Leadership, Organizational Commitment and Teacher Retention in Cameroon Primary Education

Keneh Alfred Jombei

PhD student in Educational Administration and Management in Kesmonds International University (Kiu)

***Corresponding Author**

DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.101100056

Received: 08 November 2026; Accepted: 13 November 2026; Published: 24 November 2026

ABSTRACT

Teacher retention is a strategic concern for primary education because frequent teacher movement or departure can disrupt school routines, weaken collegial continuity, increase recruitment and induction costs, and affect pupils' learning experiences. This article examines the relationships among school leadership, organizational commitment, and teacher retention in Cameroon primary education. The article integrates transformational leadership, social exchange theory, and Meyer and Allen's three-component model of organizational commitment. Drawing on these perspectives and recent retention literature, it proposes an original model—the Cameroon Primary Teacher Retention Model (CPTRM)—in which leadership is an upstream organizational influence, organizational commitment is a central psychological mechanism, and teacher retention is the principal outcome. The proposed model emphasizes trust, fairness, professional support, recognition, participation, professional growth, and manageable working conditions as leadership-related mechanisms that can strengthen commitment and staying intentions. A quantitative cross-sectional correlational design is proposed, using a four-point Likert questionnaire administered to primary-school teachers. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation would be used to test four hypotheses. Because no original field dataset was supplied, the findings section presents literature-grounded findings and a transparent empirical-results template rather than invented numerical results. Recent evidence shows that school-organizational factors constitute a large proportion of influential teacher-retention factors and that leadership, trust, commitment, job satisfaction, stress, workload, and professional identification are consequential. The article concludes with practical recommendations for education authorities, school leaders, teacher-training institutions, and school communities.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Primary education provides the foundation for literacy, numeracy, social development, citizenship, and later educational progression. The quality and continuity of primary education depend substantially on teachers who are present, professionally committed, supported by school leadership, and willing to remain in the profession and in their schools. Teacher retention therefore extends beyond the question of recruitment: it concerns whether schools and education systems create conditions in which teachers choose to remain.

Recent international evidence reinforces the organizational nature of teacher retention. Leithwood, Gu, and Eleftheriadou (2026), in a systematic review of reviews, identified 109 factors associated with teacher retention decisions and concluded that a large proportion of consequential factors are located within the school organization. Their education-specific adaptation of Social Cognitive Career Theory places school leadership upstream in a complex chain linking working conditions, teacher perceptions, well-being, and retention decisions.

Organizational commitment is particularly relevant because it captures teachers' psychological attachment to their schools or organizations. Meyer and Allen's framework distinguishes affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment. Affective commitment reflects emotional attachment; continuance

commitment reflects perceived costs or alternatives; and normative commitment reflects a sense of obligation to remain. These dimensions provide a useful bridge between school leadership and retention.

The systematic review by Bogler and Berkovich (2022), based on 68 peer-reviewed quantitative studies, found that teacher organizational commitment is associated with demographic, personal, role-related, interpersonal, and contextual predictors and has important outcomes. A systematic review of principals' leadership and teacher commitment likewise reported that leadership behaviours such as shared vision, communication, appreciation, fairness, respect, trust, responsibility-sharing, and constructive support were associated with higher teacher commitment.

For Cameroon primary education, the issue should be interpreted within the realities of public, private, faith-based, urban, peri-urban, and rural schools. Teachers may experience differences in resources, leadership capacity, workload, professional development, remuneration, housing and transport circumstances, class sizes, and opportunities for advancement. The relevance of leadership and commitment is therefore not simply theoretical: school leaders can shape everyday experiences of fairness, voice, recognition, feedback, support, trust, and professional identity.

Retention is also connected to broader workforce outcomes. A 2022 meta-analysis of 94 studies found that trust, professional identification, and organizational commitment were among the strongest protective factors against teachers' turnover intention, while burnout, workload, and stress were positively related to turnover intention. This provides a strong rationale for investigating commitment as a potential pathway between leadership and retention.

Statement of the Problem

Teacher retention is a persistent challenge for education systems because losing experienced teachers can affect instructional continuity, school culture, mentoring, pupil-teacher relationships, and the capacity of schools to implement improvement initiatives.

Recruitment alone does not resolve the problem if teachers continue to leave because of unsupportive organizational environments. In primary schools, the consequences can be particularly significant because teachers often carry broad instructional and pastoral responsibilities and may remain with the same group of pupils for substantial periods. When teachers leave, schools must redistribute responsibilities, recruit replacements, and support new teachers. These processes can impose costs on schools and pupils.

Although international research has established links between leadership, commitment, and retention, the literature also indicates that teacher retention is complex and that the school organization plays a major role. □cite□turn0search0□ Existing organizational-commitment research has also identified gaps concerning mediators, moderators, and contextual explanations. □cite□turn0search1□ The problem is therefore not simply whether leadership matters, but how leadership may create conditions that strengthen teachers' organizational commitment and, consequently, their decision to stay.

The present article addresses this gap by integrating leadership, organizational commitment, and retention into one Cameroon-focused model. It seeks to provide an empirically testable explanation of how leadership behaviours may contribute to teachers' staying decisions through commitment and related organizational conditions.

Objectives of the Study

General Objective

To examine the relationship between school leadership, organizational commitment, and teacher retention in Cameroon primary education.

Specific Objectives

To examine the relationship between supportive school leadership and organizational commitment among primary-school teachers.

To determine the relationship between organizational commitment and teacher retention.

To examine the relationship between leadership practices and teacher retention.

To assess the combined conceptual role of leadership and organizational commitment in explaining teacher retention.

Research Hypotheses

H01: There is no significant relationship between supportive school leadership and organizational commitment among primary-school teachers in Cameroon.

H02: There is no significant relationship between organizational commitment and teacher retention among primary-school teachers in Cameroon.

H03: There is no significant relationship between supportive school leadership and teacher retention among primary-school teachers in Cameroon.

H04: There is no significant relationship between organizational commitment and teacher retention when examined within the proposed leadership–commitment framework.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Leadership in Primary Schools

Leadership refers to the process through which school leaders influence people, relationships, structures, and practices toward shared educational purposes. Transformational leadership emphasizes vision, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and inspirational influence. Distributed and instructional approaches add attention to shared responsibility and teaching-and-learning improvement. In retention research, however, leadership should also be understood through everyday support: fairness, communication, trust, recognition, voice, feedback, professional learning, and responsiveness.

Polatcan and Cansoy's systematic review found that leadership behaviours including shared vision, cooperation, communication, appreciation, fairness, respect, trust, responsibility-sharing, and constructive support were associated with teachers' organizational commitment. □cite□turn0search3□ Recent retention research similarly identifies leadership and trust as important school-organizational influences.

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment describes the strength and nature of an employee's attachment to an organization. Meyer and Allen's three-component model identifies affective, continuance, and normative commitment. □cite□turn0search9□ For primary teachers, affective commitment may appear as pride in belonging to the school and emotional attachment to colleagues and pupils; continuance commitment may reflect perceived costs of leaving; normative commitment may reflect professional or moral obligations to the school community.

Bogler and Berkovich's systematic review of teachers' organizational commitment shows that commitment is influenced by interpersonal and contextual factors and has important organizational outcomes. This makes commitment a plausible mechanism through which leadership may affect retention.

Teacher Retention

Teacher retention refers to teachers remaining in their schools or in the teaching profession over time. It can be measured through actual retention, intention to remain, low intention to leave, or a combination of behavioural and attitudinal indicators. Because a cross-sectional survey cannot observe future departure directly, this study operationalizes retention primarily through intention to stay and willingness to continue working in the school.

Li and Yao's meta-analysis of 94 studies found that organizational commitment, trust, and professional identification were among the strongest protective factors against turnover intention, whereas burnout, workload, and stress increased turnover intention.

Leadership–Commitment Link

Leadership may influence commitment by shaping how teachers interpret the school as an organization. A leader who listens, communicates clearly, distributes responsibility fairly, recognizes contributions, and supports professional growth can strengthen teachers' sense that the organization values them. In turn, teachers may develop stronger emotional attachment, obligation, or perceived investment in the organization.

Commitment–Retention Link

Commitment can influence retention because teachers who feel emotionally attached to their school, identify with its goals, or perceive meaningful reasons to remain are less likely to want to leave. The meta-analysis by Li and Yao supports organizational commitment as a major protective factor against turnover intention.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Concept	Meaning	Key authors	Application
Leadership	Influence process that shapes direction, relationships and school practice.	Bass & Riggio; Leithwood et al.	Support, fairness, vision, communication, participation and professional growth.
Organizational commitment	Psychological attachment or bond between employee and organization.	Meyer & Allen; Bogler & Berkovich	Affective, continuance and normative attachment to school.
Teacher retention	Continuation in the school or teaching role; often operationalized as intention to stay.	Li & Yao; Leithwood et al.	Staying intention, low intention to quit, willingness to continue.
Trust	Confidence in leaders and colleagues and belief that organizational interactions are reliable and fair.	Leithwood et al.; Polatcan & Cansoy	Potential mechanism linking leadership to commitment and retention.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational Leadership Theory, associated with Burns and later developed by Bass, proposes that leaders can elevate followers' motivation and commitment by articulating a compelling vision, modelling valued behaviours, intellectually stimulating followers, and giving individualized consideration.

In primary schools, this can involve communicating a clear educational purpose, encouraging teachers to solve instructional problems creatively, recognizing individual contributions, and supporting professional development.

Application: Transformational leadership explains the proposed leadership-to-commitment path. When teachers experience inspirational, individualized, and intellectually supportive leadership, they may perceive greater meaning and value in their work and stronger attachment to the school.

Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory, associated with Blau, proposes that relationships develop through reciprocal exchanges. When teachers perceive that the school and its leaders provide support, respect, fairness, recognition, and opportunities, they may feel an obligation to reciprocate through commitment and continued contribution.

Application: The theory explains why supportive leadership may produce stronger organizational commitment and retention. The teacher interprets leadership support as an investment in the relationship and responds with loyalty, commitment, and willingness to remain.

Meyer and Allen's Three-Component Model of Organizational Commitment

Meyer and Allen's model distinguishes affective, continuance, and normative commitment. The model is particularly useful because retention is not a single psychological process. A teacher may stay because they genuinely want to, because leaving appears costly, or because they feel an obligation to remain. The three forms may coexist at different levels.

Application: The model positions organizational commitment as the central psychological construct connecting leadership experiences to retention. It also permits the researcher to examine which component is most strongly represented among teachers.

Link Among the Three Theories

The theories complement one another rather than compete. Transformational Leadership Theory explains the leader's behaviours; Social Exchange Theory explains the reciprocal relationship created by those behaviours; and Meyer and Allen's model explains the forms of organizational attachment that may translate into retention.

Theory	Main explanation	Mechanism	Expected contribution
Transformational Leadership	What leaders do	Vision, support, stimulation, consideration	Build positive organizational experiences
Social Exchange	Why employees reciprocate	Perceived support, fairness and reciprocity	Strengthen obligation and trust
Three-Component Commitment	How attachment develops	Affective, continuance, normative commitment	Increase willingness to stay

Proposed New Model: Cameroon Primary Teacher Retention Model (CPTRM)

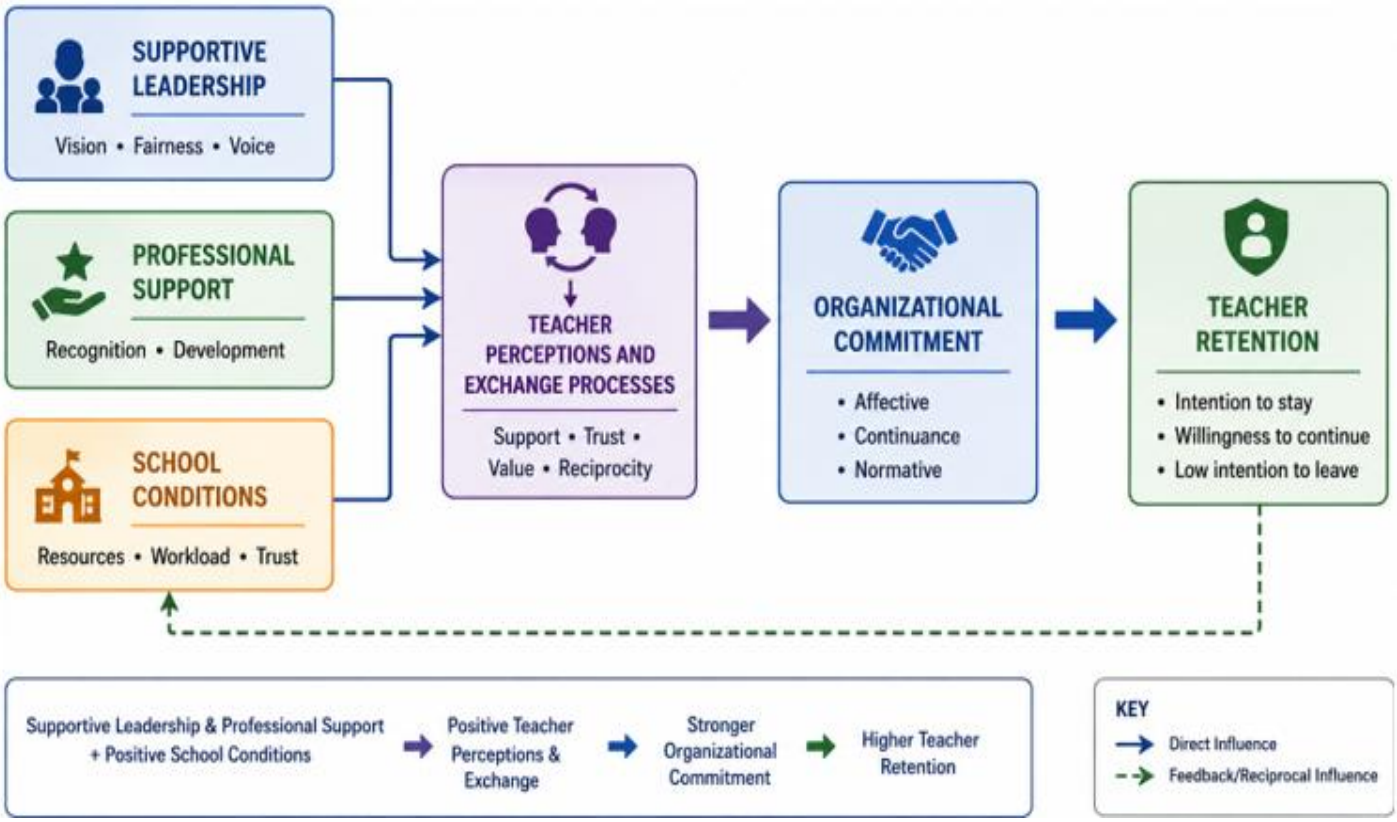
This article proposes the Cameroon Primary Teacher Retention Model (CPTRM) as an original conceptual model for empirical testing. It is not presented as an established theory. The model argues that school leadership is an upstream organizational force that shapes teachers' experiences of support, fairness, recognition, voice, professional growth, and trust.

These experiences strengthen organizational commitment, which is expected to increase teacher retention. Working conditions and professional support are included as contextual supports that can strengthen or weaken the leadership–commitment–retention chain

ISSN No. 2454-6186 | DOI: 10.47772/IJRISS | Volume X Issue XI November 2026

Model Diagram

CAMEROON PRIMARY TEACHER RETENTION MODEL (CPTRM)



The first layer consists of leadership and school conditions. The second layer represents teachers' interpretations of those conditions, especially trust, perceived organizational support, fairness, value, and reciprocity. The third layer is organizational commitment. The final layer is retention. The model therefore does not assume that leadership automatically causes retention. Rather, leadership is expected to influence the organizational experiences through which commitment develops, and commitment is expected to be closer to the retention decision.

This structure is consistent with the 2026 review by Leithwood, Gu, and Eleftheriadou, which argues that many retention factors operate through complex chains and that school leaders can influence conditions that are closer to teachers' decisions to stay or leave.

Importance of the Model

It provides an integrated explanation rather than treating leadership, commitment, and retention as unrelated variables.

It places organizational commitment in a theoretically meaningful position between leadership and retention.

It is adaptable to Cameroon primary-school realities and can be tested across public, private, and faith-based schools.

It gives school leaders practical leverage points: trust, fairness, recognition, participation, professional support, and working conditions.

It can guide future studies examining mediation, moderation, school type, region, teacher experience, and rural–urban differences.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A quantitative cross-sectional correlational design is proposed. It is appropriate for examining relationships among leadership, organizational commitment, and teacher retention without manipulating school conditions.

Population and Study Area

The target population should comprise teachers employed in selected primary schools in a clearly specified region, division, municipality, or set of municipalities in Cameroon. The researcher should obtain the current teacher population from relevant education authorities and participating schools before determining the final sample. A proportionate stratified sampling procedure is recommended to represent school ownership or type, followed by random selection of teachers within participating schools. Sample size should be determined using a recognized formula or statistical power analysis and adjusted for non-response.

Instrument

A structured questionnaire should contain demographic items and scales measuring leadership, organizational commitment, and teacher retention. A four-point Likert scale is recommended: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree.

Validity and Reliability

Content validity should be assessed by experts in educational leadership, measurement, and primary education. A pilot test should be conducted outside the final sample. Internal consistency should be evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, with approximately .70 or higher generally considered acceptable for exploratory research, subject to interpretation of the number and nature of items.

DATA ANALYSIS

Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations should summarize the data. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation should test the four hypotheses at $\alpha = .05$. The analysis must be based on actual collected data. Correlation should be interpreted as association rather than causal proof.

The basic Pearson correlation can be written as $r = \mathrm{Cov}(X,Y)/(SDx \times SDy)$. Values range from -1 to $+1$. Positive values indicate that higher values of one variable tend to accompany higher values of the other'

FINDINGS

Because no original field dataset was provided with this request, it would be academically inappropriate to invent numerical findings. The findings below therefore summarize what the literature supports and provide the exact structure for reporting the eventual empirical results.

Leadership is consistently implicated in teachers' organizational commitment. A systematic review found that vision, cooperation, communication, appreciation, fairness, respect, trust, shared responsibility, and constructive support were associated with stronger commitment. Organizational commitment is a significant protective factor against teachers' turnover intention. A 2022 meta-analysis identified commitment, trust, and professional identification among the strongest protective factors.

A substantial proportion of teacher-retention factors are located within the school organization, and leadership can influence multiple downstream conditions that shape teachers' staying decisions. □cite□turn0search0□

Teacher organizational commitment is influenced by interpersonal and contextual predictors and is associated with important teacher and organizational outcomes

Illustrative reporting sentence: "There was a positive and statistically significant relationship between supportive school leadership and organizational commitment, r = [value], p = [value]. Therefore, H01 was rejected." This sentence should only be completed after actual analysis.

DISCUSSION

The proposed framework suggests that leadership should be understood as a starting point in the retention process rather than as a single isolated predictor. This interpretation is consistent with recent evidence that school leadership can shape working conditions, trust, professional support, and other factors that sit between organizational practices and teachers' retention decisions.

The expected leadership–commitment association is also consistent with the systematic review of principals' leadership and teacher organizational commitment, which highlighted communication, appreciation, fairness, respect, trust, responsibility-sharing, and supportive behaviours.

The commitment–retention relationship is theoretically and empirically plausible because teachers who feel attached to their organization, identify with its goals, or perceive meaningful reasons to remain are less likely to express turnover intentions. The meta-analysis by Li and Yao provides particularly strong support for commitment as a protective factor. For Cameroon, the value of the proposed model lies in its contextual orientation. Rather than assuming that a single leadership style is sufficient everywhere, the model focuses on observable leadership practices and organizational experiences that can be examined in different primary-school settings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Education authorities should strengthen leadership preparation for primary-school head teachers, with emphasis on people management, communication, conflict resolution, teacher support, and ethical decision-making.

School leaders should establish regular teacher consultation and feedback mechanisms so that teachers have meaningful opportunities to express concerns and contribute to appropriate school decisions.

Recognition systems should be transparent and based on credible professional contributions rather than favoritism.

Primary schools should strengthen mentoring and induction for beginning teachers, particularly where new teachers are placed in challenging or rural environments.

Education authorities should improve access to continuous professional development and make it relevant to teachers' actual classroom needs.

School leaders should monitor workload, administrative demands, and resource constraints because workload and stress are associated with turnover intention.

Policies intended to improve retention should address organizational conditions as well as individual incentives because recent evidence indicates that many important retention factors reside within schools.

Teacher associations should participate constructively in discussions about working conditions, professional identity, career development, and teacher welfare.

Researchers should test the CPTRM through longitudinal and multi-level studies, including comparisons across regions, school types, teacher experience, gender, and rural–urban settings.

Future research should test whether organizational commitment mediates the relationship between leadership and retention rather than assuming that leadership affects retention directly.

CONCLUSION

Leadership, organizational commitment, and teacher retention are interconnected dimensions of sustainable primary education. The literature supports the view that teachers' decisions to remain are shaped substantially by school-level conditions, leadership, trust, commitment, professional identification, workload, and well-being. □cite□turn0search0□turn0search8□ The proposed Cameroon Primary Teacher Retention Model integrates these insights by positioning supportive leadership as an upstream influence, organizational commitment as a central psychological mechanism, and retention as the principal outcome. The model offers a practical and empirically testable framework for Cameroon primary education. Its ultimate value will depend on rigorous field testing, transparent statistical analysis, and adaptation to the specific institutional and regional context in which it is applied.

REFERENCES

1. Allen, N. J., & Meyer, J. P. (1990). The measurement and antecedents of affective, continuance and normative commitment to the organization.
2. Bandura, A. (1986). Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory. Prentice-Hall.
3. Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2006). Transformational leadership (2nd ed.). Psychology Press.
4. Blau, P. M. (1964). Exchange and power in social life. Wiley.
5. Bogler, R., & Berkovich, I. (2022). A systematic review of empirical evidence on teachers' organizational commitment 1994–2018.
6. Burns, J. M. (1978). Leadership. Harper & Row.
7. Leithwood, K., Gu, Q., & Eleftheriadou, S. (2026). A school-oriented explanation of teachers' retention decisions: Building on evidence from a systematic review of reviews. Review of Education, 14, e70182. https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.70182
8. Li, R., & Yao, M. (2022). What promotes teachers' turnover intention? Evidence from a meta-analysis. Educational Research Review, 37, 100477. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2022.100477
9. Meyer, J. P., & Allen, N. J. (1991). A three-component conceptualization of organizational commitment. Human Resource Management Review, 1(1), 61–89. https://doi.org/10.1016/1053-4822(91)90011-Z
10. Meyer, J. P., Bobocel, D. R., & Allen, N. J. (1991). Development of organizational commitment during the first year of employment: A longitudinal study of pre- and post-entry influences. Journal of Management, 17(4), 717–733. https://doi.org/10.1177/014920639101700406
11. Polatcan, M., & Cansoy, R. (2019). The relationship between school principals' leadership and teachers' organisational commitment: A systematic review. Bartın University Journal of Faculty of Education, 8(1), 1–24.
12. Rouse, K. S., Snyder, K., & Hedlund, C. (2026). Reframing "staying power" as an organizational construct: Implications for teacher retention and sustainable quality in education. Frontiers in Education, 11. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2026.1726142