

Bureaucratic Leadership of School Leaders in Senior High School: A Scoping Review

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Abstract

Bureaucratic leadership remains widely practiced in senior high schools, especially in centralized, policy-driven education systems. Its emphasis on hierarchy, formal rules, and accountability helps maintain order and policy compliance, but its influence on leadership practice and school outcomes varies across contexts. This scoping review examined the existing literature on bureaucratic leadership in senior high school settings, with attention to how it has evolved in recent post-pandemic studies. Using the Population–Concept–Context (PCC) framework and following PRISMA and Joanna Briggs Institute guidelines, the review synthesized 25 empirical, theoretical, and conceptual studies published from 2015 to 2025. The findings show that bureaucratic leadership remains important in supporting administrative stability and standardized school governance. At the same time, rigid bureaucratic structures may reduce teacher autonomy, limit instructional flexibility, and increase leadership workload. Recent studies also point to the growing use of enabling and hybrid approaches, where formal structures are balanced with teacher participation, adaptability, and resilience-oriented leadership practices. The review suggests that the effectiveness of bureaucratic leadership largely depends on how formal structures are interpreted and applied in specific school contexts. Overall, the study offers an integrative view of bureaucratic leadership as an evolving, context-sensitive approach and identifies areas requiring further research, particularly in senior high school settings.

Keywords: bureaucratic leadership, senior high school, enabling bureaucracy, hybrid leadership, scoping review

Introduction

Leadership styles shape the effectiveness of schools, particularly in senior high schools, which occupy a critical stage in student academic and career development. Bureaucratic leadership, rooted in Weber's (1947/2015) theory of bureaucracy, emphasizes hierarchical authority, formal rules, and system-wide accountability. It ensures consistency, compliance, and governance across public education systems (Bush, 2020).

Senior high school leaders must navigate centralized curricula, standardized testing mandates, teacher evaluation systems, and stakeholder expectations. While transformational and distributed leadership have received attention, bureaucratic leadership remains dominant in centralized educational systems, especially in developing countries. Understanding its influence, limitations, and potential integration with adaptive practices is crucial for contemporary educational leadership.

This scoping review aims to map the extent, range, and nature of existing research on bureaucratic leadership in senior high schools, identify key themes, and highlight gaps for future research.

Despite the sustained presence of bureaucratic leadership in educational institutions, the current body of literature remains fragmented across conceptual, empirical, and contextual lines. Existing studies often discuss bureaucracy as an organizational mechanism or administrative structure, yet comparatively few examine it as a leadership

orientation that directly shapes the work of senior high school leaders and teachers, as well as student-related outcomes. This creates a conceptual gap in understanding how bureaucratic leadership is specifically defined, interpreted, and operationalized within senior high school settings, where academic tracking, career pathways, and institutional accountability create distinct leadership demands.

A further contextual gap is evident in the uneven attention given to senior high schools as a distinct educational sector. Much of the literature on bureaucratic leadership has focused on general school administration, higher education, or public sector organizations, with limited synthesis devoted specifically to the senior high school level. This is significant because senior high schools' function within unique curricular and governance structures that may intensify both the strengths and limitations of bureaucratic leadership. Moreover, studies from developing countries and highly centralized educational systems remain underrepresented, despite these contexts being where bureaucratic leadership is most visibly practiced.

There is also an emerging theoretical and developmental gap concerning how bureaucratic leadership is evolving in response to post-pandemic educational realities. Recent scholarship increasingly points to enabling bureaucracy, adaptive governance, and hybrid leadership arrangements that seek to balance formal control with flexibility and responsiveness. However, these newer perspectives remain scattered and insufficiently integrated into the broader literature, making it difficult to determine how bureaucratic leadership is being reconfigured in contemporary senior high school practice.

From a methodological standpoint, the literature also reveals limited use of qualitative and context-rich approaches to capture how bureaucratic leadership is experienced and negotiated by school heads, teachers, and other stakeholders. Much of the existing evidence relies on descriptive or policy-oriented analyses, leaving room for deeper inquiry into lived experiences, school culture, and localized leadership practices.

In response to these identified gaps, the present study seeks to provide a comprehensive and integrative synthesis of the literature, with particular emphasis on the evolving nature of bureaucratic leadership and its implications for senior high school practice. Rather than merely summarizing prior studies, this review aims to trace patterns across definitions, outcomes, theoretical developments, and contextual applications while identifying areas that remain insufficiently explored.

Research Questions

To address these gaps and provide a clearer direction for future scholarship, this scoping review is guided by the following central research questions:

1. What are the defining characteristics and core features of bureaucratic leadership in senior high school contexts?
2. What are the reported effects of bureaucratic leadership on teachers, school leaders, and student-related outcomes?
3. How has bureaucratic leadership evolved in recent literature, particularly toward enabling and hybrid forms in post-pandemic educational settings?
4. What theoretical, methodological, and contextual gaps remain in the current body of research on bureaucratic leadership in senior high schools?

In line with these questions, the present study adopts a primarily conceptual and substantive focus. Conceptually, it seeks to clarify and synthesize how bureaucratic leadership is defined, interpreted, and extended in contemporary scholarship, particularly through emerging perspectives such as enabling bureaucracy. Substantively, it examines the implications of bureaucratic leadership for educational practice, including its effects on teacher autonomy, organizational functioning, and student-centered outcomes.

While methodological aspects of the reviewed studies are considered to provide context and support analysis, the primary emphasis of this review is on understanding the nature, evolution, and practical implications of bureaucratic leadership in senior high school settings.

Review of Relevant Theory, Studies and Literature

Theoretical Foundations and Review of Empirical Studies

Bureaucratic leadership remains a dominant framework in centralized and policy-driven school systems. It is characterized by hierarchical authority, rule-based governance, and standardized accountability mechanisms that regulate school operations and leadership practices (Bush, 2020; Alqahtani, 2021). Contemporary interpretations highlight the concept of enabling bureaucracy, where formal structures, when implemented with fairness, clarity, and trust, can stabilize and empower staff while providing consistency in curriculum, evaluation, and policy execution (Janka, 2021; Pietarinen et al., 2022).

Post-pandemic leadership research emphasizes adaptive and crisis-responsive bureaucratic leadership, in which school leaders operate within formal systems while exercising flexibility during disruptions such as health crises, natural disasters, or rapid policy shifts (Johnston, 2021; Galorio et al., 2024). These emerging perspectives position bureaucratic leadership as a framework that can evolve to meet the demands of complex and dynamic educational environments.

Recent empirical studies demonstrate that bureaucratic leadership is essential for policy compliance, administrative order, and accountability, particularly in low-resource and centralized systems (Bush, 2020; Alqahtani, 2021). However, excessive procedural demands can hinder teacher autonomy, reduce morale, and limit instructional creativity (Nguyen et al., 2020; Bozkurt, 2023; Müslim & Demirtaş, 2021; Alanoğlu & Demirtaş, 2021; Balıkçı, 2024; Loeb et al., 2023).

Several studies indicate that hybrid and adaptive leadership strategies can mitigate these limitations. For instance, Simiyu (2023) and Gurr & Drysdale (2021) report that combining bureaucratic compliance with participatory and resilience-focused practices improves leadership effectiveness. Philippine studies by Balatero & Bauyot (2024), Galorio & Bauyot (2024), and Galorio et al. (2024) show that senior high school leaders creatively navigate bureaucratic constraints by integrating motivational leadership, community engagement, and resilience planning.

Cultural and contextual factors also influence the effectiveness of bureaucratic leadership. Hallinger & Walker (2017) note that hierarchical cultural norms in East and Southeast Asia make bureaucratic approaches more acceptable. Similarly, Johnston (2021) highlights the role of cultural responsiveness in softening the negative effects of rigid administrative mandates in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Emerging research underscores the importance of psychological empowerment and well-being in bureaucratic contexts. Studies show that enabling bureaucratic systems—those emphasizing fairness, trust, and consistency—can reduce teacher burnout and improve instructional quality (Pietarinen et al., 2022; Balatero & Bauyot, 2024).

Importantly, this review contributes a novel perspective by explicitly mapping the transition from traditional, rigid bureaucracy to enabling bureaucracy, particularly in the post-pandemic context. While prior reviews have described bureaucratic leadership or adaptive practices independently, few have framed this evolution as a continuum. By highlighting how formal structures can shift from constraining compliance to supporting teacher agency, fostering resilience, and enabling innovation, this study offers a unique lens for understanding bureaucratic leadership in senior high schools after COVID-19 (Gurr & Drysdale, 2021; Galorio et al., 2024).

These findings suggest that when bureaucracy is implemented strategically, it can serve as a scaffold for innovation, resilience, and sustainable leadership rather than merely a restrictive framework.

Integrative Narrative and Framework

To extend beyond descriptive synthesis, this review advances an integrative perspective of bureaucratic leadership as a context-dependent and evolving framework rather than a fixed administrative structure. Rooted in Weber’s theory of bureaucracy, traditional leadership in schools is defined by hierarchical authority, formal rules, and standardized procedures designed to ensure accountability and system coherence (Weber, 1947/2015; Bush, 2020). This form remains particularly visible in centralized education systems, where alignment with national policies is critical.

However, more recent scholarship suggests that bureaucratic structures can operate in qualitatively different ways depending on how they are enacted. The concept of enabling bureaucracy reframes formalization not as a constraint but as a resource—one that can support professional work when accompanied by fairness, transparency, and trust (Janka, 2021; Pietarinen et al., 2022). In this view, rules provide clarity and predictability, allowing teachers to focus on instruction rather than administrative uncertainty.

Building on these perspectives, the present study conceptualizes bureaucratic leadership along a continuum consisting of three interrelated forms: (1) traditional bureaucracy, characterized by rigid compliance and centralized control; (2) enabling bureaucracy, where structures are implemented in ways that support teacher agency; and (3) adaptive or hybrid leadership, in which school leaders actively combine bureaucratic requirements with participatory and context-responsive practices. Evidence from recent studies indicates that such hybrid approaches are increasingly necessary in complex and uncertain environments, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic (Gurr & Drysdale, 2021; Galorio et al., 2024).

To connect theory to practice in the post-pandemic senior high school context, the study integrates the Population-Concept-Context (PCC) framework:

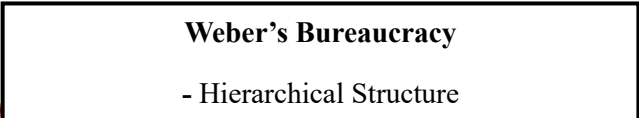
Population (P): Senior high school principals and teachers

Concept (C): Bureaucratic leadership along a continuum – traditional, enabling, and adaptive/hybrid forms

Context (C): Centralized, policy-driven senior high school systems in a post-pandemic educational environment

Figure 1

Connecting Weber’s Bureaucracy to Modern Bureaucratic Leadership in Senior High Schools



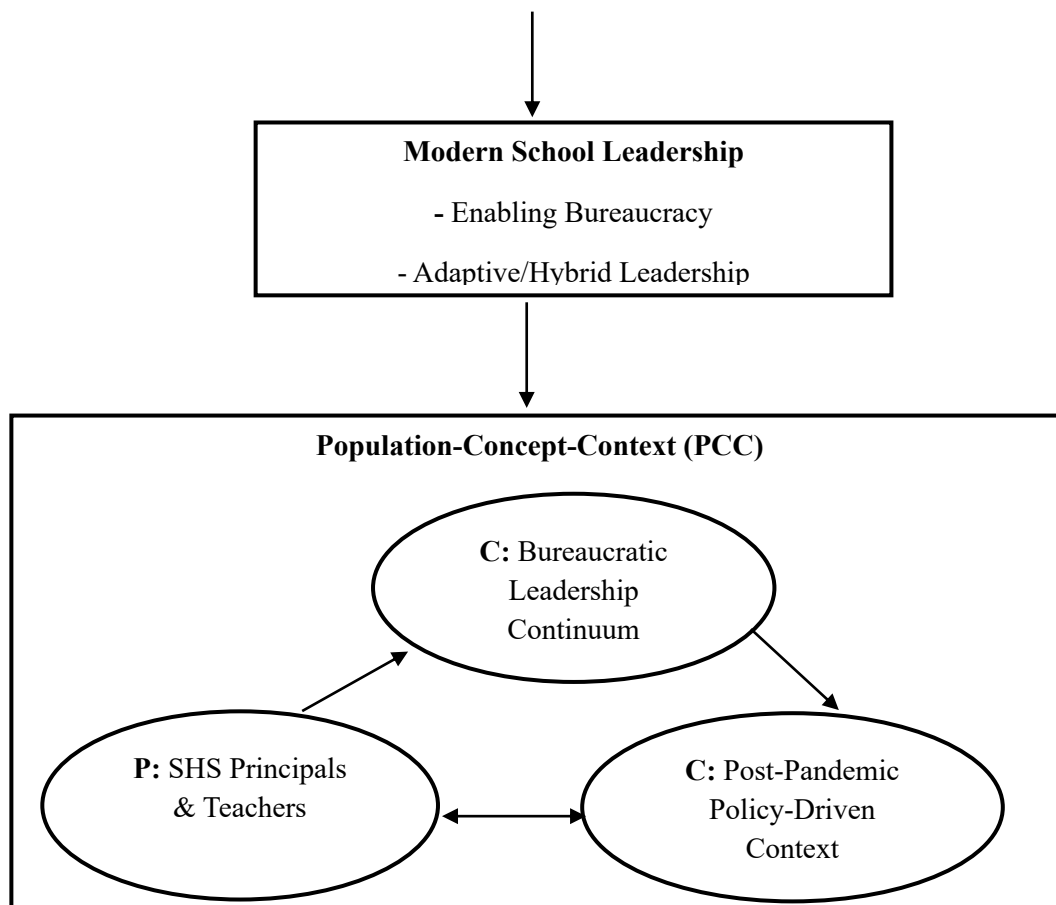


Figure 1 presents a visual paradigm that links Weber's original bureaucracy with modern concepts and illustrates how the PCC elements interact in this study.

This shows how traditional bureaucratic principles (Weber) underpin the evolution toward enabling and adaptive leadership. The PCC framework situates the study's population (SHS principals and teachers), the concept (bureaucratic leadership continuum), and the contextual factors (post-pandemic, policy-driven SHS environments), highlighting the study's theoretical grounding and relevance.

This review's contribution is unique because it explicitly maps the transition from traditional bureaucracy to enabling bureaucracy in a post-pandemic context, offering a perspective not addressed in prior reviews and highlighting how formal structures can be leveraged to enhance teacher autonomy, resilience, and instructional effectiveness.

Figure 2.

Transition from Traditional to Enabling Bureaucracy in Senior High Schools

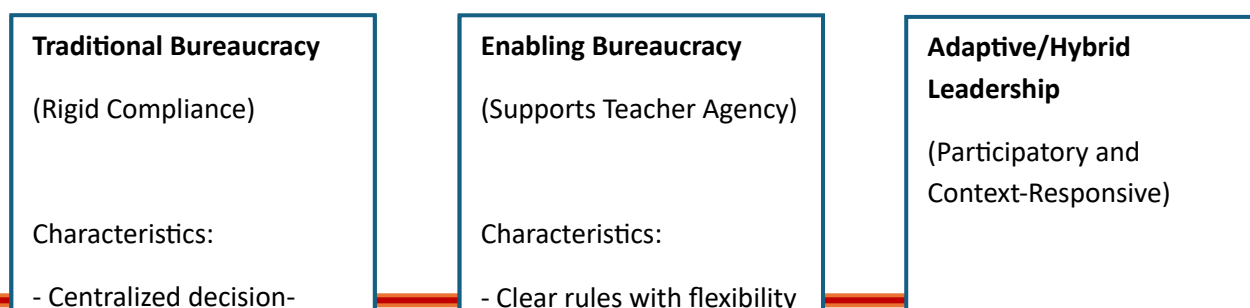




Figure 2 illustrates the continuum of bureaucratic leadership, showing the transition from traditional bureaucracy to enabling bureaucracy and then to adaptive/hybrid leadership. It highlights how formal structures can shift from strict compliance to supporting teacher agency, resilience, and instructional innovation in the post-pandemic senior high school context.

The model further proposes that the effects of bureaucratic leadership are shaped by several antecedent conditions, including the degree of policy centralization, cultural expectations regarding authority, and the availability of institutional resources (Hallinger & Walker, 2017; Alqahtani, 2021). These conditions influence how leaders interpret and implement formal structures.

Between structure and outcome lie key mediating mechanisms, such as teacher participation in decision-making, leadership flexibility, and organizational trust. Prior research suggests that when teachers are meaningfully involved in school processes, bureaucratic systems are more likely to function as enabling rather than restrictive (Pietarinen et al., 2022; Balatero & Bauyot, 2024).

These interactions produce a range of educational outcomes, including teacher well-being, instructional innovation, organizational resilience, and student engagement. Notably, studies have shown that excessive procedural demands can limit instructional focus and contribute to leadership stress, whereas enabling structures can foster psychological empowerment and improve professional practice (Loeb et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2020).

From a practitioner standpoint, this model reflects an important insight: bureaucratic leadership is not simply imposed from above but is continuously interpreted, negotiated, and enacted by school leaders and teachers in everyday practice. Its effectiveness, therefore, depends less on the presence of rules and more on how those rules are applied in context.

Integrative Framework of Bureaucratic Leadership in Senior High Schools

To provide a more coherent synthesis of the literature, this study advances an integrative framework that explains how bureaucratic leadership operates in senior high school contexts through the interaction of antecedents, mediating mechanisms, and outcomes. This framework positions bureaucratic leadership not as a static structure but as a contextually shaped and dynamically enacted process.

Figure 3.

Integrative Framework of Bureaucratic Leadership in Senior High Schools

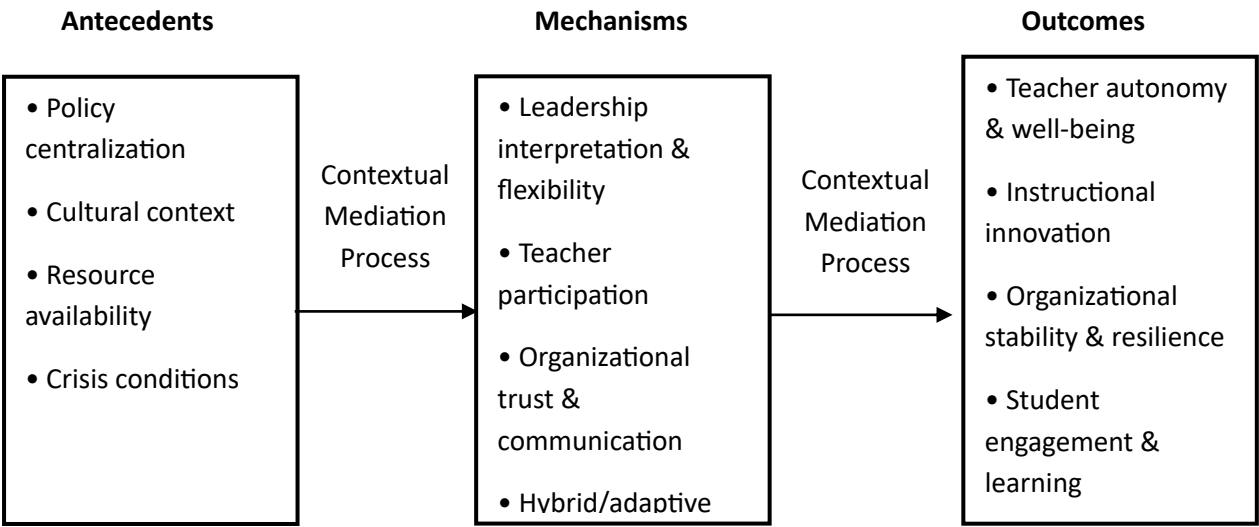


Figure 3 illustrates the proposed integrative framework, showing how bureaucratic leadership operates as a context-dependent and evolving process. Antecedents such as policy centralization, cultural norms, institutional resources, and crisis conditions shape leadership practices.

These factors interact with mediating mechanisms, including leadership flexibility, teacher participation, organizational trust, and adaptive/hybrid strategies, which in turn influence outcomes at multiple levels: teacher well-being, instructional innovation, organizational resilience, and student engagement. The framework emphasizes that bureaucratic leadership is not static but continuously interpreted and enacted in everyday school practice.

Antecedents (Contextual Conditions)

The literature consistently indicates that the form and function of bureaucratic leadership are shaped by several contextual antecedents. These include the degree of policy centralization, which determines the rigidity of administrative requirements and the level of autonomy afforded to school leaders (Bush, 2020; Alqahtani, 2021). In highly centralized systems, leaders are often required to adhere strictly to standardized policies and reporting procedures.

Cultural context also plays a significant role. In societies where hierarchical authority is widely accepted, bureaucratic leadership is often perceived as legitimate and necessary for maintaining order (Hallinger & Walker, 2017). In contrast, in more decentralized or participatory contexts, rigid bureaucratic practices may be viewed as restrictive.

In addition, resource availability and institutional capacity influence how bureaucratic structures are implemented. Schools with limited resources may rely more heavily on formal procedures to maintain efficiency, while better-resourced institutions may have greater flexibility to adapt policies.

Finally, crisis conditions, particularly those experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, have intensified the need for leadership adaptability. These conditions expose the limitations of rigid bureaucratic systems and create opportunities for more flexible and responsive leadership practices (Galorio et al., 2024).

Mediating Mechanisms (Processes of Leadership Practice)

Between structural conditions and outcomes are the mechanisms through which bureaucratic leadership is enacted. The literature highlights several key processes.

One critical mechanism is leadership interpretation and flexibility, referring to how school leaders make sense of policies and adjust their implementation based on contextual needs. Rather than applying rules mechanically, effective leaders exercise professional judgment in balancing compliance with responsiveness.

Another important mechanism is teacher participation in decision-making. Studies suggest that when teachers are actively involved in school processes, bureaucratic systems are more likely to function as enabling rather than restrictive (Pietarinen et al., 2022). Participation fosters a sense of ownership and reduces resistance to policy implementation.

Organizational trust and communication also mediate the effects of bureaucratic leadership. Clear communication of expectations, combined with transparent and fair procedures, strengthens trust and enhances cooperation within the school community (Janka, 2021).

Additionally, adaptive and hybrid leadership practices—such as combining formal procedures with motivational and relational strategies—allow leaders to navigate bureaucratic constraints while maintaining school effectiveness (Gurr & Drysdale, 2021).

Outcomes (Educational and Organizational Effects)

The interaction between antecedents and mediating mechanisms produces a range of outcomes that affect both individuals and the organization.

At the teacher level, bureaucratic leadership influences autonomy, motivation, and well-being. Rigid systems tend to limit professional agency and contribute to stress, whereas enabling structures can promote psychological empowerment and job satisfaction (Pietarinen et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2020).

At the organizational level, bureaucratic leadership contributes to stability, accountability, and policy alignment, which are essential for maintaining system coherence. However, excessive procedural demands may reduce efficiency and limit innovation, particularly in rapidly changing environments (Loeb et al., 2023).

In instructional practice, leadership approaches affect the extent to which teachers can implement innovative, student-centered strategies. More flexible and participatory systems are associated with greater instructional adaptability.

Ultimately, these factors influence student engagement and learning outcomes, although this relationship is often indirect and mediated through teacher practices and school climate.

Taken together, the framework suggests that bureaucratic leadership is best understood as a dynamic interplay between structure and agency. Antecedent conditions shape the form of bureaucratic systems, but it is through mediating mechanisms—particularly leadership practices and teacher engagement—that these systems produce meaningful outcomes.

This perspective highlights that the effectiveness of bureaucratic leadership does not depend solely on the presence of formal rules, but on how those rules are interpreted, enacted, and aligned with the needs of the school community.

Synthesis

The reviewed literature collectively demonstrates that bureaucratic leadership remains a highly relevant and enduring framework for senior high school administration, particularly within centralized, policy-driven educational systems. Across theoretical and empirical studies, a consistent pattern emerges that bureaucratic leadership provides organizational stability through hierarchical authority, formal procedures, and accountability mechanisms, yet its effectiveness is strongly shaped by context and implementation.

A key synthesis point across the studies is the shift from viewing bureaucracy as purely restrictive to understanding it as potentially enabling. Traditional bureaucratic structures continue to support compliance, coherence, and standardized governance, but more recent scholarship highlights that when these structures are enacted with fairness, transparency, trust, and professional respect, they can also strengthen teacher confidence, reduce ambiguity, and support instructional consistency. This transition from rigid to enabling forms reflects an important theoretical development in the literature.

Another major insight from the synthesis is that the impact of bureaucratic leadership is mediated by leadership practices and school culture. Studies consistently indicate that teacher participation, leadership flexibility, organizational trust, and contextual responsiveness determine whether formal systems become empowering or constraining. In this sense, the literature suggests that bureaucratic leadership is not defined solely by structure, but school leaders interpret and enact those structures in everyday practice.

The literature further converges on the idea that adaptive and hybrid forms of bureaucratic leadership are increasingly necessary in contemporary schools, particularly in the post-pandemic era. Recent studies from both international and Philippine contexts show that effective senior high school leaders often blend compliance requirements with relational, motivational, and resilience-focused practices. This synthesis, therefore, positions bureaucratic leadership as an evolving continuum rather than a fixed administrative style.

Despite these advances, the literature remains limited in several areas. Research specifically focused on senior high school settings remains underdeveloped, particularly in developing countries and in highly centralized systems. In addition, qualitative studies exploring how teachers and school leaders negotiate bureaucratic demands in practice remain scarce. These gaps underscore the need for more context-sensitive and practice-oriented research.

Meanwhile, the integrative model developed in this review synthesizes the literature into a coherent explanation of how bureaucratic leadership functions in senior high school contexts. The model shows that leadership outcomes are not produced by formal structures alone but emerge from the interaction among antecedent conditions, mediating mechanisms, and organizational outcomes.

At the antecedent level, policy centralization, cultural norms, institutional resources, and crisis conditions shape the structural environment within which school leaders operate. These contextual conditions influence how bureaucratic expectations are defined and the extent to which leaders can exercise discretion.

The model further highlights that the relationship between bureaucratic structures and outcomes is mediated by leadership processes, including leadership flexibility, teacher participation, trust-building, communication, and hybrid adaptive practices. These mechanisms serve as the operational pathways through which rules and procedures are translated into lived school experiences.

At the outcome level, the model synthesizes evidence showing both enabling and constraining effects. Positive outcomes include organizational stability, accountability, teacher empowerment, resilience, and improved

instructional coordination. Negative outcomes emerge when procedural demands become excessive, leading to reduced autonomy, increased stress, and limited innovation.

Overall, the model reinforces the central synthesis of this review: the effectiveness of bureaucratic leadership depends less on the existence of formal rules than on the quality, flexibility, and contextual sensitivity of their implementation. By framing bureaucratic leadership as a dynamic continuum—from traditional to enabling to hybrid forms—the model offers a more nuanced explanation of how this leadership style can remain relevant in complex and rapidly changing senior high school environments.

Research Propositions

Based on the integrative model, the following propositions are advanced to guide future research:

1. Bureaucratic leadership contributes to organizational stability and policy compliance but may constrain teacher autonomy when implemented in rigid forms (Bush, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2020).
2. Enabling bureaucratic practices—characterized by fairness, clarity, and trust—positively influence teacher motivation, psychological empowerment, and instructional quality (Pietarinen et al., 2022).
3. Hybrid or adaptive leadership mediates the relationship between bureaucratic structures and school effectiveness by balancing compliance with flexibility (Gurr & Drysdale, 2021).
4. Cultural and contextual factors moderate the effects of bureaucratic leadership, with hierarchical contexts showing greater acceptance of formal authority structures (Hallinger & Walker, 2017).
5. High levels of bureaucratic demand are associated with increased leadership workload and reduced time for instructional leadership (Loeb et al., 2023).
6. Teacher participation in decision-making is a critical mechanism for transforming bureaucratic systems into enabling environments (Balatero & Bauyot, 2024).

Despite the growing body of literature on educational leadership, several critical gaps remain in the study of bureaucratic leadership, particularly within senior high school contexts. Existing studies have largely conceptualized bureaucratic leadership as a rigid, rule-bound system, with limited attention to its evolving and adaptive dimensions. While recent scholarship introduces the notion of enabling bureaucracy, there remains a lack of integrative analyses that systematically examine the transition from traditional bureaucratic structures to more flexible and hybrid leadership approaches, especially in post-pandemic educational environments.

Moreover, much of the current research is characterized by a predominance of quantitative and correlational designs, which, while useful for identifying general patterns, often fail to capture the complex and context-specific ways in which bureaucratic leadership is enacted in schools. There is a notable absence of qualitative and mixed-methods studies exploring the lived experiences of school leaders and teachers, particularly as they navigate policy demands alongside instructional responsibilities.

In addition, empirical investigations in senior high school settings remain limited, despite the unique structural and pedagogical demands of this level of education. This gap is particularly evident in developing country contexts, where centralized educational systems and resource constraints may significantly shape leadership practices.

Further, inconsistencies in the conceptualization and measurement of bureaucratic leadership hinder the comparability of findings across studies. The lack of standardized frameworks and operational definitions suggests a need for more coherent theoretical development in the field.

Finally, there is insufficient attention to the impact of recent global disruptions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, on the functioning of bureaucratic systems in education. The extent to which bureaucratic leadership can adapt to crisis conditions and support resilience in schools remains underexplored.

Methods of the Study

This scoping review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to ensure transparency and replicability in the identification, screening, and selection of relevant studies, and aligned with the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) methodological framework for scoping reviews (Peters et al., 2020). The review aimed to examine the breadth of literature on bureaucratic leadership among school leaders in senior high schools, identify prevailing themes, and determine gaps for future research.

The Population-Concept-Context (PCC) framework guided the review. The population included school leaders such as principals, assistant principals, and department heads. The concept focused on bureaucratic leadership, characterized by hierarchical authority, rule-based governance, centralized decision-making, and policy compliance. The context encompassed senior high schools worldwide, both public and private, delivering Grades 11–12 or their equivalents.

Search Strategy

A comprehensive search was conducted across multiple electronic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar, and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, covering studies published between 2015 and 2024. Gray literature was also reviewed from government and institutional sources, such as the Philippine Department of Education, UNESCO, and SEAMEO.

The search strategy employed Boolean operators, synonymous terms, and combinations of keywords to ensure sensitivity and specificity. For example, search strings included combinations such as:

("bureaucratic leadership" OR "bureaucracy in education" OR "bureaucratic school leadership")

AND

("school leadership" OR "educational leadership" OR "school administration")

AND

("senior high school" OR "secondary school" OR "K–12 education")

AND

("policy compliance" OR "centralized leadership" OR "administrative control")

To ensure comprehensive coverage, related terms such as "distributed leadership," "instructional leadership," and "organizational leadership" were also considered during the screening stage when studies intersected with bureaucratic structures. The search process was carefully documented to ensure transparency and reproducibility, in accordance with the PRISMA guidelines.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were selected based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria derived from the PCC framework. Included studies had to focus specifically on bureaucratic leadership within senior high school or equivalent secondary contexts, be empirical, theoretical, or conceptual, and be written in English. Studies focusing exclusively on primary, early childhood, or higher education settings, or opinion pieces without empirical grounding, were excluded.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Studies published between 2015 and 2025
- Peer-reviewed journal articles written in English
- Studies focusing on bureaucratic leadership or closely related constructs in educational settings
- Research conducted in secondary or senior high school contexts
- Empirical (qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods), theoretical, or conceptual studies

Exclusion Criteria:

- Studies focused exclusively on primary education or higher education
- Non-English publications
- Opinion articles, editorials, or non-scholarly sources without empirical or theoretical grounding
- Studies not directly addressing bureaucratic leadership or its related dimensions
- Duplicate records across databases

Screening and Selection Process

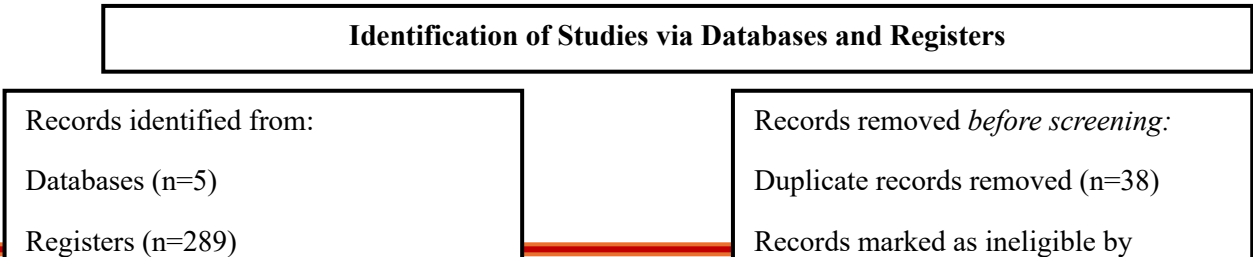
To systematically identify and select studies relevant to bureaucratic leadership in senior high schools, the review followed the PRISMA four-stage process: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. The process ensured transparency, minimized bias, and allowed a clear audit trail from initial search results to the final set of included studies. Figure 2 illustrates this step-by-step screening and selection process, showing the number of records identified, duplicates removed, articles screened by title and abstract, full-texts assessed for eligibility, and the final studies included in the review.

The study selection followed the four stages of PRISMA: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion.

1. *Identification:* A total of initial records were retrieved from the databases and gray literature sources.
2. *Screening:* After removing duplicates, the remaining studies were screened by title and abstract to exclude records not meeting inclusion criteria.
3. *Eligibility:* Full-text articles were assessed for relevance to the study’s focus on bureaucratic leadership in senior high school contexts. Discrepancies between reviewers were resolved through discussion and alignment with the PCC criteria.
4. *Inclusion:* A final set of **25 core studies** was included in the review. Additional sources were retained as supporting references for theoretical and methodological discussions.

Figure 4.

PRISMA Flow Diagram Showing Identification, Screening, Eligibility, and Inclusion of Studies on Bureaucratic Leadership in Senior High Schools



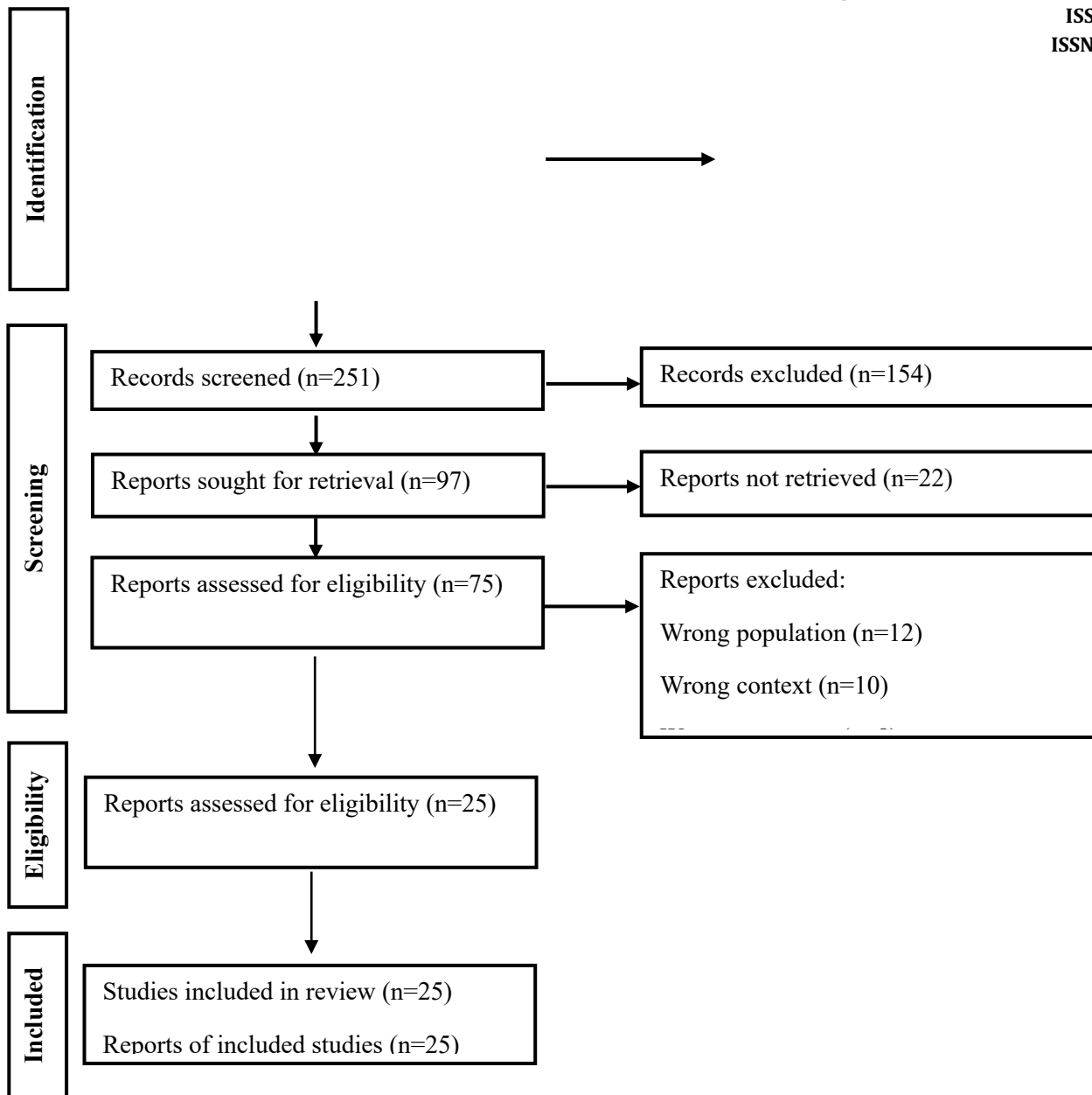


Figure 4 summarizes the screening and selection process for this scoping review. Initially, a total of records were identified across multiple databases and gray literature sources. After removing duplicates, studies were screened by title and abstract, and articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded.

Full-text articles were then assessed for eligibility based on relevance to bureaucratic leadership in senior high school contexts, with discrepancies resolved through discussion. The process resulted in a final set of 25 core studies included in the review, with additional sources retained for supporting theoretical and methodological insights. This structured approach ensured transparency, rigor, and replicability in selecting studies for synthesis.

Moreover, data extraction was performed using a structured charting tool to capture key information, including author(s), year, country or region, study setting, design and methodology, key findings on bureaucratic leadership, and implications for senior high school leadership. The extracted data were analyzed descriptively and thematically, enabling systematic comparison across diverse educational contexts and study types and highlighting patterns, emergent themes, and gaps in the literature.

Finally, to ensure the rigor and credibility of the findings, the review prioritized studies published in peer-reviewed journals with established impact factors. This criterion aimed to balance comprehensiveness with methodological quality, ensuring that included studies met recognized standards for scholarly reliability.

Language and Source Limitations

This review included only studies published in the English language. While this criterion ensured consistency in screening, interpretation, and synthesis, it may have excluded relevant studies published in other languages. In addition, the decision to prioritize peer-reviewed and indexed journal articles may have limited the inclusion of gray literature, institutional reports, and non-indexed sources that could provide complementary contextual insights. These constraints are acknowledged as methodological limitations that may affect the overall comprehensiveness of the review.

Results

The findings of this scoping review provide a comprehensive synthesis of existing research on bureaucratic leadership in senior high schools. The reviewed literature highlights that bureaucratic leadership remains prevalent, particularly in centralized, policy-driven educational systems. Studies consistently emphasize the structural benefits of hierarchical authority, rule-based governance, and standardized accountability mechanisms in promoting administrative order, policy compliance, and system coherence.

However, the literature also underscores the nuanced and sometimes contradictory effects of bureaucratic practices. While bureaucracy can enhance organizational stability and policy alignment, excessive rigidity can limit teacher autonomy, reduce motivation, and constrain instructional creativity. Emerging research further suggests that hybrid and enabling approaches—where leaders combine procedural compliance with participatory, adaptive, and context-sensitive strategies—can mitigate these limitations and foster psychological empowerment, organizational resilience, and instructional effectiveness.

This section organizes the discussion around key themes identified from the literature, including journal characteristics, the impact of rigid bureaucracy, enabling and adaptive practices, cultural and contextual influences, and persistent challenges. By structuring the findings in this way, the review not only summarizes existing knowledge but also critically interprets how bureaucratic leadership operates, evolves, and influences outcomes in senior high school settings.

3.1 Journal Characteristics and Study Overview

The literature review revealed that bureaucratic leadership remains a central and widely practiced approach in senior high schools, particularly in centralized education systems. Consistently, studies show that rule-based governance, hierarchical management, and standardized accountability mechanisms enable school leaders to maintain administrative order, implement policies effectively, and ensure alignment with national education mandates (Bush, 2020; Alqahtani, 2021; Lopez & Reyes, 2016). These practices support consistency across schools and provide a structured framework for organizational stability. While these structural benefits are evident, the literature also highlights the constraints imposed by rigid bureaucratic systems.

To provide a comprehensive overview of the studies included in this review, Table 1 summarizes the 25 core studies, detailing authorship, year, country or region, study setting, research design, methodology, and key findings related to bureaucratic leadership in senior high school contexts. This summary allows readers to quickly assess the scope, focus, and diversity of the literature, and it forms the foundation for the thematic analysis that follows.

Table 1

Summary of Included Studies on Bureaucratic Leadership of School Leaders in Senior High Schools

Author(s) & Year	Country/Region	Study Design	Population & Setting	Key Findings Related to Bureaucratic Leadership	Implications for Senior High School Leadership
Abdul-Jabbar & Kurian (2017)	Malaysia	Qualitative	Secondary Principals	Bureaucracy enhances procedural readiness and accountability	Effective for policy-driven reforms but may hinder instructional focus
Alanoğlu & Demirtaş (2021)	Turkey	Survey	Secondary Principals	Increasing bureaucratic expectations reduce focus on instructional leadership	Risk of burnout and school underperformance
Alqahtani (2021)	Saudi Arabia	Quantitative	Secondary School Principals	Centralized decision-making supports policy but restricts responsiveness	Procedural overload; flexibility is needed
Al-Rashiff et al. (2024)	Philippines	Mixed Methods	SHS Teachers	Leadership claimed to be inclusive but remains centrally bureaucratic	Teacher participation in governance remains limited
Balatero & Bauyot (2024)	Philippines	Qualitative	Panabo City SHS Heads & Teachers	Embedding structures supplemented with motivational strategies improved teacher retention and morale	Bureaucratic systems can enhance teacher resilience and commitment
Balıkçı (2024)	Turkey	Qualitative	School Administrators	Bureaucracy helps with order but obstructs urgent decision-making	Greater decision-making autonomy needed in emergencies
Bozkurt (2023)	Turkey	Survey	Teachers and School Leaders	Bureaucratic leadership correlates negatively with positive school climate	Emphasis on relational leadership is necessary
Bush (2020)	England / UK	Theoretical	Public School Systems	Supports system-wide control,	Essential in low-resource systems, but risks rigidity

especially in developing nations					
Bush, T., & Glover (2019)	England / UK	Theoretical / Review	Public and private schools	Bureaucracy and policy-driven systems influence leadership roles and responsibilities	Provides context for SHS leaders to understand local trends and adapt best practices
DeMatthews (2018)	United States	Qualitative	Public School Principals	Bureaucracy marginalizes equity-focused leadership and limits responsiveness	Need for socially just and flexible leadership in policy-heavy systems
Galorio & Bauyot (2024)	Philippines	Case Study	SHS Principals	Leaders show creativity and resilience within bureaucratic constraints	School heads find informal ways to foster innovation
Galorio et al. (2024)	Philippines	Multiple Case Study (Davao de Oro)	SHS Heads	Resilient leaders used bureaucratic structures plus crisis planning to navigate policy restrictions and community needs	Cultivating resilience within bureaucratic constraints supports school sustainability and stakeholder trust
Gurr & Drysdale (2021)	International (Case Study)	Qualitative	School Leaders (Cross-national)	Successful schools use hybrid leadership to overcome bureaucratic constraints	Bureaucracy can coexist with transformational models
Hallinger & Walker (2017)	East Asia	Theoretical	Public Secondary Schools	Bureaucratic leadership aligns with Confucian cultural expectations	Cultural context must inform leadership
Harris, A., & Jones (2018)	United Kingdom	Qualitative / Review	Secondary schools	Bureaucratic demands and accountability pressures shape leadership decisions	SHS leaders need strategies to balance compliance with instructional priorities
Janka (2021)	Germany	Mixed Methods	Secondary School Administrators	“Enabling bureaucracy” builds trust	Structured systems can support rather than restrict

				through consistent and fair structures	
Johnston (2021)	United States	Qualitative	Principals (During Pandemic)	Principals with adaptive and culturally responsive leadership succeed under bureaucratic pressure	Cultural competency buffers negative effects of bureaucracy
Loeb et al. (2023)	United States	Quantitative	Principals and School Staff	Bureaucracy consumes time meant for instructional leadership	Time allocation must shift toward learning-centered leadership
Lopez & Reyes (2016)	Philippines	Qualitative	SHS Principals	Bureaucratic procedures ensure compliance but limit innovation	Leaders struggle balancing policy requirements with adaptive practices
Maphosa & Mahlangu (2019)	South Africa	Qualitative	High School Teachers	Rigid hierarchies reduce teacher agency and morale	Need to integrate more inclusive leadership strategies
Müslim & Demirtaş (2021)	Turkey	Quantitative	Public School Teachers	Equity and rule control reduces morale unless fairness is emphasized	Clarity improves acceptance of bureaucracy
Nguyen et al. (2020)	Vietnam	Mixed Methods	Public High Schools	Bureaucratic rigidity hinders pedagogical innovation	Recommend context-based adaptation of policy
Padilla et al. (2025)	Philippines	Quantitative	Public SHS	Bureaucratic evaluation systems do not align with student academic outcomes	Need to redesign performance evaluation tools
Pietarinen et al. (2022)	Finland	Quantitative	SHS Teachers	Enabling bureaucracy fosters psychological empowerment and reduces teacher burnout	Systems designed to empower rather than constrain improve well-being and performance

Simiyu (2023)	Kenya	Mixed Methods	High School Leaders	Hybrid strategies encourage leadership effectiveness in bureaucratic contexts	Blending adaptive approaches within formal structures
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The studies summarized in Table 1 reveal several important trends. Most research was conducted in centralized education systems, with a predominance of empirical designs, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods approaches. While many studies have examined traditional bureaucratic leadership, an increasing number of studies explore enabling and hybrid models that balance rule-based compliance with participatory and adaptive practices. This overview provides the foundation for the thematic synthesis and discussion that follows, illustrating how contextual factors, leadership practices, and organizational outcomes are interconnected across different settings.

3.2 Impacts of Rigid Bureaucracy on Teachers and Leaders

Rigid bureaucratic structures were found to constrain teacher autonomy, reduce motivation, and limit instructional creativity. Research indicates that excessive procedural focus and top-down decision-making can hinder innovation and slow responsiveness to emerging school needs (Nguyen et al., 2020; Bozkurt, 2023; Alanoğlu & Demirtaş, 2021). Teachers and principals operating under strict bureaucratic demands often report stress and challenges in balancing policy compliance with pedagogical responsibilities (Loeb et al., 2023; Balıkçı, 2024). Hence, these findings suggest that although bureaucracy ensures order and consistency, its overemphasis can compromise teacher motivation, instructional flexibility, and overall school responsiveness.

3.3 Enabling Bureaucracy and Teacher Empowerment

Emerging evidence highlights that the negative effects of bureaucracy can be mitigated through enabling bureaucracy—bureaucratic practices implemented with fairness, clarity, and professional trust. Such approaches foster psychological empowerment, reduce burnout, and support teacher well-being, ultimately enhancing instructional quality (Pietarinen et al., 2022; Balatero & Bauyot, 2024). More so, beyond enabling bureaucracy, studies also emphasize hybrid and adaptive approaches that blend compliance with flexibility to sustain school effectiveness.

3.4 Hybrid and Adaptive Leadership Approaches

Several studies also demonstrate the effectiveness of hybrid or adaptive leadership within bureaucratic systems. School leaders who combine procedural compliance with motivational strategies, participatory decision-making, and resilience planning can navigate bureaucratic constraints while sustaining school performance and stakeholder trust (Simiyu, 2023; Gurr & Drysdale, 2021; Galorio et al., 2024). In the Philippine context, leaders creatively integrate community engagement and crisis-responsive practices within formal structures to address policy demands, local challenges, and disaster preparedness (Galorio & Bauyot, 2024; Galorio et al., 2024). Thus, hybrid leadership illustrates that bureaucratic practices are not static; their effectiveness depends on how leaders adapt procedures to context and stakeholder needs.

3.5 Cultural and Contextual Influences

Cultural and contextual factors also shape the implementation and perception of bureaucratic leadership. Hierarchical and collectivist cultural norms in East and Southeast Asia, as well as in Turkey and the Philippines, influence the acceptance of bureaucratic practices and determine whether they are viewed as enabling or

restrictive (Hallinger & Walker, 2017; Johnston, 2021; Alqahtani, 2021). Leaders who adopt culturally responsive practices can buffer the negative effects of rigid structures while maintaining organizational control. Considering these contextual factors helps explain why bureaucratic leadership can produce variable outcomes across different educational settings.

3.6 Persistent Challenges and Implications for Practice

Finally, the literature identifies persistent challenges, including leadership fatigue, stress, and reduced decision-making capacity due to procedural overload. Studies suggest that incorporating flexibility, psychological empowerment, and supportive structures can enhance leader resilience and sustain school functionality (Pietarinen et al., 2022; Loeb et al., 2023; Balıkçı, 2024).

Therefore, these findings reinforce the notion that bureaucratic leadership should not be viewed as merely restrictive. Instead, its effectiveness hinges on strategic implementation, adaptive practices, and supportive organizational conditions that enhance both teacher and student outcomes.

Discussion

The findings extend beyond descriptive reporting, highlighting patterns, tensions, and emerging practices in bureaucratic leadership. This discussion is organized around key thematic areas, providing a deeper analytical interpretation of the literature and linking findings to theoretical and practical implications.

4.1 Structural Strengths and Functional Limitations of Bureaucracy

The findings reaffirm that bureaucratic leadership plays a critical role in ensuring order, accountability, and policy compliance within senior high schools. These structural strengths are particularly valuable in centralized systems where consistency and standardization are necessary. However, these same structures can become limiting when they restrict flexibility and responsiveness. The emphasis on procedures and hierarchy may reduce the capacity of school leaders to address emerging challenges effectively, particularly in dynamic educational environments.

4.2 Bureaucratic Leadership and Teacher Agency

A recurring theme across the literature is the tension between bureaucratic control and teacher autonomy. Rigid implementation of policies often reduces teachers' sense of professional agency and limits their ability to innovate in the classroom. At the same time, studies on enabling bureaucracy suggest that when rules are applied with clarity, fairness, and trust, they can support rather than hinder teacher performance. This indicates that the impact of bureaucracy is not inherent but depends on how it is enacted.

4.3 Emergence of Enabling and Hybrid Leadership Approaches

One of the most significant developments identified in this review is the shift toward enabling and hybrid leadership models. School leaders increasingly combine bureaucratic compliance with participatory and adaptive practices to address complex challenges. This transition is particularly evident in post-pandemic contexts, where rigid systems proved insufficient in responding to crises. As a result, leaders adopted more flexible approaches that integrate structure with innovation and resilience (Gurr & Drysdale, 2021; Galorio et al., 2024). This finding represents a key contribution of the study, offering a new lens for understanding bureaucratic leadership as an evolving rather than fixed construct.

4.4 Methodological Constraints and Their Implications

The dominance of quantitative, cross-sectional studies limits the depth of understanding regarding bureaucratic leadership. These approaches tend to frame leadership as a static variable, overlooking the dynamic and context-dependent nature of leadership practice. Furthermore, issues such as publication bias, reliance on self-reported data, and geographical concentration affect the reliability and generalizability of findings. These methodological constraints suggest that current conclusions should be interpreted with caution.

4.5 Toward a Context-Responsive Model of Bureaucratic Leadership

The synthesis of findings supports the need for a context-responsive model of bureaucratic leadership that accounts for cultural, structural, and situational factors. Rather than viewing bureaucracy as inherently restrictive, it should be understood as a framework that can be adapted through leadership practices. This perspective aligns with the proposed integrative framework, which highlights the interaction of antecedents, mediating mechanisms, and outcomes in shaping leadership effectiveness.

The scoping review reveals that bureaucratic leadership remains a dominant approach in senior high schools, especially within centralized and policy-driven educational systems. Its structural strengths—hierarchical authority, rule-based governance, and standardized accountability—ensure administrative order, policy compliance, and system coherence. However, rigid bureaucratic practices can constrain teacher autonomy, reduce motivation, and limit instructional creativity.

Emerging research highlights the mitigating role of enabling bureaucracy, where fairness, transparency, and trust in procedures foster teacher empowerment, well-being, and instructional effectiveness. Hybrid and adaptive leadership approaches, combining compliance with participatory, context-sensitive, and resilience-focused strategies, further enhance school performance while maintaining alignment with formal requirements.

Cultural and contextual factors, such as hierarchical norms and resource availability, influence how bureaucratic leadership is enacted and perceived, leading to variable outcomes across settings. Persistent challenges include procedural overload, leader fatigue, and reduced flexibility, which can be addressed through strategic adaptation and supportive structures.

Overall, the findings indicate that bureaucratic leadership is dynamic and context-dependent. Its effectiveness hinges on adaptive enactment, enabling practices, and responsiveness to situational and cultural factors, allowing structured governance to coexist with innovation, teacher agency, and resilience in senior high school settings.

Conclusion

The findings of this scoping review indicate that bureaucratic leadership remains a foundational approach in senior high schools, particularly within centralized education systems. Consistently, bureaucratic practices support policy implementation, administrative order, and accountability (Bush, 2020; Alqahtani, 2021). However, the literature also reveals tensions between procedural control and leadership effectiveness. Excessive bureaucracy can slow decision-making, reduce flexibility, and constrain school leaders' capacity to respond to emerging challenges, particularly in crisis situations (Balıkçı, 2024; Loeb et al., 2023).

Teacher-related outcomes highlight similar challenges. Rigid bureaucratic structures reduce autonomy, motivation, and instructional focus (Nguyen et al., 2020; Bozkurt, 2023), whereas enabling practices that emphasize fairness, clarity, and trust enhance teacher empowerment and reduce burnout (Pietarinen et al., 2022). Hybrid and adaptive leadership approaches further demonstrate that bureaucratic compliance can coexist with participatory, motivational, and resilience-oriented strategies, ultimately supporting both school performance and stakeholder trust (Simiyu, 2023; Galorio et al., 2024).

Bureaucratic structures facilitate administrative efficiency, standardized practices, and compliance with educational mandates (Lopez & Reyes, 2016; Abdul-Jabbar & Kurian, 2017). Yet, strict adherence to rules can impede rapid decision-making and limit teacher initiative, indirectly affect student engagement and learn outcomes (Nguyen et al., 2020; DeMatthews, 2018). Contextual and cultural factors influence the enactment of bureaucratic leadership, with hierarchical norms in East and Southeast Asia, Turkey, Vietnam, and the Philippines shaping its perceived effectiveness (Hallinger & Walker, 2017; Alqahtani, 2021). Leaders who adopt culturally responsive practices can buffer the negative effects of rigid administration (Johnston, 2021; Galorio et al., 2024).

Limitations of the Scoping Review

Despite these insights, several methodological limitations of this review should be acknowledged. First, the search was limited to major electronic databases (Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar, and ProQuest), which may have excluded relevant studies published in smaller or region-specific databases. Second, only studies published in English were included, potentially omitting key research conducted in other languages. Third, the review focused on senior high school contexts and did not extend to primary or higher education, which limits generalizability across the broader educational spectrum. Finally, the scoping review approach does not include formal quality appraisal of individual studies, meaning that findings should be interpreted with caution regarding methodological rigor.

Recommendations

Future research may broaden the scope of this review by including non-English studies, region-specific databases, and grey literature to capture perspectives that may not be visible in major international databases. Studies across other educational levels, such as primary and higher education, may also help determine whether the patterns identified in senior high schools are evident in other contexts. To strengthen the evidence base, future reviews may incorporate quality appraisal tools and more longitudinal or post-pandemic studies that examine how bureaucratic leadership continues to evolve.

For practice, school leaders may benefit from adopting a more hybrid or enabling bureaucratic approach that maintains accountability and procedural clarity while allowing flexibility, teacher participation, and context-based decision-making. Encouraging teacher involvement in planning and implementation may help reduce the negative effects of rigid structures on autonomy and motivation.

At the policy level, educational administrators may consider streamlining procedures and creating more responsive governance mechanisms that balance compliance with school-level realities. Overall, the effectiveness of bureaucratic leadership appears to depend less on the presence of formal structures alone and more on how these structures are adapted to support trust, responsiveness, and instructional goals.

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