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Toxic Leadership in Greek Primary Education: Impacts on Teachers' Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment

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Abstract

This study explores the perceptions of primary school teachers in Sparta, Greece, regarding toxic leadership behaviors and their impact on job satisfaction (JS) and organizational commitment (OC). The study was motivated by the need to investigate how school management practices, particularly in smaller regional communities, influence teacher well-being—an area underexplored in the Greek educational context. A total of 163 teachers participated by completing validated questionnaires assessing toxic leadership, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) identified two factors explaining 61.3% of the variance: one linking toxic leadership and job satisfaction and another centered on organizational commitment. Spearman's correlation analysis revealed significant negative correlations between toxic leadership and both OC ($r = -0.230$, $p < 0.001$) and JS ($r = -0.476$, $p < 0.001$). Multiple regression analysis confirmed the predictive effect of toxic leadership on both variables. Interestingly, teachers with over 15 years of experience exhibited higher OC compared with those with up to 5 years of teaching experience, suggesting the resilience-building benefits of tenure. This study underscores the urgency for leadership development programs emphasizing ethical practices, emotional intelligence, and accountability to mitigate the adverse effects of toxic leadership.

Keywords: toxic leadership; school management; job satisfaction; organizational commitment

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the concept of "toxic LEADERSHIP" in educational settings has gained significant attention because of its far-reaching implications for teachers' professional well-being and the overall effectiveness of schools [1–3]. School management is pivotal for shaping school culture, teacher morale, and student outcomes. While leadership in education has been extensively studied, there remains a significant gap in the assessment of the specific dynamics of toxic leadership within primary education settings, particularly in cultural contexts such as Greece. Primary education is uniquely vulnerable to the effects of destructive leadership because of its critical role in shaping foundational student outcomes and the heightened demands placed on teachers to support young learners' development. Furthermore, Greek schools often operate within hierarchical structures that may exacerbate the impact of toxic leadership by limiting teachers' professional autonomy and opportunities for collaborative decision-making [4,5].

In the Greek educational context, toxic leadership appears to be reinforced by structural and cultural specificities, including the centralized governance of schools, limited school-level autonomy, and entrenched hierarchical leadership norms. Such conditions

can restrict participatory practices and promote authoritarian behaviors that undermine teacher agency and morale. Furthermore, as Papaloi et al. (2023) [6] emphasize, the lack of a formal ethical leadership framework in Greek schools, combined with minimal training in emotional intelligence and moral reasoning, may allow toxic traits to persist unchecked. Argyropoulou and Lintzerakou [7] similarly highlight the need for emotionally intelligent and democratic leadership approaches to counterbalance rigid top-down management styles and foster inclusive school environments. This is compounded by high power distance and cultural tolerance of rigid authority structures. In line with Mao et al. (2024a, 2024b) [8,9], fostering inclusive and ethical leadership requires culturally responsive strategies that support teacher well-being, autonomy, and collective decision-making. When fairness, support, and psychological safety are lacking, toxic leadership behaviors are more likely to emerge, leading to diminished job satisfaction and commitment [10–12].

The aim of the present study is to examine teacher perceptions of toxic leadership in Sparta, a culturally distinct region in southern Greece. Regional cultural norms can shape leadership behavior, as Mao et al. (2024a) [8] note, making local context critical in understanding organizational dynamics. Argyropoulou and Lintzerakou [7] emphasize that in smaller communities, tight social structures may influence leadership tolerance. Additionally, the lack of formal ethical leadership frameworks in Greek schools, as highlighted by Papaloi et al. [6], may further amplify regional differences.

The broader implications of toxic leadership become evident when its detrimental effects on teacher job satisfaction and its connection to organizational commitment are considered. Teacher job satisfaction, defined as a positive emotional state resulting from job appraisal, encompasses satisfaction with students, colleagues, workload, pay, and opportunities for professional growth [13–15]. When teachers are satisfied, they exhibit higher levels of motivation, engagement, and productivity. Furthermore, job satisfaction significantly influences organizational commitment, which includes affective commitment (emotional attachment), continuance commitment (awareness of costs associated with leaving), and normative commitment (a sense of obligation to stay) [16–19]. These findings underscore the importance of addressing leadership to preserve and enhance these critical elements of teacher well-being and organizational stability [20].

Toxic leadership in education can manifest in several ways, negatively impacting both educators and students. Recent studies highlight the significant influence of leadership styles on organizational climate, job satisfaction, student performance, and overall school culture [21,22]. In this context, the connection between leadership styles and teacher engagement is crucial, as it helps determine the effectiveness of educational leaders in creating supportive environments. Unfortunately, toxic leadership results in decreased organizational commitment, which has been found to undermine both job satisfaction and the overall success of educational institutions [23]. These findings highlight the need for leadership development programs that prioritize ethical decision-making, emotional intelligence, and resilience to mitigate the destructive effects of toxic leadership in schools [24,25].

Teachers' perceptions of leadership are crucial in shaping their work environment and professional experiences. There is some evidence to suggest that a perception of their leader's behavior, in combination with supportive and ethical reports, will result in increased job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and overall well-being among teachers [3]. Conversely, toxic leadership has been consistently linked to increased stress, diminished morale, and reduced job satisfaction among teachers. The lack of professional autonomy, poor communication, and exclusion from decision-making processes are central themes in teachers' experiences of toxic leadership [24] and are relevant to how teachers perceive this.

The effects of toxic leadership extend beyond teachers' well-being, significantly influencing student outcomes, the school climate, and institutional performance. Research has demonstrated that when teachers experience reduced job satisfaction and organizational commitment due to destructive leadership, it often results in higher turnover rates, lower classroom engagement, and diminished student achievement [26,27]. These cascading effects underscore the urgent need to understand and mitigate the impact of toxic leadership to protect not only educators but also the broader educational community. By focusing on the interplay between leadership behaviors and teacher outcomes, this study seeks to contribute valuable insights into this critical area.

The present study aims to investigate the perceptions of primary education teachers regarding toxic leadership within their schools and its impact on their job satisfaction and organizational commitment. By examining these parameters, this study seeks to identify the destructive leadership behaviors that teachers perceive as toxic and analyze how these behaviors influence their professional environment. Specifically, this research focuses on three key dimensions: destructive leadership behaviors, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction. These are crucial elements of teachers' performance and can be explored to develop strategies to promote healthier and more productive educational settings.

The study also aims to contribute to the broader discourse on school management by highlighting the need for ethical and emotionally intelligent practices. By fostering collaboration, transparency, and professional autonomy, school leaders can mitigate the negative effects of toxic behaviors and create supportive environments that benefit both teachers and students [15,27]. Ultimately, the findings aim to inform policies and practices that promote organizational cultures in schools, ensuring better outcomes for all stakeholders involved.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Sampling Procedures and Participants

This study was conducted in 17 public primary school units located in the Municipality of Sparta, Laconia, Greece. These schools were selected through convenience sampling based on accessibility and the willingness of school leaders and teachers to participate. The selection aimed to include schools of varying sizes and teacher demographics to enhance representativeness within the local context. Participation was entirely voluntary and anonymous, adhering to ethical guidelines of the Hellenic Open University. From a total population of 236 teachers, 163 completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 69.1%. A total of 161 valid questionnaires were used for analysis.

2.2. Instruments and Cultural Adaptation

The study employed the following validated instruments, all of which had been either developed specifically for the Greek educational context or rigorously adapted and tested to ensure linguistic and cultural appropriateness:

(i) Toxic Leadership Scale: Adapted from the works of Tepper (2000) [28] and Schmidt (2008) [29], this scale was translated and modified by Baharakis (2022) [30] for use in Greek schools. The Greek version includes 15 items and demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.89). A pilot study with teachers confirmed the clarity and contextual fit of the questions.

(ii) Organizational Commitment Scale: The Three-Component Model (TCM) Employee Commitment Survey, developed by Meyer and Allen (2004) [31] as translated and adapted for the Greek context, its validity and reliability have been confirmed in previous studies [32,33].

(iii) Job Satisfaction Inventory: The Teacher's Satisfaction Inventory (TSI) by Gkolia and Koustelios (2014) [34] was used to measure job satisfaction. As this instrument was

developed for Greek teachers, its content was already culturally relevant. The scale demonstrated excellent reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.974).

All questionnaires utilized Likert-scale response formats, and non-parametric statistical methods were applied, given the ordinal nature of the data and the results of normality tests.

2.3. Statistical Analysis

Data from the completed questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to identify underlying factors influencing the perception of toxic leadership, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment among primary school teachers. The EFA was performed using the Varimax rotation to simplify the interpretation of factor structures. Two factors were extracted based on the eigenvalues greater than 1, which explained a significant amount of variance in the data.

Spearman's correlation analysis was conducted to explore potential relationships between the perceived level of toxic leadership and teachers' job satisfaction (JS) and organizational commitment (OC). Subsequently, multiple regression analysis was employed to examine the predictive power of toxic leadership behaviors on JS and OC.

3. Results

3.1. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

A total of 163 primary education teachers from 17 schools within the Municipality of Sparta participated in this study, and 161 valid questionnaires were collected. The sample encompassed a diverse group of teachers with varying levels of experience, specialties, and demographic characteristics. The demographic characteristics of the participants were as follows: gender: 55% female (n = 89), 45% male (n = 74); age: 32% aged 30–39 years, 45% aged 40–49 years, and 23% aged 50 years or older; years of experience: 28% with 1–5 years of teaching experience, 42% with 6–15 years, and 30% with more than 15 years of experience.

3.2. Analysis of the School Management Parameters Investigated in the Present Study

The first section of the questionnaire assessed the perceptions of teachers regarding toxic leadership behaviors. The teachers were asked to rate various leadership behavioral traits on a Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." The mean score for toxic leadership behaviors was 3.4 (SD = 0.7), indicating a moderate perception of toxic leadership within the schools. The highest-rated toxic behavior was "micromanagement," with a mean score of 3.8, followed by "authoritarian control" at 3.5. In contrast, "lack of support" and "unethical decision-making" had mean scores of 3.2 and 3.1, respectively. The reliability of the toxic leadership scale, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was 0.965. These results demonstrate that the teachers who participated in the study experienced behaviors that manifested toxic leadership traits such as micromanagement, authoritarian control, and lack of support, all of which can erode teacher morale and undermine professional autonomy [21,35,36].

3.3. Analysis of the Organizational Commitment Parameters Investigated in the Present Study

The mean score for organizational commitment was 3.6 (SD = 0.8), indicating a moderate level of attachment to the school. Teachers with more years of experience (16+ years) reported slightly higher levels of commitment (mean = 3.9) compared with those with fewer years of service (1–5 years, mean = 3.3). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the organizational commitment scale was 0.858.

3.4. Analysis of the Job Satisfaction Parameters Investigated in the Present Study

The mean score for job satisfaction was 3.2 (SD = 0.6), indicating a relatively lower level of satisfaction. Teachers cited workload and a lack of professional autonomy as major factors contributing to lower levels of satisfaction. Teachers who perceived their leaders as toxic had lower job satisfaction scores (mean = 2.8) compared with those who rated school management more positively (mean = 3.7). The job satisfaction scale had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.974. Satisfaction with the school principal was reflected in favorable responses, resulting in average scores above 3.5 in the answers of teachers to statements such as "My principal is there when I need them" (3.76 $\pm$ 1.27) and "My principal helps me when I need them" (3.73 $\pm$ 1.27). Similarly, satisfaction with colleagues was high, as seen in responses to statements such as "I have good relationships with my colleagues" (4.09 $\pm$ 0.92) and "My colleagues are friendly" (3.96 $\pm$ 0.98). The teachers also reported high levels of satisfaction with the nature of their work, particularly with statements such as "The role of a teacher is important" (4.54 $\pm$ 0.66) and "My work is creative" (M = 4.15 $\pm$ 0.89). Satisfaction with students was also positive, with responses such as "I collaborate effectively with my students" (4.09 $\pm$ 0.82) and "My students respect me" (4.07 $\pm$ 0.90). Finally, satisfaction with working conditions was moderate to positive (3.62 $\pm$ 1.04).

3.5. EFA Analysis

The rotated factor loadings for the two factors are summarized in Table 1. Factor 1 is primarily associated with toxic leadership and job satisfaction, suggesting that destructive leadership behaviors are perceived to correlate closely with lower levels of satisfaction. Factor 2 is associated mainly with organizational commitment, with a secondary loading for job satisfaction, indicating that reduced satisfaction may also co-occur with lower organizational attachment. The two extracted factors explained a total of 61.3% of the variance in the data. Specifically, Factor 1 accounted for 35.8% of the total variance, while Factor 2 explained 25.5% of the total variance. These results support the underlying dimensional structure of the variables studied, highlighting two conceptually meaningful groupings: one factor linking toxic leadership with immediate job attitudes, and the other factor reflecting deeper organizational engagement.

Table 1. Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA).

Variable	*Factor 1*	*Factor 2*
Toxic Leadership (X)	0.658	−0.069
Job Satisfaction (Y)	−0.581	−0.441
Organizational Commitment (Y)	−0.014	−0.616

Factor 1: This factor is associated primarily with toxic leadership and job satisfaction, indicating a negative impact on teachers'job satisfaction. *Factor 2*: This factor is associated primarily with organizational commitment, with a significant negative loading for job satisfaction, suggesting that lower job satisfaction is correlated with lower organizational commitment.

3.6. Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between toxic leadership traits and both organizational commitment and job satisfaction. The results revealed significant correlations; more specifically, Spearman's correlation coefficients revealed significant negative relationships between toxic leadership and organizational commitment ($r(161) = -0.230$, $p < 0.001$). In addition to the correlation between toxic leadership and organizational commitment, further analysis revealed significant relationships between toxic leadership and the three components of organizational commitment: affective ($r(161) = -0.352$, $p < 0.01$), continuance ($r(161) = -0.234$, $p < 0.01$), and normative ($r(161) = -0.357$, $p < 0.01$). Teachers who perceived higher levels of toxic leadership re-

ported diminished affective commitment, indicating weakened emotional attachment to their schools. This was evident from the negative correlation, which highlights how leaders' behavior can erode the motivation to remain part of the institution on an emotional level. Similarly, toxic leadership negatively impacts continuance commitment, suggesting that such behaviors lead teachers to question the costs of leaving their organization. Finally, a significant negative relationship was observed between toxic leadership and normative commitment, reflecting a reduced sense of obligation to stay in the school. These findings underscore the pervasive influence of toxic leadership across all dimensions of organizational commitment and emphasize the critical need for interventions to mitigate its impact on educational environments.

A significant correlation was also observed between toxic leadership and job satisfaction ($r(161) = -0.476$, $p < 0.001$), and a positive correlation was observed between job commitment and job satisfaction ($r(161) = 0.568$, $p < 0.001$). These findings suggest that higher levels of toxic leadership are associated with lower job commitment and satisfaction, whereas job commitment and satisfaction are positively correlated.

In addition to the negative correlations observed between toxic leadership and the components of organizational commitment, the analysis revealed strong positive correlations between the components of organizational commitment—affective, continuance, and normative commitment (Table 2). This alignment suggests that as teachers experience higher levels of emotional attachment to their institutions (affective commitment), they are also more likely to perceive the costs of leaving (continuance commitment) and feel a sense of obligation to remain (normative commitment). Together, these components contribute synergistically to fostering a stronger overall organizational commitment. Toxic leadership scores, on the other hand, were negatively correlated with job satisfaction components (Table 3).

Table 2. Spearman's correlation coefficients between organizational commitment and toxic leadership traits.

	1	2	3	4
1. Toxic Leadership	--			
2. Affective Commitment	−0.352 **	--		
3. Continuance Commitment	−0.234 **	0.226 **	--	
4. Normative Commitment	−0.357 **	0.664 **	0.349 **	--
5. Total Organizational Commitment	−0.230 **	0.801 **	0.619 **	0.878 **

Note: asterisk indicates significance; ** $p < 0.001$.

Table 3. Spearman's correlation coefficients between job satisfaction and toxic leadership traits.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Toxic Leadership						
2. Director	−0.663 *					
3. Colleagues	−0.353 *	0.609 *				
4. Nature of Work	−0.224 *	0.443 *	0.519 *			
5. Students	−0.120	0.417 *	0.424 *	0.667 *		
6. Working Conditions	−0.132	0.395 *	0.335 *	0.412 *	0.472 *	
7. Overall Job Satisfaction	−0.491 *	0.823 *	0.766 *	0.730 *	0.720 *	0.659 *

Note: an asterisk indicates significance; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

In fact, all studied aspects of job satisfaction (Table 3) were significantly negatively correlated with toxic leadership: satisfaction with colleagues ($r = -0.353$, $p < 0.001$) and satisfaction with the nature of work ($r = -0.224$, $p = 0.004$). A stronger negative correlation was observed between toxic leadership and satisfaction with the director ($r = -0.663$,

$p < 0.001$). These results suggest that educators who experience more toxic leadership behaviors report lower levels of job satisfaction.

Among the different aspects of job satisfaction are significant, positive, and mostly moderate correlations. The strongest correlations are observed between satisfaction with students and the nature of the work (r = 0.667, $p < 0.001$) and between satisfaction with colleagues and the director (r = 0.609, $p < 0.001$). Finally, toxic leadership is negatively and moderately to strongly correlated with overall job satisfaction (r = −0.491, $p < 0.001$).

3.7. Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to explore the predictive power of toxic leadership traits on organizational commitment and job satisfaction. The model was statistically significant (F(10,152) = 2.55, $p = 0.007$), explaining 14.4% of the variance in organizational commitment ($R^2 = 0.144$). However, none of the independent variables were statistically significant at the 5% level, indicating that there were no strong individual predictors.

Interestingly, toxic leadership demonstrated a highly significant negative relationship with organizational commitment (β = −0.509, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that increased levels of toxic leadership are associated with lower organizational commitment. On the other hand, age showed a marginal but significant relationship with organizational commitment (β = 0.209, $p = 0.049$), suggesting that older teachers tend to exhibit higher levels of organizational commitment compared with their younger counterparts.

Variables such as gender (male vs. female teachers: β = 0.142, $p = 0.078$) and other demographic factors (e.g., marital status, employment status, and years of collaboration with the principal) did not have significant effects, further reinforcing that they were not robust predictors of organizational commitment. The effect of age on commitment was also confirmed by comparing teachers with up to 5 years of teaching experience with those with more than 15 years of teaching experience. The more experienced teachers exhibited significantly higher levels of organizational commitment (mean = 3.9) compared with those with less than 5 years of experience (mean = 3.3, t(161) = 3.45, $p < 0.01$).

4. Discussion

This study examined teachers' perceptions of toxic leadership in their schools, revealing that they experienced moderate levels of toxic leadership. The most commonly reported behaviors were micromanagement and authoritarian control, with a lack of support and unethical decision-making resulting in lower scores. Irrespective of the differences in the scores of particular toxic leadership traits, the results indicate some issues with school management that can have detrimental effects on teacher morale, professional autonomy, and overall job satisfaction. Effective school management is a cornerstone of a positive and productive school environment; however, when leadership becomes toxic, it can have far-reaching negative impacts on teachers and the overall school culture [36].

In the present work, prior to analyzing the relationships between the investigated variables, EFA was conducted to identify the underlying factor structure of the data. The results revealed two distinct factors corresponding with the main constructs investigated in the study: toxic leadership, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Factor 1, which combines toxic leadership and job satisfaction, highlights the adverse effects that toxic leadership behaviors (e.g., micromanagement, authoritarian control) have on teachers' satisfaction with their work environment. This finding is consistent with prior empirical studies reporting that destructive leadership styles are significantly negatively correlated with teachers' job satisfaction [10–12,15]. Furthermore, based on the EFA analysis, employees who experience more toxic leadership behaviors are less likely to feel satisfied and committed to their jobs. This was also indicated using correlation and regression

analyses, which confirmed that toxic leadership has a significant negative effect on both job satisfaction and organizational commitment among primary school teachers. While these findings suggest a strong directional association, the cross-sectional design of the present study limits definitive conclusions regarding causality. The observed associations, however, align with theoretical expectations and prior empirical studies, and the results highlight the need for monitoring school management and, where possible, developing strategies to eliminate the frequency of toxic leadership issues in educational settings.

The results of the present study indicate that teachers experience toxic leadership issues, such as school micromanagement, that can undermine teachers' sense of trust and autonomy, both of which are essential for fostering creativity and engagement in their roles. In spite of the negative effects of toxic leadership, the results indicated a strong positive correlation between job commitment and job satisfaction. These findings underscore the importance of school management in promoting supportive environments that enhance positive work attitudes among teachers. These findings are consistent with previous Greek studies that highlight how school leadership practices, particularly those lacking emotional intelligence and ethical grounding, can shape teacher attitudes and organizational cohesion [37]. In fact, there is some evidence to suggest a negative correlation between toxic leadership and key aspects of teacher well-being, including overall organizational commitment (comprising affective, continuance, and normative commitment) and job satisfaction, particularly satisfaction with their director, colleagues, and the nature of their work [10–12,15]. Notably, in the present study, strong positive correlations were observed between the different components of organizational commitment, suggesting that teachers with strong emotional attachments to their schools are also more likely to consider the costs of leaving and feel a sense of obligation to stay. While experienced teachers may develop coping mechanisms or stronger emotional attachments that mitigate the negative impact of toxic leadership, the findings underscore the detrimental effects of destructive leadership on the well-being and retention rates of less experienced teachers.

In addition to the correlation analysis, the regression analysis also revealed some interesting results for the association between leadership and organizational commitment among teachers. The model was statistically significant, explaining 14.4% of the variance in organizational commitment. Age emerged as a marginally significant predictor, with older teachers exhibiting higher levels of organizational commitment than their younger counterparts. This finding aligns with prior research suggesting that more experienced teachers may develop coping mechanisms or stronger emotional attachments to their institutions, enabling them to maintain commitment levels despite challenging school management dynamics [23]. The results of the present study confirm the expectation that experienced teachers exhibit resilience despite the negative effects of school management on organizational commitment. Interestingly, apart from age, none of the other demographic variables studied in this work, including gender, marital status, employment status, teaching specialization, educational background, principal's gender, and years of working with the principal, were found to significantly influence organizational commitment in this sample. This limited explanatory power of the regression model suggests that other factors not included in the analysis may significantly influence teacher commitment. In the Greek context, the effect of age may be at least partially explained by the fact that more experienced teachers may feel less threatened by toxic leadership, which could contribute to higher job satisfaction. This may be because they are generally more self-confident, possess stronger interpersonal skills, and are better equipped with emotional intelligence [38,39]. Additionally, senior teachers may be less concerned with promotion prospects, as they have already established their careers, which may result in a lower sense of threat from toxic leaders. Furthermore, personality can play a crucial role in teacher commitment [40].

In general, several personality traits can influence both teachers' commitment and their resilience to toxic leadership [41]. Teachers with higher resilience, internal locus of control, and emotional intelligence are likely to cope better with any issues of school management and preserve their commitment to the organization despite challenging circumstances.

In this case, an inclusive leadership practice that empowers teachers, promotes emotional well-being, and encourages ethical conduct, combined with a shift from hierarchical to participatory leadership, is essential. Authoritarian control restricts collaborative decision-making and can contribute to feelings of disempowerment among educators. The perceptions of teachers of "lack of support" and "unethical decision-making" further suggest that some teachers perceive their leaders as failing to provide the necessary guidance or ethical oversight to maintain a healthy organizational culture and improve teacher well-being and professional autonomy. Toxic behaviors, such as micromanagement, could lead to increased stress, decreased job satisfaction, and even higher turnover rates among teachers [1]. The negative effects of toxic leadership observed in the present study mirror findings in other contexts, such as Nepal, where Khadka and Bhattarai (2021) [42] report several examples of how leaders' personal interests significantly influence decision-making processes, create a toxic environment, and undermine school integrity.

Schools should prioritize leadership development programs that focus on fostering a positive school culture, ethical decision-making, and collaborative approaches to management. By mitigating these toxic behaviors, schools can cultivate a more supportive environment, enhancing teacher morale and retention while contributing to a more positive school climate overall. In fact, engaging teachers in decision-making fosters collaboration, enhances communication, and creates a sense of shared responsibility [43]. This approach aligns with research findings from Greece and other countries, which emphasize the role of regional cultural values in promoting inclusive and effective organizational practices [8,9,32]. Increasing teacher autonomy also contributes to a healthier work environment. Autonomy supports professional growth and motivation, reducing the demoralizing effects of micromanagement. As Mao et al. (2024a) [8] indicate, aligning leadership with cultural expectations of trust and independence enhances inclusiveness and employee engagement. Furthermore, leadership development focused on emotional intelligence and ethical decision-making is also crucial. Mao et al. (2024b) [9] stress the value of ethical governance and interpersonal competence for improving organizational dynamics. Future studies could explore how emerging approaches in educational leadership, such as those integrating emotional intelligence and strategic human resource management, may counteract toxic leadership and foster healthier school environments [39]. Such strategies can form the foundation for reducing the possibility of toxic leadership and the associated negative effects on schools.

5. Conclusions

This study has some limitations. Its cross-sectional design does not allow for causal inferences, and the exclusive focus on primary schools in Sparta may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or educational levels. Furthermore, self-reported data may introduce social desirability bias. Despite these limitations, the results highlight the association between teachers' perceptions of leadership and reduced job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

The findings highlight that school management behaviors—such as micromanagement, authoritarian control, and lack of support—not only erode teacher morale and emotional well-being but also undermine professional autonomy and a sense of belonging. The cascading effects of such behaviors extend beyond individual educators, negatively influencing the school climate, organizational stability, and student outcomes. Addressing

toxic leadership requires a multifaceted approach grounded in evidence-based interventions. Leadership development programs focusing on ethical decision-making, emotional intelligence, and transformational leadership are essential to mitigate the destructive impact of toxic behaviors. Mentorship programs, particularly for early-career teachers, can foster resilience, build organizational commitment, and ensure professional growth. Additionally, accountability structures, such as 360-degree feedback systems, can identify and address toxic behaviors early, creating a culture of transparency and collaboration.

The results of the present work highlight the interplay between organizational commitment dimensions—such as affective, continuance, and normative—and the potential for targeted strategies in enhancing overall commitment. School management practices that prioritize emotional support, clear communication, and shared decision-making can strengthen these dimensions, fostering a more cohesive and dedicated workforce. By cultivating leaders who value ethical and inclusive practices, schools can create environments where teachers feel empowered, respected, and motivated. These environments are instrumental in promoting teacher satisfaction, reducing turnover, and improving student success.

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