

Leadership Identity in Schools: A Qualitative Inquiry with School Administrators*

Aylin KIRISCI-SARIKAYA¹ , F. Sehkar FAYDA-KINIK² 

¹(Corresponding author) Ph.D., Izmir Democracy University, aylin.kirisci@idu.edu.tr, ORCID ID:0000-0001-7443-8433

²Ph.D., Istanbul Technical University, kinik@itu.edu.tr, ORCID ID:0000-0001-6563-4504

Article Information	ABSTRACT
Received: 26 July 2025 Accepted: 29 October 2025 © UEAD 2025 All rights reserved.	<p>This study aimed to explore how school administrators construct and interpret their professional identity through values, beliefs, knowledge, understandings, experiences, and wisdom. As a basic qualitative research design, the study exhibited the lived experiences of school administrators and how their leadership practices were shaped. A total of 13 school administrators, including principals and vice principals, working in schools at different educational levels, were selected through purposeful sampling to reflect maximum variation. The data were collected using semi-structured interviews. An abductive coding approach guided the analysis, which allowed the integration of emergent insights within the theoretical framework. The findings revealed five main themes that define professional identity: values and attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and skills, understandings, and experience and wisdom. Based on coded segments, subthemes were categorized under each theme. School administrators generally emphasized justice, democratic attitudes, experiential learning, situational awareness, and the role of personal and professional experiences as critical in their leadership identities. This research contributes to the literature on educational leadership by offering a deeper understanding of how school leaders make sense of their professional roles. The findings proved that professional identity is not static and is influenced by reflective practices, contextual awareness, and ongoing interactions between internal and external elements.</p> <p>Keywords: Leadership identity, professional identity, educational administration, school leaders.</p>

Okullarda Liderlik Kimliği: Okul Yöneticileriyle Nitel Bir Araştırma

Makale Bilgisi	ÖZET
Geliş Tarihi: 26.07.2025 Kabul Tarihi: 29.10.2025 © UEAD 2025 Tüm hakları saklıdır.	<p>Bu çalışma, okul yöneticilerinin mesleki kimliklerini nasıl yapılandırdıklarını ve yorumladıklarını; değerler, inançlar, bilgi, anlayışlar, deneyimler ve bilgelik üzerinden incelemeyi amaçlamıştır. Temel nitel desende yürütülen çalışmada, okul yöneticilerinin yaşantılarına odaklanılmış ve liderlik uygulamalarının nasıl şekillendiği ortaya konmuştur. Farklı eğitim kademelerinde görev yapan, müdür ve müdür yardımcılardan oluşan toplam 13 okul yöneticisi, maksimum çeşitliliği yansıtacak şekilde amaçlı örnekleme yoluyla seçilmiştir. Veriler, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler ile toplanmıştır. Analiz süreci, kuramsal çerçeve ışığında bulguların ortaya çıkmasına imkân tanıyan abdüktif kodlama yaklaşımıyla yürütülmüştür. Bulgular, mesleki kimliği tanımlayan beş ana tema ortaya koymuştur: değerler ve tutumlar, inançlar, bilgi ve beceriler, anlayışlar, deneyim ve bilgelik. Her bir temanın altında kodlanmış veriler doğrultusunda alt temalar yapılandırılmıştır. Genel olarak okul yöneticileri, liderlik kimliklerinin merkezinde adalet, demokratik tutumlar, deneyimsel öğrenme, durumsal farkındalık ile kişisel ve mesleki deneyimlerin rolü olduğunu vurgulamışlardır. Bu araştırma, okul liderlerinin mesleki rollerini nasıl anlamlandırdıklarına dair derinlemesine bulgular sunarak eğitim liderliği literatürüne katkı sağlamaktadır. Elde edilen veriler, mesleki kimliğin durağan bir yapı olmadığını; yansıtıcı uygulamalar, bağlam farkındalığı ve içsel-dışsal etkenler arasındaki sürekli etkileşimlerle şekillendiğini ortaya koymuştur.</p> <p>Anahtar Sözcükler: Liderlik kimliği, mesleki kimlik, eğitim yönetimi, okul yöneticileri.</p>

DOI: 10.32960/uead.1749120

Article Type: Research Article

Citation Information: Kirisci-Sarikaya, A., & Fayda-Kinik, F. S. (2025). Leadership identity in schools: A qualitative inquiry with school administrators. *National Journal of Education Academy*, 9(2), 185-209. <https://doi.org/10.32960/uead.1749120>

Kaynakça Gösterimi: Kirişçi-Sarıkaya, A., & Fayda-Kinik, F. S. (2025). Okullarda liderlik kimliği: Okul yöneticileriyle nitel bir araştırma. *Ulusal Eğitim Akademisi Dergisi (UEAD)*, 9(2), 185-209. <https://doi.org/10.32960/uead.1749120>

* This research was conducted with the approval granted by the Social Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee, under decision number 2025/135 dated 04/06/2025.

1. INTRODUCTION

The professional identity of school leaders is a complex phenomenon that develops through their ongoing engagement with organizational structures, professional norms, and community expectations. Over time, school leaders interpret their roles and respond to changing rules and expectations. Therefore, personal (Cruz-Gonzalez et al., 2021a; Yoeli & Berkovich, 2010), social (Mommers et al., 2024; Oplatka, 2023), and organizational (De La Torre & Altopiedi, 2023; Wang & Derakhshan, 2024) factors influence the dynamic structure in the professional identity of school leaders. Shaped by these factors, values, beliefs, knowledge, understandings, experiences, and wisdom can be regarded as the foundational elements comprising professional identity (Robertson, 2017). These components are not isolated but interact within educational settings and form a complex construct through which educational leaders interpret their roles, respond to challenges, and fulfill leadership in various contexts. According to Cruz-Gonzalez et al. (2021a), professional identity is deeply embedded in personal and contextual perceptions that likely change over time, especially as leaders transition into their roles. Therefore, the construction of a professional identity is more than positional authority, including how leaders conceptualize and materialize their purpose in educational organizations.

Values and beliefs, as the basic elements of professional identity, function as moral and philosophical guides that influence leaders' decisions and behaviors. The values leaders employ throughout their professional lives shape their commitment to equity, inclusion, and student-centered learning; however, their beliefs are about how they perceive leadership, power, and transformation within their schools (Wang & Grogan, 2024). Mommers et al. (2024) indicated that school leaders typically hold multiple role identities emerging from their personal beliefs and influenced by societal expectations. This complexity results from the influence of "the others", as described by Rodriguez et al. (2020), including staff, students, and the broader community. In other words, the construction of professional identity is considerably determined by the values and beliefs school leaders adopt in an internally grounded and socially expected manner.

The professional identity of school leaders is also constructed with knowledge and understanding of how educational leaders perceive themselves. Knowledge, as a critical component in leadership identity, involves the theoretical and practical realization required to effectively carry out professional tasks, which is acquired through formal education and continuous professional development (Barnett et al., 2017). As Notman (2017) noted, identity formation is catalyzed by leadership transitions, in which new knowledge is acquired and integrated into one's understanding of professional self. Thus, the development of leadership identity depends on ongoing professional learning, grounded in the continuous expansion of knowledge and understanding, through reflection, contextual adaptation, and interpretation in real-world environments.

Similarly, leaders' experiences and wisdom establish their professional identity in educational settings. School leaders have distinct experiences in personal, educative, and vicarious forms (Lipscombe et al., 2024). Robertson (2017) highlighted that school principals working for a long period continuously reshape their professional identity in response to evolving educational demands and their own personal and professional development. These experiences form the narrative foundation upon which leaders build and reconstruct their identities. Wisdom emerges as a result of integrating experiences with their insights. Accordingly, wisdom in leadership refers to making decisions that promote the common good and enhance the well-being of both leaders and their communities (Yang, 2013). Therefore, experiences and wisdom, as

part of the professional identity of school administrators, can provide more sustainable and meaningful leadership.

Each foundational component of professional identity is critical to the identity formation of school leaders. However, school administrators face significant challenges in increasingly complex educational settings. Nordholm et al. (2023) investigated school principals' values, beliefs, knowledge, understandings, experiences, and wisdom, and identity fragmentation was revealed among newly appointed principals due to role ambiguity and changes in organizational expectations. Additionally, Scribner and Crow (2012) argued that increasing technocratic and managerial expectations can damage leaders' professional orientation and force them to compromise their values and beliefs. These results point out the fragility of leadership identity in environments that prioritize performance metrics over professional integrity.

School administrators must be supported in forming their professional identity so that they can overcome the challenges they face during their leadership. However, the studies specifically on the professional identity of school administrators remain limited in the literature (Crow & Møller, 2017; Cruz-Gonzalez et al., 2021a; Demirkasimoglu, 2021). The existing studies generally employ qualitative research designs; thus, they are contextually and culturally specific, which is quite expected for identity research (e.g., phenomenological and case studies such as Cruz-Gonzalez et al., 2020; Scribner & Crow, 2012). Particularly, the identities of school administrators have been reshaped by challenging pressures, such as accountability and exam-oriented performance expectations, rapid curricular and regulatory changes, digitalization and the datafication of schooling, growing demographic diversity and inclusion requirements, persistent staffing shortages and workload increase, and the demands of crisis management and post-disaster provision in affected provinces (Crow & Møller, 2017; Cruz-Gonzalez et al., 2021a; Mommers et al., 2024; Oplatka, 2023). Notably, these conditions complicate how leadership is understood and implemented, which requires administrators to balance competing expectations, navigate centralized governance arrangements, and maintain professional purpose in the face of uncertainty (De La Torre & Altopiedi, 2023; Scribner & Crow, 2012; Wang & Derakhshan, 2024).

Although studies examining school administrators' professional identity exist in the relevant Turkish literature, the evidence is generally based on small and largely qualitative inquiries focusing on role constraints and status rather than identity as an unfolding process (Yilmaz, 2025). Among these studies, the overall emphasis is on problem mapping and work conditions (Cetin, 2019; Isleyen, 2024; Karatas, 2022), and qualitative accounts of identity/role understandings and preparation pathways (Gungor & Tasdan, 2018; Karatas & Demirbilek, 2024; Kesmen et al., 2023). Within this corpus, Turkish studies repeatedly portray principalship as insufficiently professionalized and treated as an extension of the teaching profession, while highlighting persistent systemic issues such as over-politicization and bureaucracy (Yilmaz, 2025). Therefore, there is a research gap concerning the identity work itself because few Turkish studies focus on how leaders configure and activate values, beliefs, knowledge, understandings, experiences, and wisdom in practice as they interpret expectations, negotiate politicization and limited authority, and sustain purpose over time (Celtek, 2019; Gungor & Tasdan, 2018). In other words, the identity formation of school leaders needs to be investigated in terms of values, beliefs, knowledge, understandings, experiences, and wisdom, described as the foundational elements in professional identity (Robertson, 2017). Therefore, this study aims to explore how educational leaders construct and interpret their professional identity through values, beliefs, knowledge, understandings, experiences, and wisdom, and understand how these elements shape their leadership practices in real school contexts through their

perspectives. By investigating these components qualitatively through the lived experiences of principals and vice principals working in schools, the study revealed how their professional identity is shaped and the role of relational dynamics and adaptation to contextual demands.

This study regards professional identity as a process, not a fixed trait. It shows how values and beliefs become daily leadership routines, how policy and organizational knowledge set the boundaries for action, and how experience and reflection turn into practical wisdom under real constraints. By detailing how values, knowledge, understandings, experience, and wisdom are activated together in practice, the study goes beyond role descriptions and work conditions. The results contribute to actionable guidance for how to select, prepare, and mentor leaders, and how to shape policy, with a focus on minimizing value-role misalignment and enlarging leaders' discretion.

2. PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY OF SCHOOL LEADERS

Professional identity in schools can be described as how individuals understand, define, and perform their roles within educational settings. It has individual and social elements developed in narrative, epistemic, emotional, historical and cultural, and political dimensions (Crow & Møller, 2017). It is shaped by personal beliefs, organizational expectations, and social interactions. Regarding school leaders, professional identity is more than fulfilling their administrative duties, and it is also about aligning their values, decisions, and actions with the broader goals of education (Johnson & Crow, 2017; Scribner & Crow, 2012; Yilmaz, 2025).

On the other hand, leadership identity, as a subset of professional identity, focuses specifically on how individuals perceive themselves as leaders and how they enact leadership within their school communities (Johnson & Crow, 2017; Molla & Castello, 2022; Scribner & Crow, 2012). It involves the internalization of leadership roles and is influenced by a leader's motivation, capacities, and willingness to respond effectively to the demands of an educational environment (Cruz-Gonzalez et al., 2019, 2021b). Tubin (2017) defines leadership identity as a cognitive construct that impacts how they perceive themselves as educational leaders, how obvious their mission is, and how their followers accept their authority.

Professional identity in school leadership is a fluid and multidimensional construct, continuously reshaped through experience and context in which school leaders are involved. Incorporating the administrative demands of leadership with pedagogical and social responsibilities leads to the development of multiple identities that must be balanced over time (Demirkasimoglu, 2021; Mommers et al., 2024). Besides, professional identity is affected through a process of continual negotiation between expected norms and personal values, particularly in diverse and changing educational environments (Bøje & Frederiksen, 2021; Robertson, 2017). Leaders who can navigate these dynamics effectively engage in critical reflection and align their developing professional identity with internal commitments and external demands.

In practice, the professional identity of school leaders emerges through a dynamic, adaptive, and context-sensitive process shaped by various internal and external influences. It forms internally as personal reflections, self-perceptions, and meaningful processes transform over time (Cruz-Gonzalez et al., 2021b; Demirkasimoglu, 2021). Leaders can benefit from their educational philosophies, previous experiences as teachers, and individual interpretations of what leadership means in practice (Russo-Netzer & Shoshani, 2019). These personal perspectives are critical in how principals adapt to and interpret their roles. From an

external perspective, professional identity is shaped by social interactions with mentors, peers, and school communities, as well as by cultural expectations and socio-political pressures (Bairauskiene, 2020; Rodriguez et al., 2020). For instance, new principals rely heavily on peer networks and mentorship to negotiate the challenges of their roles (Simon et al., 2019; Tanghe & Schelfhout, 2023). Regarding broader contextual influences, requirements for national policies, dynamics in local communities, and overlap in gender norms can either support or constrain leaders in shaping their identity (Cruz-Gonzalez et al., 2020; Gil-Espinosa et al., 2024). Notably, all these internal and external factors influence how the leadership identity of school administrators is perceived and accepted by school communities.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study was adopted as a basic qualitative research design, which is descriptive, aiming to explore how individuals interpret their experiences and construct meaning, typically through interviews, observations, or document analyses, and with findings analyzed to identify themes and patterns (Merriam, 2009). Accordingly, the main focus of the research was to gain a comprehensive understanding of how school administrators interpret and construct their professional identities through values, beliefs, knowledge, understandings, experiences, and wisdom, and understand how these elements shape their leadership practices in real school contexts through their perspectives. Building on Robertson's (2017) framing of professional identity as a configuration of values, beliefs, knowledge, understandings, experiences, and wisdom, the research questions (RQs) examined how each component operates in Turkish school settings. Thus, the foundational components of professional identity were explored by questioning the pedagogical and organizational values, beliefs, knowledge, understandings, experiences, and wisdom of school administrators with the following RQs:

RQ1. How do school administrators' values and attitudes shape their professional identity?

RQ2. How do school administrators' beliefs shape their professional identity?

RQ3. How do school administrators' knowledge and skills shape their professional identity?

RQ4. How do school administrators' understandings shape their professional identity?

RQ5. How do school administrators' experiences and wisdom shape their professional identity?

RQ1 focused on values and attitudes because commitments to justice, equity, confidentiality, and solution-based approaches influence leaders' daily judgments and school climate (Begley, 2003; Campbell et al., 2003; Jenlink, 2014; Kafa & Pashiardis, 2019; Lazaridou, 2007). RQ2 addressed beliefs, including growth, relations, and morals, since belief systems drive motivation, participation, and values-based action over time (Brown & Militello, 2016; Frick, 2009; Mommers et al., 2024; Poole, 2007; Robertson, 2017; Rodriguez et al., 2020). RQ3 was about knowledge and skills, such as policy literacy, communication, and relational competence, that enable leadership identity within shifting rules and expectations (Anthony & Said, 2015; Crow & Møller, 2017; Lijuan & Hallinger, 2016; Rivero Castro et al., 2019). RQ4 targeted pedagogical and organizational understandings, including situational awareness, vision-setting, guidance, and inclusive decision routines, that connect how leaders conceive the role to how they enact it (Li, 2022; Rajbhandari, 2017; Sun & Leithwood, 2015; Xiaomei & Chaomin, 2021). Finally, RQ5 examined experiences and wisdom because identity develops through reflective practice, mentoring, and learning

across challenges, which converts experience into practical judgment that sustains purpose within institutional constraints (Burns et al., 2024; Lipscombe et al., 2024; Robertson, 2017; Seidle et al., 2016).

3.2. Participants

The participants were selected through purposeful sampling, specifically using the maximum variation strategy (Patton, 2015). This method is intended to capture a diverse range of leadership experiences by considering variables such as professional seniority, gender, age, and length of service. Qualitative studies typically involve a limited number of participants, as they aim to explore the meanings, perceptions, and experiences of individuals in depth and detail. Therefore, 13 school administrators, including principals and vice principals working in public schools from various levels in Izmir, Turkiye, were selected to ensure rich, varied, and contextually grounded insights into the phenomenon of professional identity. The participants were coded as P1, P2, P3, (...) to secure their anonymity. The detailed demographic information of the participants is depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. *Demographic Information of Participants*

Code	Gender	Age	Educational Level	Professional Experience (years)	Administrative Experience (years)	School Level	Role
P1	M	52	M.A.	30	19	Anatolian high school	Principal
P2	F	47	B.A.	23	14	Anatolian high school	Principal
P3	M	61	B.A.	39	28	Anatolian high school	Principal
P4	M	39	M.A.	13	7	Anatolian high school	Principal
P5	M	52	M.A.	28	15	Anatolian high school	Vice principal
P6	F	48	M.A.	24	14	Middle school	Principal
P7	M	55	B.A.	31	15	Middle school	Principal
P8	F	29	B.A.	5	1	Elementary school	Principal
P9	M	45	B.A.	24	18	Middle school	Vice principal
P10	M	38	M.A.	17	4	Middle school	Principal
P11	F	43	M.A.	18	1	Elementary school	Vice principal
P12	M	62	B.A.	38	19	Middle school	Vice principal
P13	F	44	M.A.	19	8	Elementary school	Vice principal

According to Table 1, the participants comprised 13 school administrators, of whom eight were principals and five vice principals. Eight of them were male, while five were female. Their ages ranged from 29 to 62 years. Seven held a master's degree (M.A.), whereas six had a bachelor's degree (B.A.). Professional experience of the administrators varied from 5 to 39 years; one with 5 years, four with 11-20 years, five with 21-30 years, three with 31-40 years; on the other hand, their administrative tenure ranged from 1 year to 28 years; five with 1-10 years, seven with 11-20 years, one with over 20 years. All the participants were working in public schools, serving at levels from elementary (n=3) through middle (n=5) and high school (n=5).

3.3. Data Collection

The data was collected using a semi-structured interview form, developed by the researchers and finalized with feedback from three experts in the field of educational administration. The form included 11 items to collect demographic information, and 15 open-ended questions aligned with the study's purpose. The interview questions were organized according to the dimensions of the theoretical framework, as listed in the Appendix. In addition to these open-ended questions, the participants were also invited to share any further views or concerns about their professional identity to ensure a comprehensive understanding of their perspectives. Accordingly, a total of 13 interviews were conducted face-to-face in Izmir by the researchers

in July 2025 at the schools where the participants were employed, on previously scheduled dates. All the interviews were audio-recorded with consent, and each lasted approximately 40-45 minutes. This flexible but consistent data collection process supported rich and reflective responses to the investigated components of professional identity. In this way, the participants could engage meaningfully with the interview questions and share their experiences in a comfortable and context-sensitive manner.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

At every stage of the research, scientific and ethical standards were rigorously upheld. Ethical approval was obtained from the Social Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee dated 04.06.2025 with document number 2025/135. Additionally, official research permission was granted by the Ministry of National Education. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before the data collection process. Therefore, before each interview, the participants were thoroughly informed about the study's purpose, their rights during the interview, and the confidential nature of the data collected. It was clearly explained that the information gathered would only be used for scientific purposes and that no details for personal identification would be included at any stage of the study. The participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the interview at any time without any consequence.

3.5. Data Analysis

The audio recordings obtained from the interviews were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were read multiple times by the researchers so that they could engage deeply with the data and enhance familiarity (Van Manen, 1990). The data were organized and configured to the MAXQDA 2020 qualitative software for data analysis, which facilitated a more systematic and comprehensive coding process.

The analysis was conducted using an abductive coding approach (Thompson, 2022). Accordingly, participants' in-depth reflections were analyzed abductively, which allowed the meanings that emerged directly from the data to be interpreted and synthesized with the theoretical framework guiding the study. Following Robertson (2017), professional identity was treated as a process comprising values, beliefs, knowledge, understandings, experiences, and wisdom; the coding scheme was organized around these components. Through this process, the study aimed to achieve the most logical and pragmatic understanding of school administrators' professional identity. In this way, the analyses could involve and construct both empirical insights and theoretical perspectives.

In this study, professional identity refers to administrators' broader self-understandings as educational professionals, regarding their values, beliefs, knowledge, understandings, experiences, and wisdom configured in context (Robertson, 2017). Leadership identity is treated as a subset of professional identity concerning self-as-leader and the enactment of direction-setting, influence, and relationship work (Johnson & Crow, 2017; Molla & Castello, 2022; Scribner & Crow, 2012). School administrators are used as an umbrella term for principals and vice principals. In reporting practice, leadership denotes work that builds vision, sense-making, and collective capacity, whereas management refers to compliance, coordination, resources, and routines; both appear in administrators' work, but the analysis attends specifically to identity work in leadership enactment (Crow & Møller, 2017; Sun & Leithwood, 2015). These definitions structured the coding categories aligned to Robertson's (2017) components and guided abductive interpretation of emergent patterns.

During the analysis, under each theme, subthemes were created based on the codes revealed, and the frequencies (*f*) were calculated to identify the number of statements repeated. Because the number of coded segments was numerous for several subthemes, representative codes were selected and reported. In addressing the representation of codes within subthemes, a systematic approach was employed. When a subtheme included three or fewer codes, all of them were comprehensively presented. In cases where a subtheme contained more than three codes, only the top three most frequently expressed codes were reported.

3.6. Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness and rigor in the research, several standards and strategies were considered and employed in the analysis process. First, regarding the credibility criteria, all the interviews were conducted with the help of semi-structured questions. This type of interview provided in-depth and reflective responses, which aligned with the basic qualitative research design. Besides, the verbatim transcription and repeated readings of the data further enhanced familiarity and immersion (Van Manen, 1990). Peer debriefing was conducted to ensure that coding decisions, theme development, and interpretations were reviewed and validated by two experienced researchers in the field of educational administration (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Descriptions were provided through detailed demographic information (see Table 1). All these considerations contributed to the transferability and contextual applicability of the findings to other educational settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The dependability of the study was supported through the systematic use of MAXQDA 2020 software. Therefore, transparency and consistency in the coding process were confirmed by the researchers. Furthermore, to enhance confirmability, data analysis involved transparent documentation of coding decisions. The direct quotations were also used to ground interpretations in participants' own words.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Values and Attitudes of School Administrators

To address RQ1, the first theme, values and attitudes, was investigated in the transcribed data from the school administrators. This theme implies the ethical and moral foundations of school administrators' professional identities. It shows how the personal values and professional attitudes of school administrators influence their leadership identity. The results are demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2. *Thematic Structure of School Administrators' Values and Attitudes*

Theme (<i>f</i>)	Subthemes (<i>f</i>)	Code Examples (<i>f</i>)	Participants
Values and attitudes (89)	Personal values (51)	Value of harmony and adaptability (16)	P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P9, P11, P13
		Commitment to justice and equity (11)	P1, P2, P3, P5, P9, P11, P13
		Resilient work ethic and perseverance (6)	P1, P8, P10, P11
	Professional attitudes (31)	Commitment to fairness and justice (4)	P6, P9, P11, P13
		Respect for confidentiality and privacy (4)	P8, P10
		Solution-focused professionalism (3)	P4, P6, P9
	Conflicting values (7)	Acting professionally despite personal inclinations (4)	P3, P12
		Emotional reactivity in professional settings (2)	P13
		Discomfort with excessive or inauthentic praise (1)	P11

The participants commented on this topic quite often ($f=89$), and the main subtopics discussed in this context were found as personal values ($f=51$), professional attitudes ($f=31$), and conflicting values ($f=7$). Regarding the subtheme of personal values, one participant expressed that those values guided her professional identity and leadership. She brought this moral orientation into her professional life, as illustrated in the following quote:

P11: *I think my school management style is compatible with my personal values because for me, honesty, integrity, being reliable, applying the rules in all circumstances, under all conditions, all suit my style, because these are the things that I always prioritize in life. Let me give you an example. Even when I met my husband, I told him this. For me, trust comes first, because if I trust, all other problems can be solved. In that sense, I think such values are important in administration.*

As for professional attitudes, one school administrator reflected a strong emphasis on professional values related to fairness and professional boundaries in leadership. Additionally, he emphasized the importance of remaining calm and integrative, especially in emotionally charged school environments.

P9: *When you are managing a school, you have to be calm, unifying, [and] integrative, without rushing, because I am generally a calm and harmonious person. I just said before, the staff, teachers, [and] administrators who are arguing and angry with each other, [...] it can't be like that where I work. I mean, I wouldn't have given the opportunity, I didn't. [...] Because in those schools I worked in, the administration was on the side of someone. The teachers were on the other side. Therefore, that inner peace was not achieved. Unfortunately, there were schools like this. I guess there are today, too. In other words, you can respect a teacher, their personality, character, you can make close friends with them, after all they are your friends. But you have to keep that professional distance in the work environment. In other words, when it is not maintained, things get out of hand a little bit.*

Conflicting values emerged as the final subtheme of personal values and professional attitudes. Accordingly, one participant described moments when professional responsibilities contradicted his personal disposition. He explained that although he valued harmony, emotional balance, and meticulousness, he often found himself acting against his own nature. He had to enforce rules, manage difficult staff, and felt emotionally worn down, as exemplified below:

P12: *If you don't particularly like some people you work with, you still must move forward. For example, [...] sometimes you have to continue working with people you wouldn't even want to see in your personal life. In this profession, it's not possible to hold grudges or be in conflict; you simply have to keep going. That's why this doesn't really suit my personal style, but it's something you have to do. For instance, I'm not someone who is relaxed or carefree. I'm a meticulous person. Because of that, I often feel exhausted. [...] Sometimes, when you remind people of their responsibilities, you face negative reactions. You may feel like you're being unpleasant. With conscious and professional individuals, this doesn't become a problem because they understand you're simply doing your job. But sometimes, even though it contradicts your personal characteristics, you do what you must professionally [carry out], even if you don't want to, and end up feeling like you've become unpleasant. [...] they can immediately label you as "the bad one". Unfortunately, this is the reality of our profession.*

In summary, the theme of values and attitudes revealed that school administrators' leadership identities are shaped by their personal values, professional orientations, and the conflicts between the two. As shown in Table 2, personal values such as justice, equity, and harmony were the most emphasized subtheme located under values and attitudes. Professional attitudes highlighted the importance of fairness, confidentiality, and solution-focused professionalism and emphasized the need to balance collegial respect with professional boundaries. Finally, conflicting values demonstrated how administrators sometimes act contrary to their own dispositions to fulfill professional responsibilities. In short, these findings indicated that administrators construct their professional identities on a foundation of strong moral orientations, while also negotiating the challenges of maintaining professional distance and managing role conflicts.

4.2. Beliefs of School Administrators

The second theme, beliefs, was examined in the responses from the participants to address RQ2. This theme basically covers the motivational orientations, beliefs, and ethical assumptions of school leaders, which guide their understanding and leadership actions. Accordingly, the beliefs of the participants serve as internal frameworks that influence how they make sense of their roles, build relationships, and respond to institutional demands. This theme was constructed from four subthemes; namely, growth orientation and motivation ($f=55$), relational beliefs ($f=13$), ethical beliefs ($f=8$), and emotion-related beliefs ($f=3$), as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. *Thematic Structure of School Administrators' Beliefs*

Theme (f)	Subthemes (f)	Code Examples (f)	Participants
Beliefs (79)	Growth orientation and motivation (55)	Intrinsic drive for leadership (48)	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13
		Innovative mindset (7)	P1, P5, P12, P13
	Relational beliefs (13)	Democratic and participative leadership (5)	P3, P8, P13
		Relational empathy (3)	P3, P5, P6
		Enabling autonomy and support (3)	P1, P4, P8
	Ethical beliefs (8)	Fairness and integrity (5)	P2, P12, P13
		Trustworthiness (3)	P2, P13
	Emotion-related beliefs (3)	Care and love (3)	P10, P12

For the subtheme of growth orientation and motivation, one school administrator's reflection exemplified a view of the intrinsic drive for leadership. He explicitly indicated that positive reactions from teachers and students function as a powerful internal motivator.

P1: *A decision you make, whether it's right or wrong, can have an impact on teachers and students. Sometimes, when you believe you've made the right decision, and then you see a positive expression, that satisfaction on the faces of the teachers and students, it becomes one of the driving forces for us. It gives us something extra when making new decisions, but as I said, sometimes we react emotionally or get suddenly fired up for no real reason. When we see dissatisfaction on the faces of teachers or students in those moments, that naturally affects us negatively. As I said, people's satisfaction is important, extremely important. After all, our entire work is about people. [...] Of course, it's not possible to make everyone happy. However, if the majority are satisfied and happy, then, as I said, that becomes an extra driving force for us.*

Moreover, another reflection strongly exemplified the innovative mindset dimension of the growth orientation and motivation theme within leadership identity. The participant's statement indicated an

innovative mindset, where personal growth, vision, and guidance are regarded as essential to leadership identity.

P12: *In my opinion, a school principal should be wise, and to be wise, they need to read and continuously learn. They should be a reader and a guide, because this profession constantly requires guidance. As school leaders, we must have the ability to show the right path to our staff. Alongside that, it's also essential to instill vision and lead the team effectively. Another critical aspect is that a school leader should possess leadership traits. [...] and it's not something that can be entirely developed later; rather, it's a skill that's somewhat innate. Those who have this natural ability should develop and prepare themselves for it, and the Ministry [of Education] should pave the way for this development. However, we sometimes see people who struggle to manage themselves or even their immediate environment being appointed as school leaders, and when that happens, serious problems arise.*

On the other hand, one participant highlighted democratic attitudes in the subtheme of relational beliefs but rejected hierarchical and authoritarian models of leadership. He reflected a deep commitment to equity, justice, and respect for others' voices.

P3: *A school administrator absolutely must be democratic. Not a "father figure", but a democratic leader. That means they must respect the rights of others, [...]. Whether it's a teacher or another staff member, they must respect others' rights and act accordingly. Beyond that, I would say they must have strong human values. That's extremely important. Because there will be times when you need to make a decision, and in those moments, what matters most, more than any rule, are human values. A school leader should draw strength not from rules, but from their own character and moral principles.*

Notably, the theme of beliefs demonstrated that school administrators' leadership identities are guided by an inner framework of motivational, relational, ethical, and emotional assumptions. As shown in Table 3, growth orientation and motivation was the most common belief, and it reflected the administrators' intrinsic drive for leadership and their innovative mindset. Relational beliefs were about democratic and participatory approaches, and ethical beliefs focused on fairness, integrity, and trustworthiness. Though less frequent, emotion-related beliefs such as care and love also played a role in shaping leadership practices. All these findings indicated that administrators construct their professional identities around moral values and human-centered orientations.

4.3. Knowledge and Skills of School Administrators

To investigate RQ3, the comments of the school administrators were evaluated concerning their knowledge and skills that contributed to the formation of their leadership identity. The theme of knowledge and skills refers to the professional knowledge and practical competencies that school administrators possess and apply in their leadership roles. It includes both theoretical understanding, such as educational policies and leadership theories, and applied skills, like decision-making, communication, and instructional leadership. Overall, the participants regarded the knowledge and skills as essential for effectively leading a school and supporting teaching and learning. Accordingly, the subthemes were identified as basic competency ($f=51$), formation and growth ($f=20$), and targeted competency ($f=16$), as presented in Table 4.

Table 4. *Thematic Structure of School Administrators' Knowledge and Skills*

Theme (f)	Subthemes (f)	Code Examples (f)	Participants
Knowledge and skills (87)	Basic competency (51)	Effective communication and relationship management skills (10)	P3, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P12
		Comprehensive understanding of educational legislation and policy (7)	P3, P10, P11, P12
		Empathy and emotional understanding (3)	P2, P5, P10
	Formation and growth (20)	Experiential learning through practice (11)	P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P13
		Continuous learning and knowledge acquisition (9)	P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P11
		Self-directed learning (4)	P10, P13
	Targeted competency (16)	Improving technological proficiency and digital literacy (7)	P1, P2, P4, P6, P7, P10, P13
		Leadership training and administrative skill development (7)	P2, P5, P8, P9, P10, P12
		Enhancement of interpersonal and communication competencies (2)	P10, P13

Regarding the subtheme of basic competency, one reflection from a school administrator illustrated the comprehensive view of professional competence. He emphasized the role of formal qualification processes and exams. Moreover, he indicated how others perceived his leadership as naturally aligned with his personal attributes.

P3: *I have become a principal by passing an exam. I received formal training in educational administration. I studied further. People who have worked with me often say that leadership suits my personality very well. I worked hard. Also, of course, no principal is highly successful alone. Building a strong team is extremely important. Success is inevitable with a well-established administrative team, a solid group of teachers, and strong motivation.*

As for the subtheme of formation and growth, another participant's reflection vividly illustrated the transformative nature of the knowledge and skills in educational leadership. Although formal education and teacher training could provide a foundational knowledge base, the participant emphasized that real professional growth began through experience and lifelong learning.

P11: *When we all graduated from university, yes, we took courses related to teaching from our professors and completed internships. But on the very first day we started our careers, we realized that we didn't know anything, and the same goes for school leadership. This realization shows us something important: the more practice you have and the more experience you gain, the more it shapes your leadership, the way you make decisions, your perspective on situations, and your ability to anticipate the next step. In that sense, experience is very important in the profession [...]. Knowledge is power. Without knowledge, our experiences alone may not guide us effectively. [...] the training I received, the bad school leaders I encountered (who showed me what not to do), and the good leaders (who modeled what to do), all of these taught me through observation.*

For the subtheme of targeted competency, one principal highlighted the privacy of human relations and communication by stating that these skills can be developed through experience and by interacting with people.

P8: *I think the most important knowledge and skill is human relations and communication. These are things that can be developed over time through experience and by interacting with people. In addition*

to that, things like cultural activities can also help improve these skills. The tone of speech is very important. We must use our tone appropriately; we work in a public institution. Besides, I also believe that motivating teachers is very important and that this is something that needs to be developed as well. I consider that, too, to be an important type of knowledge and skill.

Communication was found as one of the targeted competencies in school leadership. Consistently, one school administrator reflected the critical role of communication with parents within the framework of essential knowledge and skills in school leadership.

P10: I think my greatest need for self-improvement is in communication with parents. I feel that I'm not able to express myself well to parents. When explaining incidents about their children, unfortunately, parents always see their child right [...]. It becomes very difficult to convince the parents. We struggle to explain that the child's behavior at home may not be the same as the behavior and speech they exhibit among peers at school. We tell them that our observations here are different, but parents absolutely refuse to believe that their child could ever be wrong or guilty in any way.

In summary, the findings under the theme of knowledge and skills highlighted that school administrators' leadership identities are shaped by a combination of basic competencies and continuous professional learning. As shown in Table 4, basic competencies were the most frequently emphasized subtheme, and it is about administrators' mastery of communication, policy knowledge, and empathy. The formation and growth subtheme focused on experiential learning, continuous professional development, and self-directed learning in leadership practices. Finally, targeted competencies put forward technological proficiency, leadership training, and communication skills. Taking all these factors into consideration, these findings suggest that administrators view knowledge and skills not as static qualifications, but as evolving capacities, and these qualifications must be continually developed.

4.4. Understandings of School Administrators

Pedagogical and organizational understandings of school administrators were investigated in determining the professional identity construction of school administrators to explore RQ4. The theme of understanding refers to how principals interpret, internalize, and enact their leadership roles based on their perceptions, experiences, and reflective insights. This theme encompasses both cognitive awareness, such as knowing how to act in various contexts, and emotional intelligence, like recognizing one's influence and limitations. The theme consisted of three subthemes; namely, leadership actions ($f=27$), leadership qualities ($f=15$), and self-awareness in leadership ($f=15$), as presented in Table 5.

Table 5. *Thematic Structure of School Administrators' Understandings*

Theme (f)	Subthemes (f)	Code Examples (f)	Participants
Understandings (57)	Leadership actions (27)	Situational awareness and contextual understanding (9)	P3, P6, P7
		Guiding and directing (5)	P1, P4, P6
		Inclusive decision-making (4)	P3, P4, P8, P10
	Leadership qualities (15)	Multidimensional knowledge and expertise (10)	P5, P7, P11, P12, P13
		Passion for the leadership role (3)	P7, P10
		Trustworthiness (2)	P7, P13
	Self-awareness in leadership (15)	Attending to individual differences and fostering development (4)	P5, P6, P7
		Realization of leadership role through experience (3)	P11, P13
		Adaptability to change (3)	P2, P3, P4

Concerning this subtheme, one participant exemplified how principals develop and perform leadership through situational awareness and responsiveness. Accordingly, it was indicated that his understanding of leadership is context-sensitive, responsive, and trust-driven.

P3: A school principal must be a leader, or more importantly, a leader who inspires trust. When we say leader, we mean someone who must be able to generate solutions. When a problem arises, whether from a student, a parent, or a member of staff, they all look to the principal for a solution. Therefore, having a problem-solving mission is extremely important for a school leader. At times, the principal must also be the final safe harbor [...]. When they come to the principal, the principal must at least listen, even if they cannot do anything else, and offer comfort. Once these things are in place, the school system tends to stabilize naturally.

Under leadership qualities, another participant described school leadership as a role that requires multidimensional expertise. He made a call for specialized training for school leaders and emphasized that effective leadership requires more than experience.

P12: In our country, we don't have a structured career path to become a school leader. I've visited many countries in the West, Finland, the UK, France, and even Romania. We searched for their education systems, and unfortunately, no country leads education as blindly as ours does, especially in terms of school leadership. In many countries, school leaders [...] are prepared professionally through academic education and seminars, but here, we do not have a structured school for leadership. Recently, there have been some developments, and I hope they will be successful. [...] Leadership education should be offered at the master's or doctoral level. Only then can school leaders contribute more effectively.

Finally, one principal reflected a deep level of self-awareness in leadership, as the subtheme, because the participant drew meaning and purpose from a longitudinal view of student growth. He showed an inclusive understanding of students and stated that he valued both academic and non-academic forms of success.

P7: My greatest realization is this: we've had students become doctors, engineers, and university lecturers, but alongside them, we also had students who were academically very weak yet are now extremely successful in their professions. I've had students who became barbers, plumbers, and auto painters. Seeing them, seeing that they've found their place in life, makes me feel so proud. It's one of my greatest joys. As I mentioned earlier, [...] our main task isn't just to focus on academics, but to prepare children for life, so they won't suffer from anxiety about the future. We must teach them to hold on to life in some way. I was a vocational high school student, so I know what it's like to come from that background. We always talk to our students about how not everyone comes from wealth, and while doing so, we emphasize that we have never compromised our own values or love for our country.

Briefly, the theme of understandings was about how school leaders see leadership through awareness, personal qualities, and reflective insights. As Table 5 showed, leadership actions were the most frequently uttered subtheme, and situational awareness, problem-solving, and inclusive decision-making were all crucial parts of leadership. Leadership qualities comprised the importance of a wide range of competencies, professional training, and passion for the leadership role. Self-awareness in leadership focused on

administrators' understandings of individual differences, adaptability, and their long-term influence on students. All these findings indicated that administrators shape their professional identities through both action and reflection by balancing contextual responsiveness with personal development and self-awareness.

4.5. Experience and Wisdom of School Administrators

To investigate RQ5, the theme of experience and wisdom was analyzed based on the remarks of school administrators. This theme refers to how both personal life experiences and professional encounters shape the leadership identity of school principals. It captures the biographical dimension of identity formation. According to this theme, past experiences serve as reference points, emotional anchors, and learning sources that influence the leadership identity. This theme was found to be composed of two subthemes, which are personal experience ($f=42$) and professional experience ($f=17$), as demonstrated in Table 6.

Table 6. *Thematic Structure of School Administrators' Experience and Wisdom*

Theme (f)	Subthemes (f)	Code Examples (f)	Participants
Experience and wisdom (59)	Personal experience (42)	Influence of social and environmental contexts on career path (23)	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P10, P11, P12, P13
		Learning from leadership role models (10)	P1, P6, P7, P9, P11, P12, P13
		Leadership aligned with personal disposition (9)	P3, P4, P7, P8, P11
	Professional experience (17)	Learning through practice and reflective action (11)	P1, P2, P3, P7, P9, P11, P13
		Integrating knowledge and experience into leadership practice (6)	P1, P2, P3, P4, P7

Regarding this subtheme, one school administrator acknowledged the students' influence on his leadership trajectory. In line with these findings, his quote below illustrates how interaction with students and the school environment played an impactful role in the participant's leadership identity and career path.

P5: Being among the students, being able to understand them, of course, has helped me grow significantly. One student once said to me, "You change people's lives for the better". That sentence had a powerful impact on me.

Another participant gave a compelling example of how negative leadership role models could shape one's leadership philosophy. The participant recalled authoritarian and punitive behaviors from former school administrators as significant experiences that influenced his ethical stance and professional goals.

P7: I'm a physical education teacher. The feedback I received from the children and the contrast between the previous administrators and me, who were more authoritarian, influenced me. For example, when I was in high school, our vice principals would cut our hair. That was the most significant thing for me. I, on the other hand, never pay attention to students' hair. If you're focused on their hair, their appearance, or clothing, you're missing the point. That was a personal principle for me. After becoming a teacher, I promised myself that if I ever took on this role, I would never approach children that way. That was my priority. [...] The promise I made to myself not to do these things if I became an administrator is what ultimately motivated me to take on this role.

Finally, concerning the subtheme of professional experience, one administrator reflected and illustrated the process of integrating knowledge and experience in the development of leadership identity.

The participant emphasized the evolution of professional judgment over time and a leadership identity shaped by the synthesis of theoretical understanding and lived encounters.

P3: In the teaching profession, experience is already crucial, and it's just as important for school leaders. When I look back now, for example, at what I did in my early years, I can say that I spent time dealing with small things. As you gain experience, as you live through challenges and encounter problems, it's possible to improve yourself, and of course, training, education, and research are also part of that process.

In summary, the theme of experience and wisdom emphasized the biographical dimension of leadership identity. This theme essentially pointed out that personal and professional experiences critically shape school administrators' practices. As presented in Table 6, personal experience was the most frequently emphasized subtheme, including the influence of social contexts, role models, and alignment with personal dispositions. Professional experience highlighted the role of reflective practice and the integration of knowledge with lived encounters. Notably, these findings suggest that administrators' leadership identities are not solely products of formal training but are deeply rooted in life experiences and professional trajectories that provide wisdom, resilience, and perspective in their roles.

5. DISCUSSION

In this study, how school administrators construct and interpret their professional identity was investigated across the themes of values, beliefs, knowledge, understandings, experiences, and wisdom. The results revealed how these foundational components shape school administrators' leadership practices in their educational environments. Accordingly, subthemes and relevant codes were created under each theme. Rather than listing traits of identity, the findings contribute to clarifying how identity is formed and enacted in practice, which provides a practical basis for leadership development.

Values and attitudes determine the professional identity of school administrators. The key components of this theme were detected as personal values, professional attitudes, and conflicting values. The participants expressed a strong value for harmony and adaptability, which demonstrates a commitment to building cohesive school environments through flexibility and emotional sensitivity. Their identity formation prominently reflected commitment to justice and equity, along with a resilient work ethic and persistence. These values are consistent with previous studies about the significance of intrinsic motivation and ethical orientations in educational leadership (Begley, 2003; Campbell et al., 2003; Lazaridou, 2007; Orsuwan & Siriparp, 2023). Concerning their professional attitudes, school administrators expressed a strong connection with fairness and justice, respect for confidentiality and privacy, and a solution-focused approach to leadership. Consistently, these attitudes indicated that school administrators' personal beliefs and contextual needs influence their leadership styles and ethical decisions (Jenlink, 2014; Kafa & Pashiardis, 2019). Conflicts were also observed when personal values contradicted professional standards. Some administrators described times when they acted professionally even though they would not ordinarily choose to. They reported instances of emotional reactivity in the workplace and noted discomfort with excessive or inauthentic praise. These results are consistent with the existing literature regarding conflicts about professional identity and emotional complexities in school leadership roles (Dulude & Milley, 2021; Van Der Wal et al., 2019). Notably, mapping where values and role requirements pull in different directions

and how leaders navigate conflicts can justify priorities for ethics training and policies that minimize misalignment.

School administrators' beliefs considerably shape their professional identity. In this study, growth orientation and motivation, relational beliefs, ethical beliefs, and emotion-related beliefs were detected as the subthemes of beliefs in the development of leadership identity. A strong intrinsic drive for leadership and an innovative mindset emerged as key motivators for continuous learning and improvement, which aligns with the existing findings that regarded professional development and ongoing identity transformation as essential to effective leadership (Brown & Militello, 2016; Robertson, 2017). Relational beliefs were associated with a commitment to democratic and participative leadership, relational empathy, and enabling autonomy and support, which is consistent with the notion that principals' professional identities are closely linked to interpersonal interactions and community collaboration (Mommers et al., 2024; Rodriguez et al., 2020). The administrators also expressed ethical beliefs, which are fairness, integrity, and trustworthiness. These reflect the challenges of moral leadership and ethically grounded decision-making in complex school settings (Frick, 2009; Poole, 2007). Finally, emotion-related beliefs, including care and love, were found to signify emotionally intelligent leadership. These results point to emotion regulation and well-being as key supports for developing leaders' identity and cultivating a positive school climate (Kutsyuruba et al., 2024; Van Dong, 2024). Overall, these patterns in beliefs turn commitment into consistent daily practices and point to preparation that builds growth beliefs, relational efficacy, and emotion-work capabilities.

Knowledge and skills are essential elements in developing the professional identity of school leaders. According to the results, the subthemes were found as basic competency, formation and growth, and targeted competency. Among the core competencies, the participants stressed effective communication and relationship management skills, which are foundational for building trust, fostering collaboration, and leading instructional change, which aligns with previous research that links proficiency in communication with leadership effectiveness and school capacity (Anthony & Said, 2015; Lijuan & Hallinger, 2016). A comprehensive understanding of educational legislation and policy was identified as critical, and it enables school leaders to align their practices with national expectations and promote compliance within environments with changing policies (Rivero Castro et al., 2019). In parallel, empathy and emotional understanding were highlighted as essential interpersonal skills, which highlights the role of emotional competence in nurturing a supportive and inclusive school climate (Crow & Møller, 2017; Lubguban, 2020; Van Dong, 2024). Moreover, the development and enhancement of knowledge and leadership skills were primarily ascribed to experiential learning via practice, ongoing education, and self-directed growth. These results consistently align with previous research that indicates reflective learning, peer mentoring, and problem-solving substantially improve leadership efficacy and identity development (Aas, 2017; Sahlin et al., 2025; Torrico et al., 2025). The process of professional identity development was identified as iterative and context-dependent, corroborating Notman's (2017) assertion that leadership identity evolves through adaptive and experiential practices. The subtheme of targeted competency, under the knowledge and skills theme, indicated several skills that the participants purposefully developed to meet contemporary challenges. These included technological proficiency and digital literacy, which have become indispensable in managing digital transitions in schools, especially for 21st-century demands (Awodiji & Naicker, 2025). Additionally, leadership training and administrative skill development were emphasized through formal programs and coaching, which reflects the value of structured professional development (Barnett et al.,

2017; Welch & Hodge, 2018). Finally, the development of interpersonal and communication competencies revealed the notion that relational leadership is critical in school improvement (Mommers et al., 2024; Rodriguez et al., 2020). Identifying the specific competencies school leaders should build and the ways to build them may lead to the growth of targeted and supported skills through coaching and policy.

The construct of understanding considerably shapes the school administrators' professional identity. The results pointed out leadership actions, leadership qualities, and self-awareness in leadership as the subthemes comprising the understanding of school administrators. Leadership actions include practical behaviors such as situational awareness, guiding and directing, and inclusive decision-making. These behaviors enable school leaders to navigate complex and dynamic educational environments. Effective leadership requires high situational awareness, such as interpreting contextual signals, predicting future needs, and responding with clarity and purpose (Rajbhandari, 2017; Ramasauskiene et al., 2025). Besides, guiding and directing, supported by influence tactics and vision-setting practices, can allow administrators to align teams towards shared goals and promote coherence within the school community (Basher, 2025; Sun & Leithwood, 2015). Inclusive decision-making, characterized by openness and collaboration, strengthens trust and enhances psychological safety, which thereby fosters innovation and professional commitment among staff (Li, 2022; Xiaomei & Chaomin, 2021). Specifying these actions as routines can contribute to leadership development, which strengthens situational awareness, inclusive decision structures, and team alignment to improve leadership impact.

Regarding leadership qualities, professional identity can be further enriched by shaping how school leaders perceive and enact their roles. The participants emphasized attributes such as multidimensional knowledge and expertise, passion for the leadership role, and trustworthiness. These qualities reflect a complex leadership profile that integrates cognitive, affective, and ethical dimensions. For instance, leaders who combine technical knowledge with interpersonal communication skills tend to resolve issues faster and decide with greater confidence, while passion for the role inspires engagement and resilience (Lubguban, 2020; Macasa et al., 2019). Similarly, trustworthiness built on transparency, emotional stability, and consistency emerged as a key determinant of leadership credibility and organizational harmony (Tigre et al., 2022; Yan et al., 2023). All these qualities can support clarifying priorities for selection and preparation, which can contribute to building credibility, developing expertise, and sustaining role commitment.

Self-awareness emerged as a foundation for developing administrators' professional identity. It involves recognizing individual differences, reflecting on experience to clarify the leadership role, and maintaining adaptability in the face of change. Leaders who cultivate self-awareness are more likely to assess their impact, regulate emotions, and align their behaviors with ethical and contextual expectations (Carden, 2025; Cruz-Gonzalez et al., 2021b; Tekleab et al., 2008). Notably, experience considerably shapes leadership identity because school leaders evolve through reflective practice and exposure to diverse leadership challenges (Lipscombe et al., 2024; Robertson, 2017). The ability to adapt to and lead changes sustains a professional identity that is resilient, responsive, and aligned with organizational needs (Gilley et al., 2008; Neves & Van Dam, 2024). Consequently, positioning self-awareness and experience as foundations of adaptation can support interventions that institutionalize mentoring, structured reflection, and practice-based inquiry to convert experience into effective leadership.

Experience and wisdom as a foundational component of professional identity were revealed to involve the subthemes of personal and professional experience. Personal experiences, especially those shaped by social and environmental contexts, such as family background, educational access, and career-related social support, profoundly influenced the participants' entry into leadership roles. The data revealed that administrators aligned their career trajectories with early experiences in educational settings, and these experiences affected their values, aspirations, and sense of professional purpose (Cruz-Gonzalez et al., 2021b; Lipscombe et al., 2024; Ummanel et al., 2016). On the other hand, professional experiences were critical in identity construction through continuous learning in practice and reflective actions. As the participants described, leading was more demanding in complex school contexts, particularly while applying their knowledge and adapting their learning through daily experiences, mistakes, and moments of critical reflection (Burns et al., 2024; Robson, 2022). Furthermore, the administrators emphasized the integration of knowledge and experience into leadership practice as a dynamic process. Consistently, school leaders could learn to synthesize theoretical knowledge with experiential insights through mentoring and formal leadership training, which enables them to respond to organizational challenges with agility and ethical clarity in decision-making (Seidle et al., 2016). In other words, converting experience into wisdom for action requires structured reflection, mentoring, and practice-based inquiry in leadership development to ensure insights transfer across contexts.

5.1. Practical Implications

The findings of this study point to some practical implications in leadership programs, professional development, and school administration. First, because personal values, beliefs, and emotional dispositions shape leadership identity, leadership preparation should integrate technical training with reflective practice, ethical leadership, and emotional intelligence, rather than treating these as separate or optional constructs. Moreover, workshops for school administrators should focus on the exploration of leaders' values and conflicts between personal and professional expectations to support authenticity and resilience. Besides, providing structured mentoring with observational learning and guided practice can strengthen identity development and help leaders convert their learning into daily actions.

Notably, policymakers and educational administrators should recognize that professional identity is an evolving construct shaped by context-specific challenges and experiences. Therefore, adaptive learning and reflective leadership can be facilitated by leadership support structures, such as peer coaching, communities of practice, and contextually responsive professional learning communities. Particular attention should be given to fostering inclusive, participative, and relational leadership capacities that align with school leaders' values, beliefs, and understandings in designing professional development that is iterative, dialogic, and situated within the complexities of real-world school environments.

5.2. Study Limitations and Future Research

Although the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the professional identity construction of school administrators, it is limited by its qualitative design and context-specific focus. The participants of the study were from a specific national education system, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could employ longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to examine identity formation over time and in response to policy or organizational change. Comparative studies across different cultural and educational contexts may also clarify how identity is formed by varying systemic, cultural, and organizational conditions. Additionally, further inquiry into how professional identity is

associated with gender, career stage, and leadership style would contribute to a more holistic understanding of leadership development.

6. CONCLUSION

This study revealed how school administrators construct their professional identities through a dynamic interaction of personal values, beliefs, emotional dispositions, knowledge, and personal and professional experiences. Accordingly, the development of professional identity is not static, but it is shaped through reflective engagement, contextual understanding, and continuous negotiation between internal and external factors. The complexity of this process should be recognized in designing programs for leadership development that support the holistic growth of educational leaders and equip them to lead ethically, responsively, and effectively in dynamic school environments.

This research contributes to a process-level explanation of professional identity. It traces how values and beliefs are activated as concrete routines, how organizational and policy knowledge sets feasible courses of action, and how experience and reflection turn into practical wisdom within actual organizational constraints. It also surfaces the key structures in tension that shape leadership identity, such as accountability versus fairness and centralized regulation versus professional judgment, and documents the strategies leaders use to keep purpose intact, such as boundary setting, framing, and relational work. Therefore, the results of this study go beyond role descriptions of school leaders and contribute to the literature by clarifying which components matter and how they interact in leadership practices.

Statement of Author Contribution:

1. Aylin KIRISCI-SARIKAYA: Conceptualization, development of research materials, methodology (data collection and analysis), writing and editing.

2. F. Sehkar FAYDA-KINIK: Conceptualization, development of research materials, methodology (data collection and analysis), writing and editing.

7. REFERENCES

- Aas, M. (2017). Leaders as learners: Developing new leadership practices. *Professional Development in Education*, 43(3), 439–453. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2016.1194878>
- Anthony, S., & Said, H. B. (2015). The relationship between principal communication behaviour and leadership effectiveness. In K. S. Soliman (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 26th International Business Information Management Association Conference Innovation Management and Sustainable Economic Competitive Advantage from Regional Development to Global Growth, IBIMA 2015* (pp. 3877–3885). International Business Information Management Association, IBIMA.
- Awodiji, O. A., & Naicker, S. R. (2025). Basic school leaders' continuous professional development for the 4IR: A systematic literature review across Africa. *Athens Journal of Education*, 12(1), 99–120. <https://doi.org/10.30958/aje.12-1-6>
- Bairasauskienė, L. (2020). Women in Lithuanian school management: An ethnographic perspective. *Acta Paedagogica Vilnensia*, 45, 110–126. <https://doi.org/10.15388/ActPaed.45.7>
- Barnett, B. G., Shoho, A. R., & Okilwa, N. S. A. (2017). Assistant principals' perceptions of meaningful mentoring and professional development opportunities. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 6(4), 285–301. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMCE-02-2017-0013>
- Basher, M. A. (2025). Influence tactics in leadership. In *Elgar Encyclopedia of Leadership* (pp. 112–114). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035307074.00053>

- Begley, P.T. (2003). In pursuit of authentic school leadership practices. In P. T. Begley, & O. Johansson (Eds.), *The ethical dimensions of school leadership: Studies in educational leadership* (Vol. 1, pp. 1–12). Springer, Dordrecht. https://doi.org/10.1007/0-306-48203-7_1
- Bøje, J. D., & Frederiksen, L. F. (2021). Leaders of the profession and professional leaders. School leaders making sense of themselves and their jobs. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 24(3), 291–312. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2019.1591515>
- Brown, C., & Militello, M. (2016). Principal's perceptions of effective professional development in schools. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 54(6), 703–726. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-09-2014-0109>
- Burns, J., Volpe-White, J., & Watkins, S. R. (2024). Foundations of reflection in leadership training. *New Directions for Student Leadership*, 2024(184), 115–125. <https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.20645>
- Campbell, C., Gold, A., & Lunt, I. (2003). Articulating leadership values in action: Conversations with school leaders. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 6(3), 203–221. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360312032000090064>
- Carden, J. (2025). Self-Awareness. In *Elgar Encyclopedia of Leadership* (pp. 284–285). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035307074.000123>
- Celtek, A. B. (2019). *Professional identity perceptions of school administrators* [Unpublished master's thesis]. Trakya University.
- Cetin, S. (2019). Challenges faced by principals: A qualitative study. *Kastamonu Education Journal*, 27(4), 1637–1647. <https://doi.org/10.24106/kefdergi.3204>
- Crow, G. M., & Møller, J. (2017). Professional identities of school leaders across international contexts: An introduction and rationale. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 45(5), 749–758. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143217714485>
- Cruz-Gonzalez, C., Domingo Segovia, J., & Lucena Rodriguez, C. (2019). School principals and leadership identity: A thematic exploration of the literature. *Educational Research*, 61(3), 319–336. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2019.1633941>
- Cruz-Gonzalez, C., Perez Munoz, M., & Domingo Segovia, J. (2020). Marta's story: A female principal leading in challenge contexts. *School Leadership and Management*, 40(5), 384–405. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2020.1719401>
- Cruz-Gonzalez, C., Rodriguez, C. L., & Segovia, J. D. (2021a). A systematic review of principals' leadership identity from 1993 to 2019. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 49(1), 31–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143219896053>
- Cruz-Gonzalez, C., Rodriguez, C. L., Segovia, J. D., & Mula-Falcon, J. (2021b). Identity metamorphosis: The teacher-principal transition of a female leader for social justice. *International Journal of Educational Organization and Leadership*, 28(2), 97–106. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2329-1656/CGP/V28I02/97-106>
- De La Torre, E. H., & Altopiedi, M. (2023). Teachers in principal charges: Professional identity construction and its impact in organizational resilience. *Revista Interuniversitaria De Formacion Del Profesorado*, 98(37.3), 203–222. <https://doi.org/10.47553/rifop.v98i37.3.93879>
- Demirkasimoglu, N. (2021). Principal's professional identity: An overview of the literature and implications for future research. In S. Cinkir (Ed.), *Empowering education research theory and practice* (pp.165–179). Peter Lang.
- Dulude, E., & Milley, P. (2021). Institutional complexity and multiple accountability tensions: A conceptual framework for analyzing school leaders' interpretation of competing demands. *Policy Futures in Education*, 19(1), 84–96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210320940134>
- Frick, W. C. (2009). Principals' value-informed decision making, intrapersonal moral discord, and pathways to resolution: The complexities of moral leadership praxis. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 47(1), 50–74. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230910928089>
- Gil-Espinosa, F. J., Lopez-Fernandez, I., Jimenez-Garcia, J. D., & Cadenas-Sanchez, C. (2024). Gender differences in school leadership: Collaborative and task-oriented styles of principals in Andalusia, Spain. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432241267873>

- Gilley, A., Dixon, P., & Gilley, J. W. (2008). Characteristics of leadership effectiveness: Implementing change and driving innovation in organizations. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 19(2), 153–169. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.1232>
- Gungor, S., & Tasdan, M. (2018, May). Arafta bir meslegin kimlik insasi: Okul yoneticilerinin mesleki kimliklerine ve rollerine iliskin degerlendirmeleri [Identity construction of a profession in limbo: School administrators' evaluations of their professional identities and roles]. In *Proceedings of the 13th International Congress on Educational Administration* (pp. 584–587). Cumhuriyet University.
- Isleyen, Y. (2024). Regarding the problems experienced by school administrators review of research 2014–2022). *International QMX Journal*, 3(2), 1209–1216.
- Jenlink, P. M. (2014). Ethical decision making in leadership: A moral literacy perspective. In S. Chitpin, & C. W. Evers (Eds.), *Decision making in educational leadership: Principles, policies, and practices* (pp. 165–182). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203757277>
- Johnson, L., & Crow, G. M. (2017). Professional identities of school leaders across international contexts. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 45(5), 747–748. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050449717712316>
- Kafa, A., & Pashiardis, P. (2019). Exploring school principals' personal identities in Cyprus from a values perspective. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 33(5), 886–902. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-03-2018-0102>
- Karatas, I. H. (2022). The deadlocks of school management in Turkey. *School Administration Journal*, 1(1), 9–18.
- Karatas, I. H., & Demirbilek, M. (2024). Professional, academic, and institutional identities of school administrators with a Ph.D. *Ankara University Journal of Faculty of Educational Sciences (JFES)*, 57(1), 99–163. <https://doi.org/10.30964/auebfd.1207584>
- Kesmen, K., Islek, O., Yilmaz, M., & Aksu, F. F. (2023). The effects of having a master's degree in educational administration on school administration: A qualitative analysis based on the views of school administrators. *Journal of Social, Humanities and Administrative Sciences*, 9(70), 3817–3828. <http://dx.doi.org/10.29228/JOSHAS.72910>
- Kutsyuruba, B., Arghash, N., & Al Makhamreh, M. (2024). School leader well-being: Perceptions of Canada's outstanding principals. *Education Sciences*, 14(6). <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14060667>
- Lazaridou, A. (2007). Values in principals' thinking when solving problems. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 10(4), 339–356. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603120701381758>
- Li, X. (2022). Inclusive leadership and employee outcomes: A meta-analytic test of multiple theories. *Academy of Management Annual Meeting Proceedings*, 2022(1). <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMBPP.2022.33>
- Lijuan, L., & Hallinger, P. (2016). Communication as a mediator between principal leadership and teacher professional learning in Hong Kong primary schools. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, 25(2), 192–212. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105678791602500205>
- Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage Publications.
- Lipscombe, K., Tindall-Ford, S., & Kidson, P. (2024). Developing a personalized educational leadership theory: A promising approach to school leadership development? *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 20(1), 59–79. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19427751241245971>
- Lubguban, M. G. B. (2020). Leadership proficiency and emotional competence of women school administrators. *Journal of Critical Reviews*, 7(11), 293–296. <https://doi.org/10.31838/jcr.07.11.47>
- Macasa, G. P., Acosta, I. C., & Malagapo, E. P. (2019). Determinants of core competencies of school leaders managing Philippine schools overseas: A guide to stakeholders and school owners. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 7(6), 1458–1468. <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2019.070613>
- Merriam, S. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Molla, N., & Castello, M. (2022). Characterisation of the professional identity of school principals. *Journal for the Study of Education and Development*, 45(4), 804–841. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02103702.2022.2096289>

- Mommers, J., Runhaar, P., & den Brok, P. (2024). Who am I? – Exploring secondary education school leaders’ professional identity. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432241230978>
- Neves, P., & Van Dam, K. (2024). Facilitating change: The role of adaptability and LMX for change support. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00218863241257959>
- Nordholm, D. E., Ritacco Real, M., & Bezzina, C. (2023). Newly appointed principals’ professional identity – insights from a Swedish perspective. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 53(1), 6–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432231151521>
- Notman, R. (2017). Professional identity, adaptation and the self: Cases of New Zealand school principals during a time of change. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 45(5), 759–773. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143216670650>
- Oplatka, I. (2023). The emergence of social justice leaders: Identity formation of new principals. In *International Encyclopedia of Education* (4th ed.) (pp. 438–444). <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-818630-5.05002-8>
- Orsuwan, M., & Siriparp, T. (2023). “It’s more than the money!” How personal and professional attitudes contribute to aspiring school leaders’ career development. *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences*, 44(1), 147–154. <https://doi.org/10.34044/j.kjss.2023.44.1.16>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice*. Sage Publications.
- Poole, W. L. (2007). Intersections of organizational justice and identity under the new policy direction: Important understandings for educational leaders. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 11(1), 23–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603120701663478>
- Rajbhandari, M. M. S. (2017). Leadership actions-oriented behavioral style to accommodate change and development in schools. *Sage Open*, 7(4), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017736798>
- Ramasauskienė, V., Zuperkienė, E., & Simanskiene, L. (2025). Situational awareness in leadership: Application of methods in business organisations. *Administrative Sciences*, 15(6), 210. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci15060210>
- Rivero Castro, M. D. R., Cifuentes, T. Y., & Hurtado, C. (2019). Preparation for an effective leadership in Chile: An opinion study of a national leadership framework from principals’ perspectives. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 27, 117. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.27.4391>
- Robertson, S. (2017). Transformation of professional identity in an experienced primary school principal: A New Zealand case study. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 45(5), 774–789. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143217707519>
- Robson, I. (2022). *The reflective leader: Reflexivity in practice*. Emerald Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/9781839825545>
- Rodriguez, C. L., Cruz-Gonzalez, C., & Segovia, J. D. (2020). The leadership identity of principals through the “view of others”: A systematic literature review. *The International Journal of Diversity in Education*, 21(1), 89–103. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-0020/CGP/v21i01/89-103>
- Russo-Netzer, P., & Shoshani, A. (2019). Becoming teacher leaders in Israel: a meaning-making model. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 49(3), 369–389. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2018.1533524>
- Sahlin, S., Styf, M., & Hakansson Lindqvist, M. (2025). Peer mentoring for professional socialisation – shaping novice principals’ leadership identity? *Journal of Educational Administration*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-08-2024-0283>
- Scribner, S. P., & Crow, G. M. (2012). Employing professional identities: Case study of a high school principal in a reform setting. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 11(3), 243–274. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2012.654885>
- Seidle, B., Fernandez, S., & Perry, J. L. (2016). Do leadership training and development make a difference in the public sector? A panel study. *Public Administration Review*, 76(4), 603–613. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12531>
- Simon, S., Dole, S., & Farragher, Y. (2019). Custom-designed and safe-space coaching: Australian beginning principals supported by experienced peers form pipeline of confident future leaders. *School Leadership and Management*, 39(2), 145–174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2018.1470502>

- Sun, J., & Leithwood, K. (2015). Direction-setting school leadership practices: A meta-analytical review of evidence about their influence. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 26(4), 499–523. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2015.1005106>
- Tanghe, E., & Schelfhout, W. (2023). Professionalization pathways for school leaders examined: The influence of organizational and didactic factors and their interplay on triggering concrete actions in school development. *Education Sciences*, 13(6). <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13060614>
- Tekleab, A. G., Sims Jr., H. P., Yun, S., Tesluk, P. E., & Cox, J. (2008). Are we on the same page? Effects of self-awareness of empowering and transformational leadership. *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, 14(3), 185–201. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1071791907311069>
- Thompson, J. (2022). A guide to abductive thematic analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 27(5), 1410–1421. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5340>
- Tigre, F. B., Henriques, P. L., & Curado, C. (2022). Building trustworthiness: Leadership self-portraits. *Quality and Quantity*, 56(6), 3971–3991. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01291-8>
- Torrico, S. L., Mandeville, A., Liu, J. T., & Manegold, J. G. (2025). Increasing leadership self-efficacy through experiential learning in student groups. *Journal of Management Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10525629251334108>
- Tubin, D. (2017). Leadership identity construction practices: The case of successful Israeli school principals. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 45(5), 790–805. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143216682503>
- Ummanel, A., McNamara, G., & Stynes, M. (2016). The career paths of primary school principals in Ireland. *Irish Educational Studies*, 35(1), 57–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2016.1151373>
- Van Der Wal, M. M., Oolbakkink-Marchand, H. W., Schaap, H., & Meijer, P. C. (2019). Impact of early career teachers' professional identity tensions. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 80, 59–70. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2019.01.001>
- Van Dong, T. (2024). Emotional management skills and training among high school administrators. *International Journal of Educational Organization and Leadership*, 31(2), 27–44. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2329-1656/CGP/v31i02/27-44>
- Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. State University of New York Press.
- Wang, A. H., & Grogan, M. (2024). A critically self-reflexive model for leader professional development: Centering intersectionality. In A. H. Wang, & M. Grogan (Eds.), *Intersectionality and leading social change in education: Professional learning to transform self, others, and the field* (pp. 112–128). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003431992>
- Wang, W., & Derakhshan, A. (2024). Contextual factors shaping the professional identity of Chinese teachers in English as a foreign language instructional context: Exploring the role of school climate and administrator leadership behavior. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijal.12653>
- Welch, J., & Hodge, M. (2018). Assessing impact: The role of leadership competency models in developing effective school leaders. *School Leadership and Management*, 38(4), 355–377. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2017.1411900>
- Xiaomei, L., & Chaomin, G. (2021). Analysis of “influence of inclusive leadership on team performance” based on SPSS software: Based on the mediating role of employee voice behaviors. *ACM International Conference Proceeding Series* (pp. 351–357). <https://doi.org/10.1145/3473714.3473776>
- Yan, S., Chen, L., & Zhang, G. (2023). Differences in the preferred trustworthiness between high-level and low-level leaders. *Psychological Reports*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00332941231213933>
- Yang, S.-Y. (2013). Wisdom for the common good: Tales of three leaders. In J. D. Vanvactor (Ed.), *Perspectives in leadership* (pp. 177–187). Nova Science Publishing.
- Yilmaz, K. (2025). Professional identity of school administrators in Türkiye according to researches. *School Administration Journal*, 5(1), 6–17.
- Yoeli, R., & Berkovich, I. (2010). From personal ethos to organizational vision: Narratives of visionary educational leaders. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 48(4), 451–467. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578231011054716>

APPENDIX

Interview Questions

Dimensions of the Theoretical Framework	Interview Questions
Values and attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- What personal values do you emphasize in your work, and how do they impact your leadership/management?- Do you think your school leadership style aligns with your personal values? If so, can you explain how? If it does, can you explain why?- How would you like to be perceived as a school administrator?
Beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- What do you believe makes a good school administrator?- As an administrator, what do you believe a leader should be and act like? What are your thoughts on this?
Knowledge and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- When you think about your professional and administrative knowledge and competencies, what do you think are the most important knowledge and skills?- Could you explain how you acquired this knowledge and these skills?- What professional knowledge and skills do you think you need to acquire or develop?
Understandings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- In your opinion, who is a school administrator, and what are their roles?- What is your understanding of the school administrator in this regard? How did you arrive at this understanding?- How do you define your own job as a school administrator?- What has been an important realization you have had about your work so far? How did you come to that realization?
Experience and wisdom	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Please think about the personal and professional experiences that led you to pursue a career as a school administrator. What experiences have influenced you in what ways?- Was there a particular/critical situation, person or event that influenced your decision to become an administrator? Can you talk about it?- How and during what process did these driving forces or sources of motivation become important to you and influence you?