

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN TEACHER EMPOWERMENT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: This article examines the role of the school principal in connecting teacher empowerment with meaningful professional development. Its purpose is to highlight the leadership practices through which teachers acquire stronger professional agency, influence, self-confidence and capacity for continuous learning. A structured synthetic literature review was conducted. Nineteen empirical studies, research syntheses and institutional sources published between 2004 and 2026 were included in the synthesis, with emphasis on evidence from 2021 onward and on research concerning Greece. The synthesis identified five mutually reinforcing functions of school leadership. The principal empowers teachers by ensuring meaningful participation in decision making, distributing responsible leadership roles, organizing collaborative learning within the school, providing time and resources for development, and linking feedback and evaluation with professional growth. International evidence indicates that the influence of leadership is expressed mainly through self-efficacy, collaboration, trust and shared responsibility. Greek studies similarly highlight communication, pedagogical guidance, motivation and the creation of a learning-oriented culture. The article concludes that empowerment and professional development constitute a reciprocal process. The proposed approach positions the principal as an architect of professional learning who combines instructional, distributed and developmental leadership.

Keywords: teacher empowerment, professional development, school principal, instructional leadership

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching quality develops through sustained professional learning, reflective practice and the capacity of teachers to influence the conditions of their work. School principals occupy a strategic position in this process because they shape priorities, relationships, access to resources and opportunities for professional participation. Their influence on classroom practice is mainly indirect and operates through the organizational conditions that support teacher motivation, collaboration and learning (Leithwood et al., 2020; Tan et al., 2022). The contemporary principal therefore combines administrative coordination with responsibility for developing the professional capacity of the school.

Teacher empowerment refers to the expansion of professional agency and meaningful influence. Its classic dimensions include participation in decision making, professional growth, professional status, self-efficacy, autonomy and perceived impact. Empowerment becomes educationally valuable when teachers use these conditions to improve instruction, lead collective work and contribute to school development. Earlier research connected empowerment with organizational and professional commitment, while recent work highlights supportive working conditions, communication, access to resources and individual development as central components (Bogler & Somech, 2004; Kiral, 2025). Professional development is closely related to this conception. Effective programs build knowledge and techniques, motivate change and support the repeated use of new practices within everyday teaching (Desimone, 2009; Sims et al., 2025).

The relationship is reciprocal. Greater agency encourages teachers to identify learning needs, seek feedback, share expertise and assume leadership roles. Professional learning, in turn, strengthens self-efficacy and the capacity to participate responsibly in school decisions. The principal links the two processes by creating a coherent professional environment in which empowerment and continuous learning reinforce one another. Evidence from Greece is especially relevant to this synthesis because recent studies highlight communication, pedagogical guidance, motivation and the creation of a learning-oriented school culture.

Research on school leadership has examined pedagogical leadership, teacher development, evaluation and teacher leadership as related strands. This article integrates them around one question. How can school principals create the organizational and professional conditions through which empowerment becomes continuous development and professional development strengthens teacher agency? The purpose is to identify the leadership practices and mechanisms that connect the two concepts, while giving particular attention to recent evidence and studies concerning Greece.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A structured synthetic literature review was conducted. The synthesis included nineteen empirical studies, research syntheses and institutional sources published between 2004 and 2026. Emphasis was placed on evidence published from 2021 onward and on research concerning Greece. The review focused on leadership

practices that connect teacher empowerment with professional development and on the mechanisms through which these practices support professional agency, self-efficacy, collaboration, trust and shared responsibility. The included material was synthesized around five mutually reinforcing leadership functions: meaningful participation in decision making, responsible distributed leadership roles, collaborative school-based learning, provision of time and resources for development, and the connection of feedback and evaluation with professional growth. International and Greek evidence was considered together in order to identify convergent leadership mechanisms and contextually relevant emphases.

3. RESULTS

The evidence converged on a model in which the principal acts as a learning architect. Empowerment is produced through the interaction of voice, responsibility, capability and recognition. Professional development supplies the knowledge and supported practice required for teachers to exercise these forms of agency with educational purpose. Five leadership functions organize this interaction.

First, principals create authentic professional voice. Participation becomes empowering when teachers influence priorities, improvement plans and learning activities and when their contributions lead to visible decisions. Distributed leadership extends this participation by assigning roles connected with mentoring, curriculum work, innovation, inclusion and coordination. Evidence from Greek teachers with informal leadership responsibilities shows that targeted development programs and school improvement initiatives can support the emergence of teacher leadership, especially when administrative recognition and interpersonal support are present (Lazaridou & Thomaidou, 2025). International evidence also connects instructional and distributed leadership with stronger instructional practice through teacher collaboration and job satisfaction (Bellibaş et al., 2021).

Second, principals organize professional learning around diagnosed school and teacher needs. This function includes protected time, relevant expertise, equitable access, peer observation, joint planning, lesson inquiry and structured reflection. Effective development combines content, active learning, coherence and sustained follow-up. A systematic review by Ventista and Brown (2023) linked professional learning to student outcomes when teachers could connect knowledge with classroom application. A meta-analytic test of 104 randomized professional development programs further identified four mechanisms that develop insight, motivate change, build techniques and embed practice (Sims et al., 2025). The principal's contribution lies in assembling these mechanisms into an ongoing school process.

Third, principals strengthen self-efficacy through feedback, modelling, recognition and achievable professional responsibility. Liu and Hallinger (2018), using data from 3,414 teachers and 186 principals, found moderate direct and indirect relationships between instructional leadership and teacher professional learning, with teacher self-efficacy serving as a mediator. Kiral (2025) similarly organized principal empowerment practices around professional development, support, resources, communication and collaboration. These findings show that confidence grows from opportunities to exercise competence within a supportive structure.

Fourth, principals connect evaluation with development. Clear expectations, evidence-informed feedback and agreed improvement goals can turn appraisal into a learning cycle. Greek principals recognize evaluation as a potential contribution to administrative and educational effectiveness, with fairness, communication and developmental use shaping its acceptance (Brinia et al., 2023). The principal therefore mediates between accountability requirements and professional trust. Feedback gains developmental value when it leads to coaching, resources and opportunities for further learning.

Fifth, principals sustain empowerment through culture and networks. Collaboration becomes durable when shared inquiry, knowledge exchange and teacher leadership are embedded in routines rather than attached to individual initiatives. The second-order meta-analysis by Tan et al. (2022), covering 512 primary studies, reported an overall leadership association of $r = .33$ and stronger mean effects for teacher and organizational outcomes than for student outcomes. The result supports an indirect pathway from leadership to learning through professional capacity.

The Greek evidence illustrates both institutional opportunity and structural pressure. Research in Athens found that principal training directly influenced teachers' professional development and emphasized the principal as a manager of learning and inspiration for lifelong learning (Chalikias et al., 2020). A recent Greek-focused review likewise identified motivational support and strategic incentives as important for participation in development activities (Lourmpas et al., 2025). Studies of instructional and pedagogical leadership show that principals can prioritize teaching and professional learning within a centralized system (Kaparou & Bush, 2015). Among 133 Greek primary headteachers, pedagogical leadership was associated especially with school climate, guidance, communication and cooperation, while hierarchical conditions shaped the available space for these practices (Alexopoulos et al., 2023). Evidence from the pandemic also demonstrated the value of communication, support and adaptive coordination in sustaining teachers' work (Kafa, 2023).

Current institutional sources complement the empirical evidence by linking school leadership with teacher professional learning and evaluation in Greece and Europe (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021; Hellenic Republic, 2021; OECD, 2026). These sources reinforce the relevance of school-based development,

feedback and improvement-oriented leadership. Together with the empirical studies, they support a developmental understanding of the principal's role in which evaluation and professional learning are connected to teacher growth.

4. DISCUSSION

The synthesis suggests that teacher empowerment is best understood as professional governance rather than simple delegation. A principal may distribute tasks while retaining all meaningful influence, producing workload without agency. Empowering leadership combines decision influence with knowledge, resources, recognition and responsibility. Professional development then becomes the capacity-building dimension of empowerment. It enables teachers to justify choices, lead peers and contribute to improvement with stronger professional judgment.

This interpretation supports a combined model of principal leadership. Instructional leadership keeps teaching and learning central. Distributed leadership broadens participation and develops teacher leaders. Developmental leadership links feedback, evaluation and professional learning. Their combination positions the principal as an architect of professional learning who creates the conditions through which professional agency and continuous development reinforce one another.

A practical cycle follows from the findings. The principal and teachers diagnose needs using school evidence, select a focused professional goal, create a collaborative learning design, test practices, review evidence and share leadership for the next cycle. Appraisal can enter this sequence as a source of feedback and goal setting. Such an arrangement connects evaluation with improvement and gives teachers visible influence over the learning process.

The practical implication of this synthesis is that leadership practices should be organized as an interconnected process. Meaningful participation, distributed responsibility, collaborative learning, time and resources, and developmental feedback reinforce one another when they are embedded in the everyday organization of the school. In this configuration, communication, pedagogical guidance, motivation and a learning-oriented culture support the mechanisms of self-efficacy, collaboration, trust and shared responsibility.

5. CONCLUSIONS

School principals influence teacher empowerment and professional development by shaping the conditions in which teachers exercise voice, assume responsibility, build expertise and participate in continuous learning. The review identified five connected functions: meaningful participation in decision making, distributed leadership roles, school-based collaborative learning, provision of time and resources for development, and the connection of feedback and evaluation with professional growth. Their effects operate primarily through self-efficacy, collaboration, trust and shared responsibility.

Taken together, the findings support a reciprocal understanding of empowerment and professional development. Empowerment strengthens teachers' capacity to participate actively in professional learning, while professional development reinforces agency, confidence and readiness to contribute to school leadership and improvement. The proposed approach therefore positions the principal as an architect of professional learning who combines instructional, distributed and developmental leadership. Evidence from Greece reinforces the importance of communication, pedagogical guidance, motivation and the creation of a learning-oriented school culture.

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