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TRANSFORMATIONAL SCHOOL LEADERSHIP, TEACHER WELL-BEING, AND INTENTION TO STAY: A MULTILEVEL STUDY OF PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Teacher well-being and retention remain persistent concerns in public secondary schools, where workload, administrative pressure, limited resources, and emotional demands can weaken professional commitment. This conceptual article develops a multilevel framework explaining how transformational school leadership influences teachers' intention to stay directly and indirectly through teacher well-being. A conceptual research design was used to integrate Transformational Leadership Theory, the Job Demands–Resources model, and Social Exchange Theory. The framework distinguishes individual teacher perceptions from shared school-level leadership conditions and identifies direct, mediating, and cross-level relationships. The proposed model suggests that transformational school leadership enhances teacher well-being by strengthening professional support, recognition, autonomy, participation, trust, and sense of purpose. Improved well-being may then increase teachers' intention to stay by reducing occupational stress and reinforcing job satisfaction, engagement, and organizational commitment. Transformational leadership is also expected to influence intention to stay directly by strengthening teachers' attachment to school goals and confidence in school leadership. At the organizational level, a shared transformational leadership climate may promote collective well-being and stronger retention intentions, while school culture, resources, and organizational support may shape the strength of these relationships. Overall, teacher well-being is positioned as the central mechanism connecting leadership with retention. The framework provides a theoretical foundation for future longitudinal and multilevel empirical research.

Keywords – transformational school leadership, teacher well-being, intention to stay, public secondary schools, multilevel framework

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1. Introduction

The well-being, and retention, of teachers has become a serious issue in public secondary schools. Teachers often operate in environments that are stressful, overworked, pressured by administrators, burdened by classroom issues, have limited resources, and are emotionally stressed. If these pressures are not resolved, they can lower teacher satisfaction, diminish professional commitment, and stimulate teachers' desire to leave their schools and/or the profession. The well-being of teachers is therefore not only a matter of individual teachers' well-being but also a matter of school stability, quality of teaching and learning, and student learning. Studies have recently revealed that personal, professional, and organisational factors influence teacher well-being, highlighting the need to see teacher well-being as a multifaceted dimension of teachers' working lives (Gámez-Genovart et al., 2025).

The school leader is a key figure in impacting teachers' daily work experiences. Leadership behaviours impact professional autonomy, involvement in decision making, recognition, trust, support and professional development. These values – shared vision, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration – are especially pertinent to transformational school leadership. Giving teachers opportunities to see these behaviours from leaders can help foster their sense of purpose, professional confidence and commitment to the school. Kareem et al., (2023) suggested that transformational educational leadership can build teachers' organizational commitment through the establishment of supportive and motivating work environments.

Psychological and organizational factors are also possible ways that leadership can impact teachers' decisions to stay. Teachers are more likely to remain in the school when they feel a sense of support and value from school leaders. In their study, Arian et al., (2019) found perceived organizational support and psychological capital to mediate between leadership and the intention to stay among teachers. Similarly, Kaniuka and Chitiga (2022) found that teacher perceptions of the leadership efforts were correlated with commitment to stay-on, implying that the perception of the actual leadership practice has a strong relationship with teachers' decisions to stay-on.

While there is increased focus on teachers and their well-being and retention, these topics are studied in isolation. Previous research can be based on one or more of stress, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, leadership or intention to leave, but there is not a great deal of research clarifying the relationships between these variables. Thus, how transformational school leadership impacts teachers' intention to remain in the school is not fully understood. This connection could be a reflection of teacher wellbeing as leaders who are supportive can foster emotional and occupational wellbeing in teachers, which can in turn lead to a greater willingness to stay.

Another drawback is the lack of consideration of the multi-level nature of school organizations. Teachers are situated in schools which is where they experience their work, thus their experiences

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are mediated by their personal experiences and by the collective experiences of the school. The rural school context is important as leadership opportunities and teacher well-being are associated with teachers' intentions to leave (Engle et al., 2024). However, school-level factors do make a significant contribution to teacher turnover, which suggests that there can be no simple formula for teacher retention based on individual factors (Farahmandpour & Voelkel, 2025).

Therefore, this article builds a conceptual framework with multiple levels, relating transformational school leadership, teacher well-being, and intention to stay from public secondary school teachers. The framework offers direct and indirect, and cross-level relationships between these constructs. It has been developed around the concepts of Transformational Leadership Theory, Job Demands–Resources model and Social Exchange Theory, which together describe how leadership is able to motivate teachers, give them resources that promote well-being, and promote reciprocity to the school.

2. Literature Review

Transformative school leadership has become a key organizational variable that affects teachers' professional functioning, well being and commitment to stay in school. This leadership style focuses on developing vision, motivating through inspiration, stimulating the intellect and giving consideration to the individual, all of which foster a positive and empowering workplace. Transformational leaders can improve teachers' sense of purpose and professional identity by ensuring that they have a shared vision and collaborative decision making. Kaya (2024) found that transformational leadership has a significant effect on teacher professional resilience and teacher job satisfaction and showed that increase in professional resilience is one of the mechanisms in which the teacher's performance and creativity are affected by transformational leadership. Likewise, Meidelina et al. (2023) in their systematic review asserted that transformational leadership is consistently associated with increasing teacher well-being in a variety of educational contexts by decreasing teachers' stress and improving their motivation.

Teacher wellbeing is a complex and multidimensional concept that includes emotional, psychological, social and occupational factors. It is an indication of teacher's capacity to handle the demands of work, while remaining to be engaged in a positive way in the work and feeling good. The literature, however, suggests that there are inconsistencies in the definition and measurement of teacher well-being. Kurrle and Warwas (2025) found there to be a great deal of diversity in conceptualizations and methodological practices, suggesting a greater need for a common understanding of teacher well-being. The absence of conceptual clarity makes it difficult to compare results from studies and to design interventions specifically. Despite these variations, there is consensus that teachers' well-being is a key factor that influences job satisfaction, engagement and retention. In support of this, Menge and Gerick (2026) reported that transformational leadership can be a social resource that contributes to increased occupational well-being, especially for early career teachers, whereas self-regulation can be a personal resource that reduces emotional exhaustion and maintains longer-term occupational well-being.

A variety of individual, organizational and contextual factors contribute to teacher retention.

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Teachers may be more likely to leave if they experience stressors that are related to their work, such as workload and work–family conflict. Li et al. (2022) found that the work–family conflict positively correlated with turnover intention directly as well as indirectly via psychological contract and job satisfaction. The study results indicate that both individual and organizational factors play a crucial role in influencing retention decisions. Leadership is especially important in difficult school settings, especially those with low resourcing or high needs. Lochmiller, et al. (2024) discovered that leadership behaviors like recognizing, building relationships, and being genuinely committed to the school's mission are important to teaching staff retention in high poverty school communities. Such practices can contribute to a positive organizational culture, enhance trust, involvement, and commitment in the workplace.

The findings from the literature overall indicate that transformational leadership helps to retain teachers because it improves their well-being, increases teacher professional resilience, and raises teacher job satisfaction. Other broader influences, like workload, organisational support and life demands, also affect teachers' decisions to remain or leave. This body of research helps to contribute to a framework that integrates leadership practices, teacher well-being and organizational conditions with the intention to stay in the profession.

3. Method

3.1 Conceptual Research Design

The study is conceptual with the objective of developing a conceptual framework of relationship between transformational school leadership, teacher well-being and intention to stay of public secondary school teachers. The study does not involve gathering data, but instead builds upon existing theories and findings. This multilevel perspective is able to separate the individual teacher's perceptions from the shared leadership practices at the school level. The framework is a representation of the direct and indirect relationship between the constructs and offers propositions for further empirical testing.

3.2 Concept Identification

Transformational school leadership is a set of actions that fosters shared vision, professional support, innovation, recognition, and teacher participation. Emotional well-being, professional satisfaction, manageable stress, engagement, and positive workplace relations are all components of teacher well-being. Intention to stay: teachers' desire to continue in their current school or teaching career. The framework also identifies teacher-level factors (workload and experience) from school-level factors (leadership climate, organizational support, resources and school culture).

3.3 Theoretical Integration

The framework combines Transformational Leadership Theory, Job Demands–Resources model and Social Exchange Theory. Transformational Leadership Theory is an explanation of how leaders are able to enhance motivation and commitment. The Job Demands–Resources model illustrates the impact of leadership support, autonomy and recognition on reducing stress and

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wellbeing. Why teachers who are supported by the organization might act loyal and committed is explained by Social Exchange Theory. These theories, when combined, account for the relationship between leadership and teacher well-being and intention to stay.

3.4 Conceptual Model Development

The model suggests that transformational school leadership has a positive impact on teacher well-being and intentions to remain. Teachers' well-being is also expected to positively influence intention to stay and serve as a mediator between leadership and retention. At the teacher level, individual teachers' leadership perceptions influence their well-being and their intention to stay. Shared leadership practices at the school level can shape the school environment as a whole, affecting teachers in the process. These relationships provide the basis for future multilevel empirical research.

4. Results

The conceptual analysis resulted in a multilevel framework of the relationship between transformational school leadership, teacher well-being, and intention to stay among public secondary school teachers. The findings are reported as theoretically derived relationships, conceptual propositions and multilevel pathways. The study is theoretical, and therefore, no statistical coefficients, significance values, and empirical estimates are given.

4.1 Proposed Conceptual Framework

Transformational School Leadership is the key explanatory construct identified in the framework. It incorporates leadership practices like communicating a shared vision, offering individual support, encouraging innovation, recognising teachers' contribution and involving teachers in school decisions. This practice is predicted to impact teachers' psychological and professional experiences. Teacher well-being is seen as a result of transformational leadership and a way in which transformational leadership affects intention to stay. Emotional stability, manageable stress at work, satisfaction with work, positive relationships with others, motivation and having a purpose are all elements of well-being.

Intention to stay is teachers' willingness to continue teaching in their current school or stay in the teaching profession. The framework suggests that the likelihood of teachers' retention increases when they feel they are well led and have a good sense of well-being at work. The key constructs and their suggested functions in the framework are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Core Constructs in the Proposed Conceptual Framework

Construct	Conceptual definition	Role in the framework
Transformational school leadership	Leadership practices that communicate vision, encourage innovation, provide support, recognize	Primary predictor

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	contributions, and promote participation	
Teacher well-being	Teachers' emotional, psychological, social, and occupational functioning within the school environment	Outcome and mediator
Intention to stay	A teacher's willingness or planned decision to remain in the current school or teaching profession	Primary outcome
Teacher-level conditions	Individual perceptions, workload, experience, self-efficacy, and personal circumstances	Individual-level influences
School-level conditions	Shared leadership climate, organizational support, school culture, resources, and working conditions	Contextual influences

According to the proposed framework, leadership can have a positive impact on intention to stay in two ways. The first is a direct pathway – where transformational leadership fosters commitment and attachment to the school as shown in Fig 1. The second is an indirect pathway through which intention to stay is strengthened by leadership that in turn leads to improved teacher well-being.

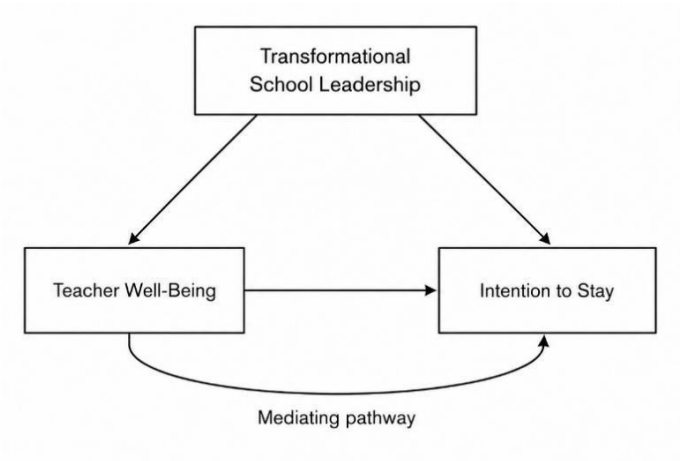

Fig 1. Integrated conceptual Model

4.2 Direct Relationships

The first connection is between transformational school leadership and teachers' well-being. Transformational leaders offer encouragement, professional recognition, autonomy, constructive feedback, and participation opportunities to teachers. These leadership resources can help to decrease the sense of isolation, role ambiguity, and occupational stress. For teachers, an understanding of their leaders' value of their contribution is thus likely to increase their professional satisfaction, emotional stability, and work engagement.

The second direct pathway relates to teacher well-being and intentions to stay. Positive occupational well-being is associated with teachers' sense of meaningfulness and manageability of their work. Good relationships, reasonable workload, job satisfaction and emotional well-being

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can contribute to greater job retention among teachers. Conversely, job stress, burnout, job dissatisfaction, and poor relationships at work could raise withdrawal intentions.

The third direct association is between transformational school leadership and intention to stay. When school leaders are good at communicating vision, being fair, acknowledging the contributions of teachers, and encouraging teachers to grow in their profession, teachers develop a greater sense of attachment. These practices can lead teachers to believe that their ongoing employment is valuable to them professionally and to the school's objectives.

The direct correlations show that teacher retention is not only on an individual level. Also affected by leadership quality and working conditions in the school. Transformational leadership can then be viewed as a resource for the organization that can also positively impact teacher health and retention.

4.3 Mediating Relationship

The following relationship is suggested: Transformational school leadership to intention to stay through teacher well-being. The process whereby leadership can influence intention to remain is described in this relationship. Transformational leadership doesn't impact teachers just by means of formal decisions or administration. It also influences the attitudes of teachers toward their profession, their professional identity, workload, teacher-student relationships, and future in the school.

School leaders can support, recognize, engage, and develop teachers, which can result in better emotional and occupational health. Enhanced health status may then lead to greater retention rates. Thus, psychological and professional experiences of the teachers may mediate some of the positive association between leadership and intention to stay.

The framework doesn't presume teacher well-being alone accounts for the relationship. Transformational leadership can still directly influence intention to stay as teachers might continue to stay in school as a result of their trust in leadership, believing in a common vision, or their confidence in future job prospects. Teacher well-being is thus suggested as a mediator.

4.4 Multilevel Relationships

The framework is aware of the fact that teachers are embedded in schools. Thus, individual and organizational level leadership, well-being, and intention to stay are relatedas shown in Fig 2. At the teacher level, the leadership can be seen as the personal perception of the principal's behaviour by each teacher. Leadership experience and expectations can vary from teacher to teacher within the same school due to various factors, including subject area, frequency of contact with the administration, workload, and experience. The perceptions may help to account for the differences in individual well-being and intention to stay.

Transformational leadership in the school is a climate of shared leadership at the school level. If teachers in the school believe that leaders support them, effectively communicate with them, encourage involvement, value their contribution to school life, the practices can become a feature of the school environment. The overall quality of the leadership climate could then have a

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positive impact on the well-being of the entire teaching community and the retention intentions of all teachers.

The strength of the proposed relationships may also be influenced by the conditions at the school level as illustrated in Table 2. High levels of resources, a culture of collaboration, reasonable workloads, fairness and growth and development opportunities could augment the impact of transformational leadership. Conversely, high staffing needs, high demands for administration, low resources and conflict can diminish its positive impact.

Table 2. Conceptual Propositions and Levels of Analysis

Proposition	Proposed relationship	Level
P1	Transformational school leadership positively influences teacher well-being	Teacher level
P2	Teacher well-being positively influences intention to stay	Teacher level
P3	Transformational school leadership positively influences intention to stay	Teacher level
P4	Teacher well-being mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and intention to stay	Teacher level
P5	Shared transformational leadership positively influences collective teacher well-being	School level
P6	Shared transformational leadership positively influences teachers' intention to stay	School level
P7	School conditions influence the strength of the leadership, well-being, and retention relationships	Cross-level
P8	Teacher well-being and intention to stay vary across schools because of differences in leadership climate and organizational conditions	Multilevel

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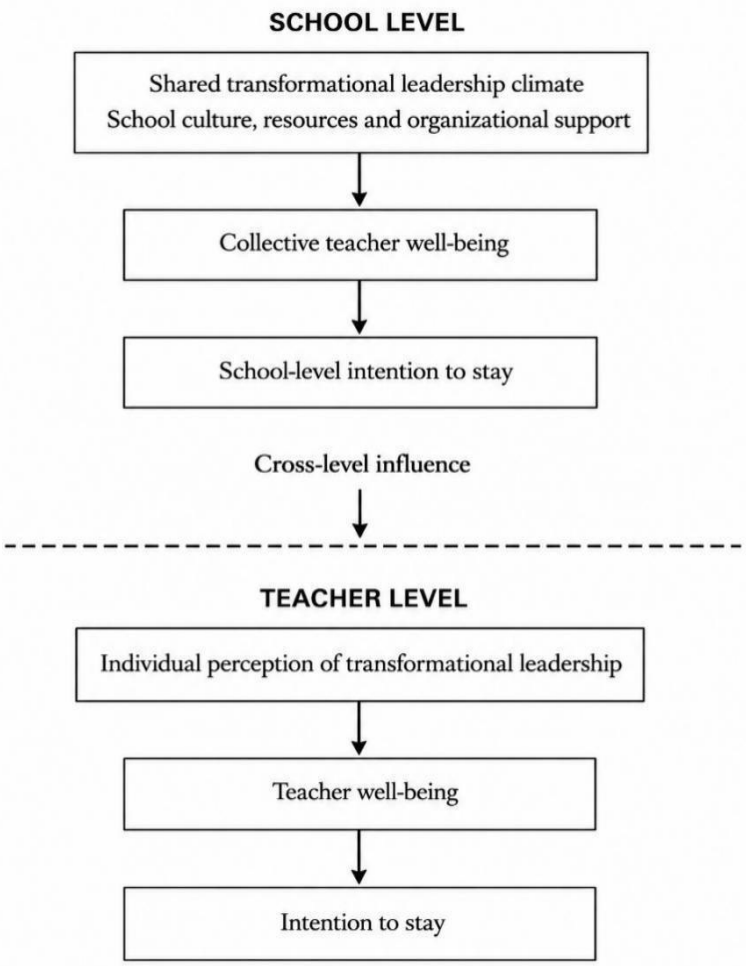

Figure 2. Multilevel Structure of the Conceptual Framework

Conceptual findings overall suggest that transformational school leadership could enhance teachers' intentions to stay via direct, mediated, and multilevel pathways. Teacher well-being serves as the organizing mechanism to explain teacher perceptions and teacher retention decisions and school-level leadership climate serves as the organizing mechanism for the development of teacher perceptions and teacher retention decisions.

5. Discussion

The conceptual findings suggest that transformational school leadership could have a positive impact on the intention to stay in two ways – direct and indirect. The direct pathway is that teachers will be more likely to stay in schools where their leaders convey a clear vision, acknowledge the importance of their work, encourage them to be involved, and provide personal attention to them. The leadership practices can have a positive impact on enhancing a sense of belonging and institutional commitment, especially among teachers in their early years (Thomas et al., 2020). This indirect pathway is through the teacher well-being stream. Improved leadership could result in higher levels of job satisfaction, emotional stability, and professional fulfilment for

teachers, particularly when it increases their levels of trust, professional autonomy, recognition and working relationships. This interpretation aligns with the idea that there are close links between management practices and teacher well-being and sustainable school development (Pagán-Castaño et al., 2021).

The teacher's well-being thus seems to be a mediating process, whereas it is more of an explanatory process itself. With supportive leadership, teachers' role stress will diminish, their affective commitment will also be enhanced, and their job satisfaction will also increase, and thus their willingness to stay in school will also be increased (Yong & Zhang, 2025). The framework also suggests that teachers with increased well-being will have increased organizational commitment and reduced withdrawal and turnover (Xu & Pang, 2024). In this regard, intention to stay is influenced by the employment environment, as well as the meaning that teachers give to their professional experiences and relationships in the school.

Another aspect of the structure of the framework is that the conditions of the individual in the organization and the conditions that surround the individual within the organization have an impact on the decision of retention. The reactions of teachers to leadership within the same school can vary due to differences in workload, experience, expectations and other factors. However, when it comes to school level, a shared transformational leadership climate of the school can increase collective trust, resilience and commitment. This is supported by the findings of transformational leadership in developing the resilience of an organization in complex school systems (Zadok et al., 2024).

The conceptual approach was methodologically used to connect leadership, well-being and retention to an explanatory model. It is particularly valuable because it provides identification of direct, mediated, and multilevel relationships that may inform future empirical testing. The suggested relationships, however, do not rely on primary data and should, therefore, be considered as theoretical propositions and not as cause-and-effect relationships.

The main theoretical merger is of Transformational Leadership Theory, the Job Demands–Resources model and Social Exchange Theory. These perspectives account for how leadership creates organizational resources, enhances teacher well-being, and fosters a mutual commitment. This integration is also aligned with psychological capital-organizational commitment literature that shows that psychological capital can be linked with decreasing turnover intention (Zhu et al., 2022).

In practice, schools should focus on developing leadership, manage workloads, recognise staff, give them autonomy, build trust with staff, and provide induction and support for staff. These can be particularly crucial for novice teachers, who can be affected by adaptation, burnout, and organizational support in terms of their intentions to leave (Yang et al., 2026). Future studies should conduct longitudinal and multilevel studies to test the framework, as well as assess actual teacher turnover and moderators like school culture, workload, employment status, organizational trust, and teacher experience (Üztemur et al., 2026).

6. Conclusion

The conceptual article created a multi-level model to connect transformational school leadership, teacher's well-being and teachers' willingness to remain in public secondary schools. The framework suggests that a transformational leader can effect an immediate positive impact on retention through the impact on teachers' commitment to the school; and an indirect impact through the impact on teachers' psychological and occupational health. It also differentiates between personal leadership experiences and organizational level leadership conditions, because teachers' experiences are influenced by their own and their organization's conditions. The role of teacher well-being is a key factor in the framework as it helps to understand how leadership practices can be linked to greater retention intent. Professional support, recognition, autonomy, a manageable level of stress, positive relationships and a sense of purpose among teachers are positively associated with their commitment to schools. Poor working conditions and lack of leadership support, on the other hand, can leave well-being compromised and can raise intentions to withdraw. The framework also highlights that transformational school leadership goes beyond inspiring individual teachers. It can also help create a positive school climate, sense of community, organizational resilience, and staff stability. Consequently, teacher retention should be supported by teacher leadership development, teacher support for well-being, workload management, teacher recognition and participative decision making. Empirical research in the future is needed to validate the suggested direct and mediated relationships as well as the multilevel relationships in various school contexts.

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