



## Principals' Leadership Styles and Secondary School Teachers' Organizational Commitment in Ethiopia

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Received: 21 December 2022

Accepted: 12 March 2023

Published: 02 April 2023

### ARTICLE INFO.

#### Key words/phrases:

Leadership style,  
Organizational commitment,  
Principals, Secondary schools,  
Teachers

### Abstract

*This study set out to investigate the connection between principals' leadership styles and the organizational commitment of secondary school teachers in Ethiopia. A descriptive survey research method was applied, involving 287 teachers who were chosen through a multistage sampling procedure. Data were gathered using two established instruments: the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass and Avolio (1997) to assess leadership practices, and the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) by Allen and Meyer (1990) to evaluate teachers' affective, continuance, and normative commitment. Analysis combined descriptive statistics with inferential techniques. The findings revealed that transactional leadership emerged as the dominant style among Ethiopian secondary school principals. Furthermore, both transactional and transformational leadership styles demonstrated significant positive relationships with the three dimensions of organizational commitment, while laissez-faire leadership was negatively associated with normative commitment. The study ends by highlighting the implications of these results and offering recommendations aimed at enhancing teachers' organizational commitment.*

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Across the globe, organizations continue to face challenges in fulfilling their objectives. Achieving these goals depends heavily on the contribution of employees, since even when institutions possess adequate resources such as finance, land, technology, time, and materials, they cannot succeed without effectively engaging their human capital (Gberevbie, 2017).

Several factors contribute to strengthening teachers' organizational commitment. These include innovative reward systems, access to employee benefits, favorable working conditions, alignment with institutional values, opportunities for professional development, recognition, and job satisfaction (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014; Popli & Rizvi, 2016). Among these, leadership has been con-

sistently highlighted as the central determinant of teachers' organizational commitment, with a strong link between a leader's approach and the level of staff dedication (Trottier, Van Mole, & Wang, 2008; Yasir, Imran, Irshad, Mohamad, & Khan, 2016).

In schools, principals are responsible for creating a positive and motivating environment for teaching and learning. They are tasked with transforming educational structures and routines in constructive ways, as well as guiding teachers to improve instructional processes. Effective educational leadership, therefore, is fundamental for achieving quality learning outcomes. According to Gracia-Spirits *et al.* (2008), school leadership exerts a deliberate and beneficial influence on the teaching-learning process. The smooth and effective functioning of schools often reflects the quality of leadership exercised by principals. Each school leader demon-

strates a unique style of collaboration and interaction with teachers, which shapes the climate of the institution.

Critics, however, note that authoritarian leadership styles often provoke negative reactions from teachers, reduce harmony, and create tension in school environments (Akinbode & Fagbohunde, 2012). Such approaches may lead to staff demotivation and a weakening of teachers' professional roles, sometimes resulting in disengagement from their institutions, even when they cannot immediately leave for alternative opportunities (Nasuridin, Ahmad, & Razalli, 2014).

Considerable attention has been directed to the relationship between leadership styles and teachers' responsibilities. Many studies on school leadership have identified different approaches that principals adopt in managing educational institutions (Kelly & MacDonald, 2019; Sudha, Shahnawaz, & Farhat, 2016; Yukl, 2013). The most widely applied framework is the Full-Range Leadership (FRL) model, which includes transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership (Abasilim, 2014; Rehman, Shareef, Mahmood, & Ishaque, 2012; Rukmani, Ramesh, & Jayakrishnan, 2010). In parallel, organizational behavior studies recognize three core forms of employee commitment: affective, normative, and continuance (Othman, Mohammed, & D'Silva, 2013).

Research has further shown that transformational and transactional leadership generally enhance teachers' organizational commitment, while laissez-faire leadership tends to diminish it (Abasilim *et al.*, 2018a; Abasilim, Gberevbie, & Osibanjo, 2018b; Dariush, Choobdar, Valadkhani, & Mehrali, 2016; Fasola, Adeyemi, & Olowe, 2013; Garg & Ramjee, 2013; Wiza & Hlanganipai, 2014).

In summary, the leadership style exercised by school principals plays a critical role in shaping teachers' organizational commitment. Since different leadership approaches may influence teachers' responsibilities in varying ways, this study focused on the full range of leadership styles—transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire. Specifically, it sought to examine how principals' leadership practices affect the organizational commitment of sec-

ondary school teachers in Ethiopia, thereby addressing pressing challenges in schools and offering insights for improvement.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Schools are the main organizations in the instructional framework. A central figure who has a significant degree of inspiration is expected to satisfy the objectives of the learning process. Researchers in organizational commitment show that principals play an extraordinary role in raising the responsibility of teachers (Aydin, Sarier, and Uysal, 2013). Principals perceive teachers' viability and proficiency as their top priorities when it comes to achieving school goals. The principal is responsible for everything that occurs in the school, and the way he or she works with the staff and interacts with them affects how satisfied the teachers are with their work and how they feel about their commitments to the school, to their profession, and teaching.

Moreover, a proficient and talented teacher is expected to accomplish school objectives. Be that as it may, how to use and prepare quality teachers matters. Enlisting, choosing, arranging, and setting representatives are, by all accounts, not the only basic issues for the accomplishment of school objectives. To use such assets, leadership style is the essential and most significant element for the ideal usage of the labor force, which is an impression of organizational responsibility.

As a result of different investigations by researchers, organizational commitment (OC) has crucial consequences for teachers and schools. According to Aydin, Sarier, and Uysal (2013), schools are moving toward structures in which rank denotes responsibility rather than authority, and the supervisor's goal is to convince rather than command. As a result, principals need to persuade their subordinates, colleagues, and superiors to support their goals and urge them to follow through with their decisions to be effective. Similarly, the organization must understand what factors have a significant impact on teacher dedication.

Furthermore, for a school to successfully implement plans, establish a competitive edge, and optimize human resources, leadership styles that foster teacher dedication are critical. As a result, if the

state of commitment is the functional product of the leadership style in existence, committed teachers are a crucial success factor for schools to reach their targeted goals. Leadership styles are also important for the school's effectiveness since they motivate teachers and communicate the school's strategic goals and policies (Keskes, 2014; Kelly & MacDonald, 2019).

Ethiopian secondary schools put a strong emphasis on delivering top-notch instruction, research, and development. The organizational culture, teacher-motivation strategies, and rules and regulations of these institutions are distinctive. A deeper understanding of the relationship between leadership styles and organizational commitment is required to develop a leadership style that would encourage and strengthen organizational commitment at the school level.

3,739 secondary schools in Ethiopia offer instruction. The main issues that secondary schools in the nation have had to deal with are low student academic achievement, high teacher turnover, a lack of motivation and commitment on the part of teachers, a lack of communication between school principals and the administrative and teaching staff, and high rates of dropout and repetition.

As a result, this article tried to address the following crucial questions:

1. What type of leadership style is most common in Ethiopian secondary schools?
2. How committed are secondary school teachers in Ethiopia?
3. How much do leadership styles influence teachers' commitment in Ethiopian secondary schools?

## 2 Literature Review

Ineffective leadership practices by school administrators can push teachers to resign from their positions. Studies have consistently demonstrated that transformational leadership exerts a strong and significant influence on teachers' organizational commitment, particularly when it comes to supporting change and reform initiatives. Principals

who adopt transformational approaches positively shape teachers' dedication and professional engagement. Implementing new educational policies in ways that align with teachers' behaviors requires the guidance of skilled and experienced school leaders. Indeed, successful schools are almost always led by principals capable of enhancing teacher loyalty and job satisfaction (Mowday, 1998; FDRE, 1994; Mottoh, 2015).

Transformational leaders affect organizational commitment by reinforcing the link between teachers' efforts and the attainment of educational goals, upholding shared values that support school missions, and fostering deeper personal commitment from both staff and leadership to the collective vision. Such leaders also encourage organizational loyalty by stimulating critical thinking, adopting creative strategies, involving teachers in decision-making, and demonstrating appreciation for individual needs so that each teacher can realize their potential (Keskes, 2014).

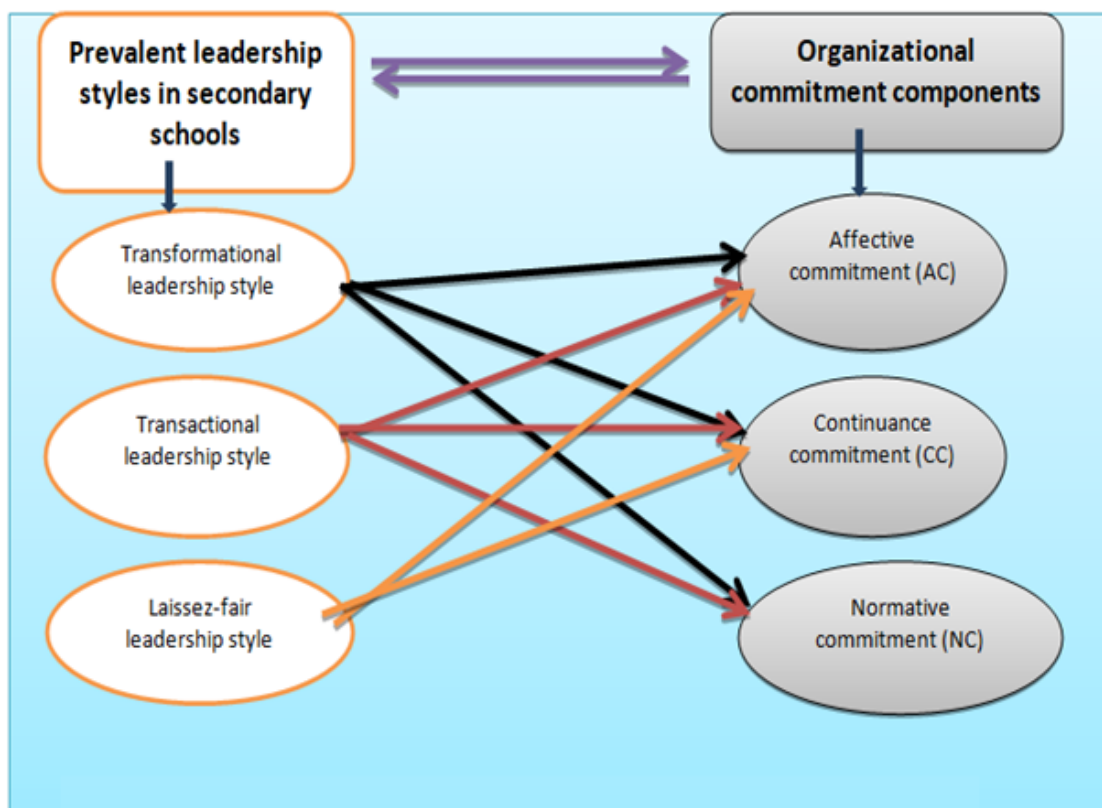
In contrast, transactional leadership has generally shown weak or no significant association with organizational commitment. Hayward, Goss, and Tolmay (2004) reported that transactional leadership did not meaningfully relate to affective, normative, or continuance commitment. Their study further indicated that transformational leadership is more effective than both transactional and laissez-faire styles in cultivating teacher commitment. A substantial body of empirical and meta-analytic research confirms this close relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment, noting that individuals led by transformational leaders tend to show stronger attachment to their organizations and reduced withdrawal behaviors (Yukl, 2013).

Teacher commitment is also widely recognized as a determinant of student achievement and overall school effectiveness. Within the broader organizational context, commitment is often categorized into three forms—*affective*, *normative*, and *continuance* (Meyer & Allen, 1990). However, in the educational domain, Singh and Billingsley (1998) identified three specific categories of teacher commitment: *commitment to teaching*, *to students*, and *to the institution*. Teachers with high levels of

commitment work persistently to uphold organizational values, display enthusiasm in their duties, and actively pursue the institution’s objectives. Conversely, absenteeism, lateness, and high turnover among teachers are indicators of weak commitment. Ultimately, the leadership style of principals plays a decisive role in shaping how schools function and in determining the extent of teachers’ organizational loyalty.

**Conceptual Framework**

The Full Range Leadership (FRL) and Organizational Commitment (OC) models created by Bass and Avolio (1985) and Meyer and Allen (1990), respectively, were synchronized and modified for this study. With the use of the MLQ and OCQ, the FRL and organizational commitment (OC) were researched to assess the effect of principals’ leadership styles on teachers’ commitment in Ethiopian secondary schools. The link between FRLS and OC dimensions is depicted in the diagram.



**Figure 1:** Conceptual framework of the study

**3 Research Design and Method**

**3.1 Research design**

This study employed a descriptive survey design. Such a design is primarily concerned with portraying the existing condition of a subject or phenomenon rather than examining causal relationships among variables (Creswell, 2007; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). According to Williams (2007), descriptive research provides a strategy for investigating issues as they appear in their current form. Likewise, Orodho (2005) and Salaria (2012)

explain that this type of design is useful for addressing present-day conditions, practices, beliefs, processes, relationships, and trends. Within the framework of this study, surveys were utilized to collect, document, and analyze information through questionnaires aimed at describing and assessing how Ethiopian secondary school teachers perceive the impact of leadership styles on their organizational commitment.

### 3.2 Target Population

The term "population" refers to all research participants or units of interest who share particular traits (Silverman, 2005). The study comprises five regions (Amhara, Oromia, SNNPR, Gambela, and Somali) out of nine regional states and one city administration (Addis Ababa) out of two city administrations by using a simple random sampling technique. From each region and city administration, one province/zone was selected, and from each province/zone, one district/woreda, and from each district/woreda, one high school was selected by using a multistage sampling technique.

### 3.3 Sampling Procedure

Sampling refers to the method of selecting a portion of a population so that it accurately reflects the characteristics of the whole group (Burns, 2010). In this study, stratified random sampling was employed to choose 287 secondary school teachers from the target schools. The sample size was determined using the following formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{e^2(N-1)+1}$$

Where  $N$  is the total number of the teacher and  $e^2$  is the probability of adjusting error occurrence when taking the sample.

**Table 1:** Sample size of the study

Secondary schools	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	Total
Number of teachers in each school	109	242	139	156	184	126	956
Sample size of teachers selected from each school	32	73	42	47	55	38	287

### 3.4 Data Collection

This study utilized two standardized instruments to gather data. Principals’ leadership styles were measured through the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) created by Bass and Avolio (1997), while teachers’ organizational commitment was assessed using the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) developed by Allen and Meyer (1990). To verify the reliability and validity of these tools, a pilot test was administered at Dilla Secondary School in the Gedeo Zone of the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples’ Region (SNNPR). The pilot results showed that the MLQ obtained a Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.83, indicating a high level of reliability. Similarly, the OCQ, which measures affective, continuance, and normative commitment, demonstrated strong internal consistency, with all subscales scoring above the 0.70 threshold (Griffith, 2015). Further evidence of validity was provided through expert reviews and alignment with prior research findings (Northouse, 2013).

### 3.5 Data analysis techniques

The survey responses were processed using SPSS version 21 and examined through both descriptive

and inferential statistics. Descriptive analysis, including mean values and standard deviations, was applied to summarize the data. To determine the relationship between principals’ leadership styles and teachers’ organizational commitment, Pearson’s product-moment correlation was used. This statistical technique allowed for an assessment of both the strength and the direction of the relationships between the variables.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Leadership Styles in Secondary Schools

Table 2 shows descriptive data for the five transformational leadership variables, three transactional leadership aspects, and one *laissez-faire* element that respondents stated.

According to the results in Table 2, the mean scores for the transformational leadership indicators varied between 2.90 and 2.32. In comparison, the transactional leadership factors showed mean values ranging from 2.68 to 1.64. The *laissez-faire* leadership style, however, recorded the lowest mean score of 1.08.

**Table 2:** Mean scores for the full range components of leadership styles

Full range leadership	Teacher respondents		
	N	Mean	SD
<b>1 Transformational Leadership</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>2.54</b>	<b>1.22</b>
Idealized influence	287	2.33	1.34
Idealized behavior	287	2.32	1.29
Inspirational motivation	287	2.90	1.06
Intellectual stimulation	287	2.62	1.16
Individual consideration	287	2.54	1.26
<b>2 Transactional leadership</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>2.68</b>	<b>1.26</b>
Contingent reward	287	2.68	1.17
Management by exception active	287	2.63	1.17
Management by exception passive	287	1.64	1.44
<b>3 Laissez fair</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>1.08</b>	<b>1.31</b>

#### 4.2 Organizational Commitments in Secondary Schools

Table 3 shows the mean scores of the three dimensions of organizational commitment as perceived by the teachers.

**Table 3:** Mean Scores on the Dimensions of Organizational Commitment

Dimensions	N	Mean	SD
Affective commitment	287	2.38	1.29
Continuance commitment	287	2.47	1.26
Normative commitment	287	2.62	1.15

According to the aforementioned findings, affective commitment had the lowest mean score of 2.38 and normative commitment had the highest mean score of 2.62. As a result, affective commitment is the least prevalent type of organizational commitment among secondary school teachers in the present study.

#### 4.3 The Relationship between Principals' Leadership Styles and Teachers' Organizational Commitment

A Pearson correlation was used to examine the relationship between the three leadership philosophies and the three organizational commitment components. The information as evaluated by the

teacher respondents is shown in Table 4, which also shows their leadership styles and organizational commitments in the context of the schools.

**Table 4:** Pearson correlation matrix between principals’ leadership styles and teachers’ commitment dimensions

Leadership styles	Organizational Commitment		
	Affective	Continuance	Normative
Transformational	.354**	.400**	.407**
Transactional	.454**	.472**	.559**
<i>Laissez-faire</i>	0.021	-0.049	-.101*

\* Correlation is significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level (2-tailed).  
 \*\* Correlation is significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level (2-tailed)

As shown in Table 4, transformational leadership exhibited a positive statistical relationship with all three dimensions of organizational commitment. The Pearson correlation coefficients ( $r$ ) were .354 for affective commitment, .400 for continuance commitment, and .407 for normative commitment. In the same way, transactional leadership also showed significant positive associations with teachers’ organizational commitment. The corresponding coefficients were .454 for affective, .472 for continuance, and .559 for normative commitment. These results suggest that transactional leadership is moderately connected with both affective and continuance commitments, while its association with normative commitment was comparatively stronger.

Table 4 further indicates that laissez-faire leadership was negatively correlated with normative commitment and showed only a weak positive relationship with affective commitment. No meaningful association was found between this leadership style and continuance commitment.

In conclusion, the correlations presented in Table 4 reveal that all three leadership styles are significantly related to organizational commitment. However, while transformational and transactional leadership demonstrated positive effects, the relationship between laissez-faire leadership and normative commitment was negative.

### 5 Discussion

The combined results for transformational leadership dimensions in this study were below the “optimal” levels that Bass and Avolio (1997) proposed for effective leadership. By their standard, transformational elements should average 3.0 or higher to

indicate a strong style, yet the means here ranged from 2.90 to as low as 1.08. In contrast, the transactional factors were much closer to the expected range. Bass and Avolio (1997) recommended that scores for transactional leadership should typically fall between 2.0 and 3.0. The mean score in this study was 2.68, which aligns with that guidance. More specifically, contingent reward scored 2.63 and management-by-exception active scored 2.68, both within the appropriate range. By comparison, management-by-exception passive and laissez-faire both scored below 2.0, with mean values between 1.64 and 1.08.

Teachers’ responses indicated that their principals did not fully demonstrate the hallmark behaviors of transformational leadership. These include instilling pride, fostering a shared vision, encouraging optimism, stimulating creativity, and providing mentoring support. Instead, teachers felt that their principals were more effective in transactional practices, particularly in clarifying expectations and recognizing accomplishments. The mean value for management-by-exception active reinforced this perception, as it suggested that principals were responsive in correcting mistakes when they occurred. However, the relatively low scores for management-by-exception passive and laissez-faire suggested that some teachers viewed district education administrators as neglectful in addressing problems.

Taken together, these results suggest that principals’ leadership leaned more toward transactional ( $M = 2.68$ ) than transformational ( $M = 2.54$ ) or laissez-faire ( $M = 1.08$ ). This pattern contrasts with Trottier *et al.* (2008), who emphasized that transformational leadership is generally regarded as the slightly stronger predictor of leadership ef-

fectiveness.

In relation to organizational commitment, Allen and Meyer (1990) did not prescribe standard or expected mean levels for affective, continuance, and normative commitment. However, previous studies (Brockner *et al.*, 1992; Shore & Wayne, 1993; Hunt & Morgan, 1994; Meyer *et al.*, 2004) observed a typical order of affective scoring highest, followed by normative, then continuance. The findings of this study diverge from that trend. Here, normative commitment was highest, followed by continuance, while affective commitment scored lowest. This indicates that although teachers identify with their schools, their emotional attachment is comparatively weak. The stronger normative commitment suggests that teachers recognized principals' mentoring, guidance, and role-modeling as influential in shaping their sense of obligation to the institution.

Leadership style was also linked to teachers' perceptions of continuance commitment, which relates to career security, transferable skills, retirement benefits, and alternative employment options (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Hunt & Morgan, 1994; Meyer *et al.*, 2004). Interestingly, the study's results differ from Lo *et al.* (2010), who reported that transformational leadership more strongly predicted all three forms of commitment.

Nevertheless, the current study supports the view that transformational leadership has a favorable association with teacher dedication. This finding is in line with Lo *et al.* (2010), who noted that transformational leadership is tied to emotional engagement, which helps explain its association with affective, continuance, and normative commitment. In the Ethiopian secondary school context, this suggests that principals who act as transformational leaders are better able to secure teachers' loyalty and support in pursuing higher-level goals (Bass, 1997).

The findings also revealed a positive relationship between transactional leadership and normative commitment. This demonstrates that practices such as reward systems, problem identification, and reinforcement are important for building teachers' sense of moral responsibility and duty to remain in their schools (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Allen & Meyer,

1990; Shukla, 2014). Similarly, the strong links between transactional leadership and affective as well as continuance commitment suggest that transactional strategies—such as exchanging rewards for performance, addressing problems directly, and monitoring outcomes—help encourage teachers to remain dedicated to their institutions (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Bass & Avolio, 1993; Shann, 2001).

This outcome is consistent with Buciuuniene and Kudiene (2008), who found that transactional leadership was positively associated with affective, continuance, and normative commitment, though their results differed in the specific strength of these associations. Likewise, the present findings support those of Ponnu and Tennakoon (2009) and Lo *et al.* (2010), who also reported favorable connections between transactional leadership and organizational commitment. Marmaya *et al.* (2011) similarly noted that transactional leadership was positively associated with emotional commitment, reinforcing the current finding regarding its link with normative commitment.

By contrast, laissez-faire leadership showed little to no positive influence on affective or continuance commitment and was negatively linked with normative commitment. The passive characteristics of laissez-faire leadership—such as neglecting challenges, showing indifference, or failing to recognize accomplishments—undermined teachers' sense of obligation to their schools. These results are consistent with earlier studies that highlighted the weak or adverse effects of laissez-faire leadership on teachers' organizational commitment (Buciuuniene & Kudiene, 2008; Popli & Rizvi, 2016).

## 6 Conclusion

This section presents the major outcomes of the study on leadership styles and organizational commitment. Both transformational and transactional leadership were found to be key approaches in assessing principals' leadership effectiveness. The findings highlight the importance of adapting leadership practices in ways that enhance teachers' organizational commitment. Specifically, transformational leadership showed a positive association with organizational commitment, while transactional leadership also demonstrated a favorable



link with teachers' sense of commitment. Thus, both dimensions of leadership contribute meaningfully to strengthening teachers' dedication to their institutions.

The evidence clearly indicates that leadership style plays a vital role in shaping teachers' organizational commitment. Consequently, the results have practical implications for leadership training in schools and for policymakers in the education sector. Principals are encouraged to create an atmosphere where teachers can freely share their ideas, engage in collaborative decision-making, and work in an environment that fosters openness and support. Such practices are likely to reduce stress, improve teachers' motivation, and enhance their engagement. Therefore, for principals to be effective, they need to seize opportunities that reinforce teachers' organizational commitment.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations for practitioners and researchers were made based on the outcomes of descriptive and correlational analysis. As a result, principals who want to improve organizational commitment should think about the following:

1. Provide teachers with an effective leadership style that will increase the academic achievements of the students and organizational commitment.
2. Encourage their teachers to be more satisfied to improve organizational commitment.
3. Make principals aware of the full range of leadership styles to boost levels of organizational commitment among teachers by creating an information exchange system that allows them to improve their knowledge and skills for competence and organizational commitment. In this context, theoretical and practical seminars should be provided in partnership with MOE, the Regional Education Bureau, universities, and principals on the issue.
4. It is hoped that the findings will spur future research into other equally essential factors that influence leadership style. The influence of leadership style on organizational

commitment was the main area of interest in this study, which focused on one particular form of work-related behavior. As a result, future studies in this area could expand to include other dimensions related to teacher dedication.

5. In educational institutions, much more research is required. It could be repeated in a variety of secondary education settings. Additional research might be done with private secondary schools from a wider range of backgrounds, as well as a comparison of all employees. Another aspect that has to be addressed is leadership and teacher commitment.

### Acknowledgments

The author gratefully acknowledges the financial support provided by Dilla University for this study, entitled "Principals' Leadership Styles and Secondary School Teachers' Organizational Commitment in Ethiopia." Sincere appreciation is extended to the Office of Research and Dissemination (RDO) and the Office of the Vice President for Research and Technology Transfer (RTTVP) for their encouragement and facilitation of the research process.

### Ethical Approval

Consent was sought from the research participants. Confidentiality was maintained in reporting information.

### Declaration of Competing Interest

This research was fully sponsored by Dilla University. The institution bears no responsibility for the findings other than for reporting purposes. The author is a staff member of Dilla University engaged in both teaching and research. All intellectual property rights (IPR) and relevant ethical standards were carefully observed throughout the study.

### Availability of the Data

The author informs the journal editors that the dataset generated during this study is available and can be provided upon request.

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