024) demonstration that leadership development interventions can generate measurable improvements in student outcomes when grounded in the local context.

7. Conclusions

This study provides robust empirical evidence that authentic principal leadership is the most powerful lever available to Zambian educational policymakers for building teacher affective commitment and improving school organisational effectiveness. The heart-first model in which principals who cultivate genuine emotional bonds with teachers through authentic leadership ($\beta_{AL \rightarrow AC} = 0.963$) unlock a motivational resource that administrative mandates and salary improvements alone cannot generate has direct implications for principal preparation, teacher deployment, accountability design, and district-level support structures.

The CARE Policy Framework (Culturally Adaptive, Relationally Authentic, Effectiveness-Broadened) translates these research findings into actionable policy through three complementary components: culturally adaptive leadership development programmes that engage with Lozi and comparable African leadership traditions; relationally authentic leadership competency development grounded in the four dimensions of Walumbwa et al.'s (2008) authentic leadership model; and a broadened school effectiveness framework that makes the relational conditions for sustainable performance visible, measurable, and consequential for career outcomes.

The evidence presented here demonstrates that the path to improved school effectiveness runs not primarily through examination pressure, salary adjustments, or compliance monitoring but through the cultivation of authentic, culturally grounded, relationally generous principal leadership that builds teachers' emotional commitment to their schools, their colleagues, and their students. This is the most sustainable investment a school system can make in its future.

References

- Asim, S., Gera, R. C., Harris, D., & Dercon, S. (2024). Does effective school leadership improve student progression and test scores? Evidence from a field experiment in Malawi (Policy Research Working Paper 10846). World Bank.
- Avolio, B. J., & Gardner, W. L. (2005). Authentic leadership development: Getting to the root of positive forms of leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16(3), 315–338.
- Banks, G. C., McCauley, K. D., Gardner, W. L., & Guler, C. E. (2016). A meta-analytic review of authentic and transformational leadership: A test for redundancy. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 27(4), 634–652.
- Bell, E., Bryman, A., & Harley, B. (2018). *Business research methods*. Oxford University Press.
- Blau, P. M. (1964). *Exchange and power in social life*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Cameron, K. S., & Whetten, D. A. (1983). Organisational effectiveness: A multidimensional construct. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 28(4), 515–524.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education* (8th ed.). Routledge.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Cropanzano, R., & Mitchell, M. S. (2005). Social exchange theory: An interdisciplinary review. *Journal of Management*, 31(6), 874–900.
- Dedzo, B., Leo, W. W. C., & Huang, F. (2026). Experiences of authentic leadership from life stories in West Africa. *Journal of Management & Organisation*, 32(1), 1–23.
- Dirik, H. F., Seren Intepeler, S., & Hewison, A. (2024). A new adaptation of the authentic leadership questionnaire in Turkish: Evidence from nursing. *Nursing & Health Sciences*, 26(4), 1–10.
- Emerson, R. M. (1972). Exchange theory, part I: A psychological basis for social exchange. In J. Berger, M. Zelditch, & B. Anderson (Eds.), *Sociological theories in progress* (Vol. 2, pp. 38–57). Houghton Mifflin.
- Feng, F. I. (2017). Relationships between authentic leadership, LMX and teacher authenticity. Paper presented at the European Conference on Educational Research, Copenhagen, Denmark.
- Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach*. Pitman.
- Fry, L. W., & Whittington, J. L. (2005). In search of authenticity: Spiritual leadership theory as a source for future theory, research, and practice on authentic leadership. In W. L. Gardner, B. J. Avolio, & F. O. Walumbwa (Eds.), *Authentic leadership theory and practice: Origins, effects and development* (pp. 183–209). Elsevier.
- Gardner, W. L., Karam, E. P., Noghani, F., Coglisier, C. C., Gullifor, D. P., Mhatre, K., Ge, S., Bi, R., Yan, Z., & Dahunsi, D. (2024). ‘Let’s get real’... when we lead: A systematic review, critical assessment, and agenda for authentic leadership theory and research. *Journal of Management and Organization*, 30(6), 1–35.
- Gooden, C., Zolkowski, J., & Smith, F. A. (2023). A systematic literature review on factors of stress, burnout and job satisfaction of secondary grades teachers at time of professional crisis. *The Clearing House*, 96(5), 162–171.
- Gouldner, A. W. (1960). The norm of reciprocity: A preliminary statement. *American Sociological Review*, 25(2), 161–178.
- Harman, H. H. (1967). *Modern factor analysis* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.

- Herzberg, F., Mausner, B., & Snyderman, B. B. (1959). *The motivation to work*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Hobfoll, S. E., Halbesleben, J.-P., Neveu, J.-P., & Westman, M. (2018). Conservation of resources in the organizational context: The reality of resources and their consequences. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 5, 103–128.
- Hoch, J. E., Bommer, W. H., Dulebohn, J. H., & Wu, D. (2018). Do ethical, authentic, and servant leadership explain variance above and beyond transformational leadership? A meta-analysis. *Journal of Management*, 44(2), 501–529.
- Homans, G. C. (1961). *Social behavior: Its elementary forms*. Harcourt, Brace & World.
- House, R. J., Dorfman, P. W., Javidan, M., Hanges, P. J., & Sully de Luque, M. F. (2014). *Strategic leadership across cultures: The GLOBE study of CEO leadership behavior and effectiveness in 24 countries*. SAGE Publications.
- Kline, R. B. (2016). *Principles and practice of structural equation modeling* (4th ed.). Guilford Press.
- Li, L., Kanchanapoom, K., Deeprasert, J., Duan, N., & Qi, Z. (2025). Unveiling the factors shaping teacher job performance. *BMC Psychology*, 13, Article 45.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE Publications.
- Locke, E. A. (1976). The nature and causes of job satisfaction. In M. D. Dunnette (Ed.), *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology* (pp. 1297–1343). Rand McNally.
- Lux, A. A., Grover, S. L., & Teo, S. T. T. (2023). Reframing commitment in authentic leadership: Untangling relationship-outcome processes. *Journal of Management & Organization*, 29(1), 103–121.
- Meyer, J. P., & Allen, N. J. (1991). A three-component conceptualization of organizational commitment. *Human Resource Management Review*, 1(1), 61–89.
- Meyer, J. P., & Allen, N. J. (1997). *Commitment in the workplace: Theory, research, and application*. SAGE Publications.
- Ministry of Education, Zambia. (2022). *Annual education statistical bulletin*. Government of the Republic of Zambia.
- Nawaz, A., & Laij, T. (2021). Authentic leadership and organizational effectiveness at private universities in Jakarta. *Journal of Business Administration*, 15(3), 1–25.
- Neider, L. L., & Schriesheim, C. A. (2011). The authentic leadership inventory (ALI): Development and empirical tests. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 22(6), 1146–1164.
- Northouse, P. G. (2022). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (9th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Olaleye, F. O., Msimanga, M. R., & Khumalo, N. S. (2024). Authentic leadership and organizational productivity in Nigerian construction firms. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 52(4), 678–698.
- Pettaway, L., Waller, L., & Waller, S. (2015). Survey of organizational effectiveness. *Educational Leadership Review*, 16(1), 1–15.
- Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Lee, J.-Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common method biases in behavioral research. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(5), 879–903.
- Preacher, K. J., & Hayes, A. F. (2008). Asymptotic and resampling strategies for assessing and comparing indirect effects in multiple mediator models. *Behavior Research Methods*, 40(3), 879–891.
- Quinn, R. E., & Rohrbaugh, J. (1983). A spatial model of effectiveness criteria. *Management Science*, 29(3), 363–377.
- Ribeiro, N., Gomes, D. R., & Kurian, S. (2018). Authentic leadership and performance: The mediating role of affective commitment. *Journal of Management Development*, 37(5), 423–435.
- Schoonenboom, J., & Johnson, R. B. (2017). How to construct a mixed methods research design. *Kolner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, 69(Suppl. 2), 107–131.
- UNESCO. (2022). *Global education monitoring report 2022: Reimagining our futures together*. UNESCO.

- Walumbwa, F. O., Avolio, B. J., Gardner, W. L., Wernsing, T. S., & Peterson, S. J. (2008). Authentic leadership: Development and validation of a theory-based measure. *Journal of Management*, 34(1), 89–126.
- Wartenberg, G., Aldrup, K., Grund, S., & Klusmann, U. (2023). Teachers' job satisfaction: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 35, Article 114.
- Weiss, D. J., Dawis, R. V., England, G. W., & Lofquist, L. H. (1967). *Manual for the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire*. University of Minnesota.
- Yamane, T. (1967). *Statistics: An introductory analysis* (2nd ed.). Harper & Row.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).