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STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Strategic leadership is becoming an increasingly important part of the focus of educational systems to enhance the effectiveness of schools, educational quality and sustainable improvement. The evidence suggests that there is a need to translate strategic initiatives into institutional outcomes, but this requires organizational conditions. This study aimed to explore the relationship between strategic planning and the performance of Omani public schools, as well as to explore the mediating effects of organizational culture. Concurrently, strategic planning was envisioned as a form of strategic leadership but separate from the leadership construct. The study was quantitatively designed using a cross-sectional design; the study was based on three theories, namely Strategic Alignment Theory, School Improvement Theory, and Public Value Governance Theory. The data were gathered from principals and assistant principals (345) in Omani schools using a questionnaire and analysed using Pearson correlation and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with SPSS and AMOS. The results indicated strong positive correlations between strategic planning, organizational culture, and institutional performance. Organisational culture had a significant indirect effect of strategic planning on institutional performance ($\beta = .266$, $p < .05$), and strategic planning had a significant direct effect on institutional performance ($\beta = .592$, $p < .05$), showing partial mediation. A satisfactory model fit was achieved with the structural model. The results point to organizational culture as a mechanism that makes strategic planning a key factor in institutional performance and the sustainable school improvement process. Implications for school leaders and policymakers, in relation to Oman Vision 2040, are provided in the study.

Keywords: **Strategic leadership, strategic planning, organisational culture, institutional performance, school improvement, educational leadership, Oman.**

INTRODUCTION

The world is facing a growing demand on educational systems to improve the quality, accountability, innovation, and institutional effectiveness of education in the wake of the rapid social, technological, and policy changes. There has therefore been a shift in the nature of school leadership from the traditional administrative role to more strategic leadership, which includes a focus on long-term vision, evidence-based decision-making, stakeholder engagement, and ongoing organisational development (Aldridge & McLure, 2024; Carvalho et al., 2021). Thus, strategic leadership is an essential tool for helping schools adjust to complex education contexts and for maintaining school improvement efforts (Zakariah et al., 2025).

The research literature in education in recent years has identified many indirect ways in which school leadership affects educational outcomes. Strategic leadership can have a direct impact on school performance to improve outcomes through the following: strengthening the quality of instruction, increasing teacher capacity, creating collaboration within the school and school district, and facilitating organisational learning (Kemethofer et al., 2025; Leithwood, 2021; Tan et al., 2024). This study does not equate strategic planning with strategic leadership, but rather looks at it as a critical aspect of strategic leadership and therefore, as an empirically measured construct. Consequently, school performance is increasingly conceptualised as a multidimensional construct encompassing instructional effectiveness, organisational capacity, stakeholder satisfaction, and continuous improvement rather than merely administrative efficiency or student achievement alone.

Organisational culture is one of the most significant organisational conditions in relation to school effectiveness within this context. Organisational culture influences the ways strategic priorities are understood, how the school co-operates and how educational change is put into practice and sustained over time. Schools built on trust, common values, teamwork and collective responsibility are more likely to deliver effective implementation of strategic initiatives to achieve meaningful academic results. On the other hand, well-designed strategic plans are not always effective in supporting school reform, or may even be stifled by fragmented cultures (Hallinger et al., 2025; Torres, 2022; Widodo et al., 2024). In addition, the evidence at the school level also shows the positive relationship between school culture and continuous school improvement, and the collaboration between principals and teachers, professional development, unity of purpose, and learning partnerships are found to be important factors influencing the practice of continuous school improvement (Rabi & Mohamad, 2025). This emergent body of evidence emphasizes organizational culture as a key mechanism by which the linkages between strategic planning and leadership practices and school improvement and institutional performance can be made.

The importance of strategic leadership and organisational culture is particularly evident in the Sultanate of Oman, where education represents a central pillar of Oman Vision 2040. The national vision emphasises educational quality, effective governance, human capital development, innovation, and alignment with international standards to build a knowledge-based society. These priorities place increasing demands on school leaders to move beyond administrative compliance and adopt strategic leadership practices generating sustainable improvements in school performance and educational quality (Awashreh & Ghunaimi, 2025; Elshaiekh et al., 2024). This context of this makes Omani public schools very relevant to explore the relationship between strategic planning and institutional performance and to gauge the role of organisation culture in this relationship.

In spite of these reform activities, much work still needs to be done to make strategic plans a reality in the school for school improvement. This indicates that poor implementation capacity, low capacity of stakeholders to participate, lack of organisational readiness, and poor collaborative cultures are major factors that cause many educational reforms to fail. Despite its emergence as a well-adopted practice in schools and other educational institutions, there has been comparatively little research into the organisational processes which influence the success of strategic initiatives to enhance the performance of the institution. Empirical research on the mediating effect of organisational culture is limited, particularly for centralised public education systems undergoing large-scale reform, as in the case of Oman.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore the effect of strategic planning, organizational culture, and institutional performance in Omani public schools, with an emphasis on the mediating effect of organizational culture. This study adds to the educational leadership literature by presenting empirical evidence from a context that has been under-researched, while offering strategic planning as a practice within strategic educational leadership and school improvement. It also provides actionable guidance for policymakers and school leaders to increase school effectiveness and meet the goals of Oman Vision 2040. Within this framework, strategic planning refers to the empirically measured construct, whereas strategic leadership denotes the broader conceptual framework within which strategic planning is situated as a leadership practice.

Problem Statement

While strategic leadership is acknowledged to be an important aspect of educational reform and school improvement, many educational systems face challenges in achieving sustained improvement in school performance through translating a strategic plan. There is some evidence that strategic initiatives can fall short of achieving the desired results due to a lack of capacity for implementation, organisational readiness, resources, engagement of stakeholders, and monitoring mechanisms (Aldridge & McLure, 2024; Hong & Jung, 2026; Nurbani et al., 2025). The presence of strategic plans does not equate to higher quality and/or institutional effectiveness.

The complexity of today's education reforms has added to the demands placed on school leaders to address demands for instruction improvement, policy implementation, organisational development, teacher motivation, and accountability demands all in one. These demands are exacerbated by factors that include limited leadership development, excessive administrative burden, limited resources and access to them, staff resistance to change, and communication issues, which can impede the successful execution of strategic efforts and sustainable school improvement (Bush et al., 2023; Hickey et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2024; Ralebese et al., 2025).

There is increasing literature on the challenges of school improvement and how successful change relies on the leadership practices of the schools as well as organisational conditions in schools. Trust, collaboration, shared values, stakeholder involvement, and ongoing learning are integral elements that can support the effectiveness and sustainability of educational change and institutional performance (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2022; Odeh et al., 2024; Wullschleger et al., 2025). Organisational culture is one of these factors, as it influences the interpretation, acceptance, and implementation of the strategic priorities by members of the school. A fragmented culture can threaten to hinder the implementation of reform even if it has a well-drafted strategic plan, while a collaborative and supportive culture can help realize strategic visions into learning outcomes (Gericke & Torbjörnsson, 2022).

Education is an integral part of Oman Vision 2040, and these challenges are highly applicable for the Sultanate of Oman. Educational quality, effective governance, innovation, human capital development, and institutional excellence are on the national agenda. These goals must be realized through school leadership in a strategic way, not just compliantly, in order to achieve sustainable school improvement. However, there are still a number of challenges in education concerning the quality of education, the responsiveness of the curriculum, the use of technological tools, and the acquisition of skills for future societies and the labour market (Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou, 2023; Psaki et al., 2022).

While there is existing research that has identified important relationships between strategic planning or leadership, organisational culture, and educational performance, these relationships have been studied separately or via different mediating factors. Evidence in recent years has revealed that leadership can be enacted through the influence of organisational conditions, which include collective efficacy and professional collaboration (Thien & Adams, 2024), and school culture has been linked to the ongoing process of school improvement (Rabi & Mohamad, 2025). Leadership, however, does not always have a direct impact on school effectiveness, as evidenced in other research, which also requires the examination of the conditions or processes within school organisations that lead to school effectiveness (Wahjunianto et al., 2025). However, little empirical research has been devoted to examining how organizational culture, a construct between strategic planning and institutional performance, is embedded in a

public-school system that is very centralised in terms of its governance.

This is particularly important in Oman, where the public schools are part of a national reform program focused on improving the quality of education, building institutional capacity, and developing sustainable human capital. As such, the present study explores the link between strategic planning and institutional performance in the Omani public schools while evaluating the role of organisational culture as a mediating factor between strategic planning and institutional performance. The study expands on the existing educational leadership literature by bringing strategic planning into the movement away from the direct relationship to the organisational mechanism that links strategic planning with institutional performance, conceptualising strategic planning as a key activity of strategic leadership.

Research Questions

1. What is the effect of strategic planning on institutional performance?
2. What is the effect of strategic planning on organisational culture?
3. What is the effect of organisational culture on institutional performance?
4. Does organisational culture mediate the relationship between strategic planning and institutional performance?

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the effect of strategic planning on institutional performance.
2. To examine the effect of strategic planning on organisational culture.
3. To examine the effect of organisational culture on institutional performance.
4. To examine the mediating role of organisational culture between strategic planning and institutional performance.

Research Hypotheses

1. **H1:** Strategic planning has a significant positive effect on institutional performance.
2. **H2:** Strategic planning has a significant positive effect on organisational culture.
3. **H3:** Organisational culture has a significant positive effect on institutional performance.
4. **H4:** Organisational culture significantly mediates the relationship between strategic planning and institutional performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Strategic Leadership and School Improvement

In response to the heightened expectations for accountability, innovation, and sustainable school improvement, strategic leadership has emerged as a key theme in educational reform. Strategic leadership focuses on vision and long-term planning, environmental scanning, resource mobilization, stakeholder engagement, and organizational learning, which are different from traditional administrative leadership (Carvalho et al., 2021). In today's educational landscapes, the role of the school leader extends beyond management to one of adaptability to meet the demands of social, technological, and policy change.

There is also some recent evidence that strategic leadership in education remains an emergent field of focus, and that the study of education leadership is gaining more interest in the ways that education leaders set direction, adapt to the environment, and align institutional priorities with the goals of education (Zakariah et al., 2025). This perspective emphasizes the difference between strategic leadership as a more comprehensive leadership model and strategic planning as a leadership practice for creating and implementing strategic direction.

Strategic leadership has been conceptualized in recent studies as a process of not just one but continuous effort rather than a plan to be drawn up once in a while. Strategic leaders set a vision, develop collective decision-making,

move resources toward the vision, and build an environment that allows for ongoing improvement and evidence-based practice (Nurbani et al., 2025). Thus, strategic planning is not only a managerial exercise, but a critical strategic leadership practice.

Research on school improvement also indicates that the ability of an organisation and a culture of collaboration are more important to sustainable educational change than stand-alone reform efforts. Strong leadership, regular monitoring, professional learning and engagement with stakeholders are the hallmarks of successful schools (Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou, 2023). More recently, however, the systematic review literature suggests that organisational readiness, implementation capacity and supportive institutional contexts are barriers that strategic initiatives need to overcome, but are rarely in place in schools (Aldridge & McLure, 2024). Thus, strategic leadership is more than an event; it is a process of giving direction and creating an environment for continuous school improvement, and strategic planning is a process by which this strategic direction is expressed.

Strategic Leadership and School Performance

School performance has evolved from a narrow focus on administrative efficiency and student achievement toward a broader multidimensional construct encompassing instructional quality, teacher development, organisational learning, stakeholder satisfaction, and institutional effectiveness (Javornik & Mirazchiyski, 2023). Contemporary educational leadership literature increasingly recognises that school performance emerges through complex interactions between leadership practices and organisational conditions.

Empirical studies generally confirm that the relationship between educational leadership and school outcomes is positive, and that its nature and strength are context-dependent and outcome-dependent. Empirical findings from a meta-analysis suggest that there are multiple organisational and instructional pathways that link leadership practices with student outcomes and that are supported by empirical evidence: instructional quality, teacher collaboration, and organisational capacity (Kemethofer et al., 2025; Tan et al., 2024). This pattern is relevant to the present study because this process is more complex, and thus the relationship between leadership-related practices and institutional outcomes should not be seen as a direct one. This is supported by Wahjunianto et al. (2025), who found that visionary leadership was not significantly correlated with school effectiveness, but school climate was significantly correlated with school effectiveness. Together with the rest of the evidence, these results suggest that the impact of leadership practices on schools may differ due to organisational conditions. For this reason, it is useful to explore the organisational culture as an intervening mechanism because it gives a more specific understanding of the relationship between strategic planning and institutional performance.

These findings suggest that leadership alone does not guarantee improved school outcomes. Rather, leadership effectiveness depends on its ability to establish supportive organisational environments that facilitate collaboration, innovation, and collective engagement with improvement initiatives. Consequently, recent educational leadership research increasingly emphasises organisational mechanisms that explain how strategic leadership contributes to school performance.

Organisational Culture and School Performance

Organisational culture has emerged as an influential determinant of school effectiveness because it shapes how organisational members interpret strategic priorities, respond to change, and collaborate toward common goals. School culture encompasses shared values, beliefs, norms, and expectations that influence organisational behaviour and educational practices (Torres, 2022).

The findings of the extensive research show that positive workplace cultures are linked to increased teachers' commitment, enhanced cooperation, increased innovation, and increased effectiveness of the institutions (Parveen et al., 2024). Trust, shared responsibility, and a culture of learning are more likely to continue to work in the schools compared to collaboration and the delivery of strategic programs that a fragmented culture may stunt. Importantly, the available evidence shows that culture does not function in one single way, through one pathway, but rather in

several different ways, through organisational processes. For instance, organisational culture has been found to have a positive relationship with various outcomes via organisational learning, teacher motivation, and collective efficacy (Aziz et al., 2024; Huda et al., 2024). There was the addition of more direct evidence for the link between culture and improvement at the school level, which found that collaborative leadership, collaborative working among teachers, professional learning, a unity of purpose, and learning partnership are linked to continuous school improvement (Rabi & Mohamad, 2025). Consequently, studies so far show that the organisational culture is linked to different educational outcomes, but less is known about how organisational culture plays a role in the linkage between strategic planning and institutional performance.

Evidence from the educational administration also suggests that organisational culture is one of the components of the organisational environment in which school leaders perform their duties. For primary school administrators, Wongkhong et al. (2023) found that organisational culture, organisational structure, and ethical climate were the relevant organisational factors that explained outcomes. Collectively, these results suggest organisational culture as an organisational capability that can influence the enactment of leadership and strategic practices in schools.

The Mediating Role of Organisational Culture

The literature on educational leadership has recently shown a trend to assert that leadership has an impact on school performance in terms of organisational processes, and not just direct effects. One of these processes has gained increased focus as an important mediating process – organisational culture. The strategic leaders set values, create shared visions, develop trust, and promote collaboration, which are related to organisational effectiveness and school improvement.

The interrelationship between organisational culture and leadership and educational outcomes such as teacher performance, organisational commitment, innovation and institutional effectiveness has been supported by empirical studies using structural equation modelling (Aziz et al., 2024; Mugwaze & Smith, 2024). Likewise, the relationship between principal instructional leadership and teachers' affective commitment was found to be mediated by collective teacher efficacy in the study by Thien and Adams (2024). Furthermore, recent findings have established that school culture is related to continuous school improvement, such as collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, unity of purpose, and learning partnership (Rabi & Mohamad, 2025). Schools that have cultures conducive to learning are better suited to ensure that priorities are followed through into sustained improvement plans, while schools that have cultures that are divided might be less effective in implementing leadership initiatives.

This is also evidenced by the fact that there is no strong direct relationship between leadership and school effectiveness in different contexts (Wahjunianto et al., 2025). This further emphasizes the importance of exploring the organisational context that could be a possible factor in understanding the connection between practices related to leadership and institutional outcomes.

Although there has been considerable evidence to support these mediated relationships, literature on the mediating role of organisational culture between strategic planning and school performance is still limited, especially in the context of implementing large-scale reform in centralised public education systems. This restriction holds true, especially in the case of Oman, where school leaders will be expected to link their practices to the goals of Oman Vision 2040. Therefore, the study of organisational culture as a mediating variable could yield valuable information with regard to the relationship between strategic planning, as a strategic leadership activity, and institutional performance in public schools.

Research Gap

There are known relationships between strategic leadership, strategic planning, organisational culture and educational performance, but there are gaps.

There is, in the first place, a confusion of concepts between strategic leadership and strategic planning. Strategic leadership is a more holistic vision of the direction of institutions, strategic adaptation to the environment, and organisational capacity building, while strategic planning is a specific leadership practice in which strategic priorities are identified and realized. Greater clarity should be provided around this distinction when looking at the relationship between planning and school performance.

Secondly, there is an empirical gap between the mechanisms between strategic planning and institutional performance. Previous research has investigated various mediating factors, and recent research in educational leadership has shown that intervening organizational factors like collective efficacy and school culture are important (Rabi & Mohamad, 2025; Thien & Adams, 2024). But there is little evidence specifically focusing on the mediation of strategic planning and institutional performance in public schools through organisational culture.

Third, there is a gap in the literature in terms of an actual context of public-school systems within centralised educational governance and experiencing national educational reform. Past research work has focused on the role of leadership, the school culture, and the effectiveness of leadership in various educational contexts, but, to date, the functioning of these relationships in Omani public schools has not been adequately studied. This is especially important in the context of the reform priorities of Oman Vision 2040.

Therefore, this study aimed to fill the above gaps by investigating the role of organisational culture on the link between strategic planning and institutional performance in Omani public schools. In this, the study defines strategic planning as a specific type of strategic leadership practice and highlights the organisational mechanism that links planning with organisational outcomes.

Theoretical Framework

This study builds on three related theories: Strategic Alignment Theory, School Improvement Theory, and Public Value Governance Theory. These theories together give a complete description of how strategic planning, as a strategic leadership tool, affects institutional performance via the organisational culture.

Strategic Alignment Theory has been developed to explain the significance of this organisational alignment of strategic priorities, organisational resources and processes of implementation to ensure organisational effectiveness. The theory of School Improvement focuses on the importance of building cultures of collaboration, fostering ongoing learning and strengthening the capacity of the organisation in order to create sustainable educational improvement. Public Value Governance builds on these ideas by focusing on the governance, accountability, engagement of stakeholders, and the creation of public value in education.

These theoretical perspectives indicate that strategic leadership will have an influence on institutional performance not only in formal planning processes, but also by creating organisational conditions which facilitate an institutional setting that fosters collaboration, shared commitment and ongoing improvement. In the same sense, organisational culture is conceptualised as one of the significant mechanisms that, through the process of strategic planning, affect school performance.

Strategic Alignment Theory. According to Strategic Alignment Theory, the effectiveness of an organisation is dependent on how well the organisation's vision, goals, resources, and processes are aligned (Grant, 2021; Venkatraman, 1989). The theory suggests that the best strategic priorities are linked to organisational structures and practices in an effective way to improve organisational performance.

In educational contexts, strategic alignment goes beyond formal strategic plans. To build effective school leadership, the vision, leadership practices, school culture, capacity of school personnel, and improvement efforts must all be focused on a common vision for education. Educational leaders are thus pivotal in the process of making the strategic priorities come alive in the organisation.

Strategic planning has been found to be related to school improvement when school leaders have engaged in environmental scanning, collaborative decision-making, monitoring, and adaptive leadership practices (Carvalho et al., 2021; Jensen & Ottesen, 2023; Mugwaze & Smith, 2024; Nurbani et al., 2025). Therefore, strategic planning is seen as a strategic leadership exercise which enables the organisation to be aligned and to be effective.

Strategic Alignment Theory, therefore, serves as a theoretical underpinning of the direct link between strategic planning and institutional performance, and the relevance of organisational alignment to enhance school performance.

School Improvement Theory. School Improvement Theory conceptualises educational change as a continuous and systemic process rather than a series of isolated reform initiatives. The theory emphasises that sustainable school improvement depends on organisational learning, collaborative cultures, professional capacity building, and shared responsibility among educational stakeholders.

Contemporary school improvement research consistently highlights the importance of coherent organisational structures, professional learning communities, evidence-informed decision-making, and supportive leadership in promoting sustainable educational change (Anderson et al., 2024; Russell et al., 2025; Stosich, 2024). Educational improvement is therefore viewed as an organisational process that emerges through collaboration and continuous institutional learning rather than through top-down policy implementation alone.

Furthermore, recent studies indicate that leadership practices influence school effectiveness largely through the organisational conditions they create, including trust, collaboration, collective efficacy, and organisational commitment (Park et al., 2023). Consequently, organisational culture becomes a critical mechanism through which strategic initiatives are translated into improved educational outcomes.

Therefore, School Improvement Theory provides the theoretical foundation for explaining the mediating role of organisational culture in the relationship between strategic planning and institutional performance.

Public Value Governance. The Public Value Governance Theory builds on the existing public management literature by focusing on value creation via effective governance, stakeholder engagement, accountability, and collaborative decision-making. The theory suggests that the efficiency of public institutions is not the sole criterion for public institutions and that they must also be measured by the social value they generate and how they meet the expectations of stakeholders.

In educational systems, public value is realised when schools provide good educational services, are equitable and inclusive, are innovative, and contribute to the development of society. Therefore, educational governance needs to be transparent, inclusive of decision-making, and accountable.

Researchers in recent years have found that leadership effectiveness is strongly related to governance structures, which directly impact the way in which the organisation is coordinated, its relationship with stakeholders, and its responsiveness to stakeholders (Degen et al., 2025; Mausethagen et al., 2024; Wilkins & Mifsud, 2024). Governance is especially significant in highly centralised educational systems as it affects schools' ability to act on strategic initiatives and fulfil institutional targets.

This view is particularly significant in the context of the current study, as the public schools in Oman have a centralised governance system and are expected to make a direct contribution to the goals of Oman Vision 2040 – quality education, institutional excellence and sustainable human capital.

Accordingly, Public Value Governance Theory provides an important contextual lens for understanding how strategic leadership and organisational culture contribute to institutional performance within public educational systems.

Integration of the Theoretical Perspectives. Each theoretical perspective is able to focus on various parts of the proposed model, but each of the three perspectives is conceptually complementary. Strategic Alignment Theory offers the main foundation for understanding the connection between strategic planning and institutional performance, focusing on the integration of strategic priorities, institutional resources, and implementation processes. The view of School Improvement Theory adds to this by describing the role of organisational conditions – that is, working together, learning together, and taking some shared responsibility for improving over time – in facilitating the conversion of strategic priorities into sustained school improvement. Public Value Governance offers the contextual perspective on governance, focusing on accountability, engagement with stakeholders, responsiveness, and value creation in public schools.

These perspectives can thus be connected with a distinct but interrelated relationship within the proposed model. The strategic planning-institutional performance relationship is mainly supported by Strategic Alignment Theory. The relationship between strategic planning and organisational culture is supported by the main theoretical frameworks of School Improvement Theory, and the role of organisational culture in underpinning strategies and action in terms of improving practice is supported by three of the main theories of School Improvement. The main theoretical basis for the relationship between strategic planning and organisational culture is the main theoretical frameworks of School Improvement Theory, and the role of organisational culture in translating strategic priorities into improvement-oriented practices is also supported by three of the main theories of School Improvement. Public Value Governance builds on these perspectives by providing a rationale for why these relationships are especially critical in public schools, where the performance of the institution is influenced by its accountability, the expectations of its stakeholders, and the public goals for education.

The three perspectives imply that strategic planning can be linked to institutional performance in both direct and indirect ways, both of which are interconnected: one direct pathway, as proposed by strategic alignment; and one indirect pathway, as proposed by School Improvement Theory, namely organisational and collaborative mechanisms. Public Value Governance then places these relationships in the institutional setting of public education in Oman. Therefore, the integrated framework serves as the theoretical underpinning to explore the direct link between strategic planning and Omani public schools' institutional performance, and the indirect link of organisational culture between strategic planning and institutional performance.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional research design to examine the relationships among strategic planning, organisational culture, and institutional performance in Omani public schools. A cross-sectional design was considered appropriate because it enables the examination of relationships among variables at a single point in time and facilitates the testing of theoretically derived hypotheses using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study specifically investigated both the direct effects of strategic planning on institutional performance and the indirect effects through organisational culture.

Participants and Sampling

The study population consisted of principals and assistant principals working in public schools under the Ministry of Education in the Sultanate of Oman during the 2024/2025 academic year; 345 school leaders participated in the study.

Among the respondents, 58.3% (n = 201) were female, and 41.7% (n = 144) were male. Regarding educational qualifications, most participants held a bachelor's degree (82.3%), followed by master's degrees (16.8%) and doctoral degrees (0.9%). Most respondents had substantial leadership experience, with 67.2% reporting more than 15 years of professional experience.

The sample size was considered adequate for SEM analysis. According to Hair et al. (2019), a minimum sample of 200 respondents is generally sufficient for covariance-based SEM, while larger samples provide more stable parameter estimates and greater statistical power.

Measures

The researcher depended on several previous studies to design the study instrument, such as Al-Sabayleh (2021), Barkahoum and Salima (2024), Qawasmeh and Qawasmeh (2023), and Sadeghifar et al. (2017).

Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire adapted from previous studies on educational leadership, strategic planning, organisational culture, and institutional effectiveness. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Strategic Planning. Strategic planning was assessed using a modified scale that originally consisted of 71 items divided into six categories: readiness for strategic planning, strategic orientation, strategic analysis, strategic plan formulation, strategic implementation, and strategic evaluation. After the process of evaluation by experts and pilot testing, strategic plan formulation was deleted from the scale because its items exhibited insufficient validity and reliability findings during the pilot test. The items that were left remained because of their satisfactory psychometric properties, thus producing a scale consisting of 32 items divided into five categories: readiness for strategic planning (5 items), strategic orientation (8 items), strategic analysis (7 items), strategic implementation (6 items), and strategic evaluation (6 items).

Institutional Performance. Institutional performance was assessed using a 23-item scale comprising three dimensions: institutional effectiveness (10 items), institutional efficiency (6 items), and institutional relevance (7 items). These dimensions reflect the extent to which schools achieve organisational goals, utilise resources effectively, and respond to stakeholder expectations.

Organisational Culture. Organisational culture was measured using a 24-item scale consisting of four dimensions: organisational values, organisational beliefs, organisational norms, and organisational expectations, with six items representing each dimension.

Validity and Reliability

Content Validity. Content validity was established through expert evaluation. The instrument was reviewed by a panel of 15 experts in educational administration and strategic management who assessed item clarity, relevance, and conceptual appropriateness. Items with insufficient agreement were revised or removed. More than 80% agreement among experts was considered acceptable.

Pilot Study and Construct Validity. To determine the initial validity and reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted with 42 school principals and assistant principals. Item-total correlation varied from 0.46 to 0.91. Pilot results also showed that the strategic plan formulation dimension lacks validity and reliability; hence, this dimension was not included in the final version of the Strategic Planning instrument, leaving the 32 items on five dimensions.

Construct validity was also evaluated by using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in SEM analysis. Convergent validity was tested by using composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE), whereas discriminant validity was tested by comparing the square root of AVE to inter-construct correlation.

Reliability. Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. The strategic planning scale demonstrated excellent reliability ($\alpha = .94$), while institutional performance and organisational culture yielded overall alpha coefficients of .93 and .94, respectively. All dimensions' reliability coefficients exceeded the

recommended threshold of .70 (Hair et al., 2019), indicating satisfactory internal consistency.

Common Method Bias. Since the data for this research have been gathered using self-report questionnaires, common method bias has been tested using Harman's single-factor test and common latent factor analysis (CLF). Results of Harman's single-factor test showed that there is no single factor explaining the largest variance. Moreover, the CLF test was also performed to examine the effect of a common latent factor on the indicators. Thus, these tests confirmed that common method bias does not affect the results.

Data Collection Procedures

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ministry of Education in the Sultanate of Oman. After receiving institutional permission, the questionnaire was distributed electronically through official communication channels using Google Forms.

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality procedures, and their right to withdraw at any stage. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all responses were stored securely and used solely for research purposes.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was done using IBM SPSS and AMOS statistical packages. Descriptive statistics were used for analysing respondents' demographics and research variables. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to establish the association among research constructs.

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was then used to analyse the hypothesized relationship between strategic planning, organizational culture, and institutional performance. Two steps were followed during analysis. First, the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was carried out to establish the goodness of fit for the measurement model. Second, the structural model was analysed to establish direct and indirect relationships among the research variables, as well as to test the mediating effect of organizational culture.

The goodness-of-fit of the models was tested using several goodness-of-fit indices, including: Chi-square statistic (χ^2), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA).

RESULTS

The key findings from the statistical analyses undertaken to test the hypotheses of the study are presented in this section.

Demographic data

A total of 361 questionnaires were distributed, of which 345 were completed and deemed suitable for analysis, yielding a response rate of 95.6%.

As shown in Table 1, the sample comprised 201 female participants (58.3%) and 144 male participants (41.7%). Most respondents held a bachelor's degree (82.3%), followed by a master's degree (16.8%) and a doctoral degree (0.9%). Regarding professional experience, the majority of participants (67.2%) reported having more than 15 years of experience in educational leadership positions, indicating that the sample consisted largely of highly experienced school leaders.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	144	41.7
	Female	201	58.3
Educational Qualification	Bachelor's Degree	284	82.3
	Master's Degree	58	16.8
	Doctorate (PhD)	3	0.9
Years of Experience	Less than 5 years	10	2.9
	5 to < 10 years	14	4.1
	10 to < 15 years	89	25.8
	15 years or more	232	67.2

Correlations Among the Main Study Variables
Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among strategic planning, organisational culture, and institutional performance (Table 2).

Table 2
Pearson Correlation Matrix Among the Main Study Variables (N = 345)

Variable	1	2	3
1. Strategic Planning	—		
2. Organisational Culture	.645**	—	
3. Institutional Performance	.872**	.795**	—

Note. **p < .01** (two-tailed).

The results revealed significant positive relationships among all study variables ($p < .01$). Strategic planning demonstrated a strong positive relationship with institutional performance ($r = .872$, $p < .01$), indicating that higher levels of strategic planning were associated with improved institutional performance. Strategic planning was also positively associated with organisational culture ($r = .645$, $p < .01$). Likewise, organisational culture showed a strong positive correlation with institutional performance ($r = .795$, $p < .01$).

Overall, the findings provide preliminary support for the hypothesised relationships among the study constructs.

Correlations Between Strategic Planning and Institutional Performance Dimensions
Pearson correlation coefficients were further computed to examine the relationships between the dimensions of

strategic planning and institutional performance (Table 3).

Table 3
Correlations Between Strategic Planning Dimensions and Institutional Performance Dimensions

Strategic Planning Dimension	Effectiveness	Efficiency	Relevance
Readiness for Planning	.353**	.393**	.244**
Strategic Orientation	.496**	.400**	.355**
Strategic Analysis	.512**	.534**	.349**
Strategic Implementation	.459**	.474**	.446**
Strategic Evaluation	.470**	.514**	.402**

Note. **p** < .01 (two-tailed).

All dimensions of strategic planning were positively and significantly associated with institutional effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance (p < .01). Among the dimensions, strategic analysis exhibited the strongest relationships with institutional effectiveness (r = .512), institutional efficiency (r = .534), and institutional relevance (r = .349). Strategic implementation also demonstrated moderate positive relationships with all dimensions of institutional performance, particularly institutional relevance (r = .446).

These findings suggest that strategic analysis and implementation processes are closely associated with improved institutional outcomes.

Correlations Between Organisational Culture and Institutional Performance
The relationships between organisational culture dimensions and institutional performance were examined using Pearson correlation analysis (Table 4).

Table 4
Correlations Between Organisational Culture and Institutional Performance

Organisational Culture Dimension	Effectiveness	Efficiency	Relevance
Organisational Values	.467**	.431**	.478**
Organisational Beliefs	.350**	.366**	.309**
Organisational Norms	.332**	.356**	.330**
Organisational Expectations	.489**	.410**	.424**

Note. ***p < .01*** (two-tailed).

The results indicated that all dimensions of organisational culture were positively and significantly related to institutional performance (p < .01). Organisational values and organisational expectations demonstrated comparatively stronger relationships with institutional effectiveness (r = .467 and r = .489, respectively). Organisational beliefs and norms exhibited moderate but significant correlations with all dimensions of institutional

performance.

The findings suggest that positive organisational cultures characterised by shared values and expectations are associated with higher levels of institutional performance.

Relationships Between Strategic Planning and Organisational Culture

Pearson correlations were also conducted to examine the relationships between strategic planning dimensions and organisational culture (Table 5).

Table 5

Correlations Between Strategic Planning and Organisational Culture Dimensions

Strategic Planning Dimension	Values	Beliefs	Norms	Expectations
Readiness for Planning	.142**	.197**	.189**	.262**
Strategic Orientation	.400**	.260**	.196**	.293**
Strategic Analysis	.451**	.325**	.236**	.389**
Strategic Implementation	.361**	.305**	.268**	.376**
Strategic Evaluation	.213**	.273**	.287**	.399**

Note. ***p < .01*** (two-tailed).

All dimensions of strategic planning were positively associated with organisational culture dimensions ($p < .01$). Strategic analysis demonstrated the strongest relationships with organisational values ($r = .451$) and organisational expectations ($r = .389$), whereas readiness for planning showed comparatively weaker associations with cultural dimensions.

These findings indicate that strategic leadership practices are closely linked with supportive organisational cultures within schools' development.

Structural Equation Modelling Results

Structural Model Fit. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed to test the hypothesised relationships among strategic planning, organisational culture, and institutional performance.

As presented in Table 6, the structural model demonstrated an acceptable level of fit to the data. Although the chi-square statistic was significant, $\chi^2(51) = 161.023$, $p < .001$, this result is common in studies with moderate to large sample sizes due to the sensitivity of the chi-square test to sample size. Other fit indices indicated satisfactory model fit: CMIN/df = 3.157, GFI = .928, CFI = .933, NFI = .906, TLI = .914, and RMSEA = .079.

Table 6

Model Fit Indices for the Structural Model

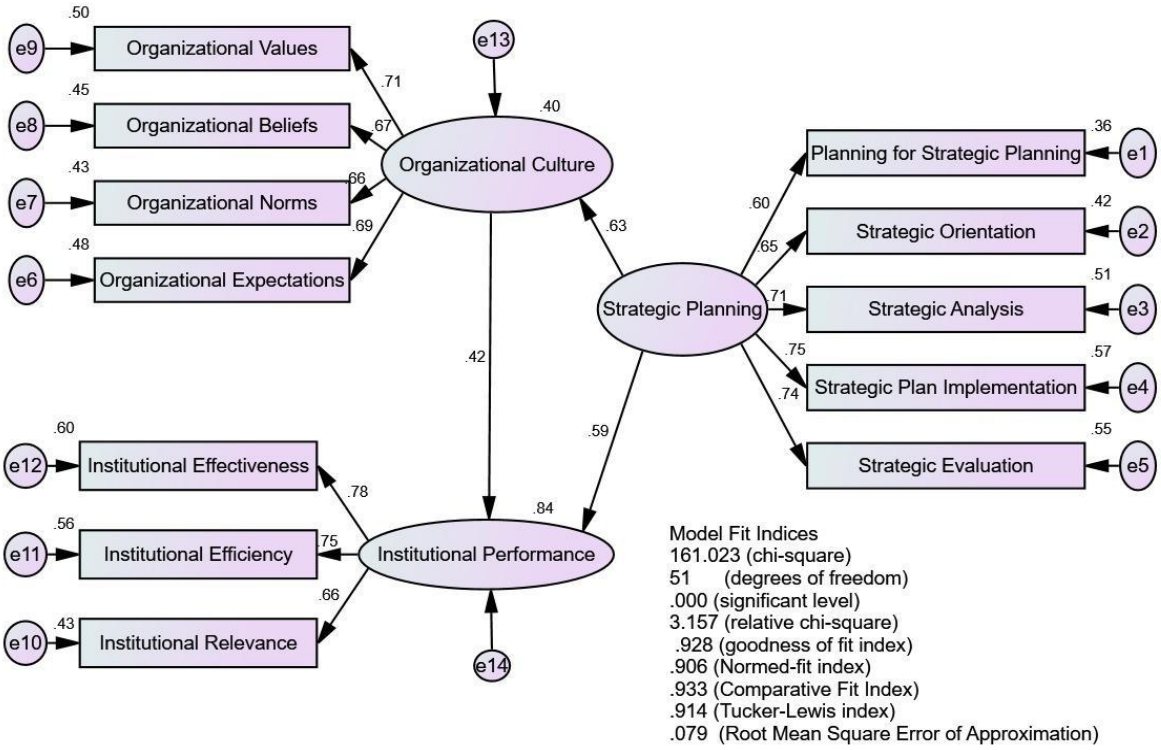
Fit Index	Recommended Threshold	Obtained Value
χ^2	Non-significant preferred	161.023 ($p < .001$)

CMIN/df	< 5.00	3.157
GFI	≥ 0.90	0.928
CFI	≥ 0.90	0.933
NFI	≥ .90	0.906
TLI	≥ 0.90	0.914
RMSEA	< 0.08	0.079

Collectively, these indices suggest that the proposed model adequately represented the observed data. Figure 1 presents the measurement model.

Figure 1

Structural Model of the Relationships Among Strategic Planning, Organisational Culture, and Institutional Performance



Measurement Model Assessment. The reliability and validity of the measurement model were evaluated using composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity criteria (Table 7).

Table 7
Composite Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	CR	AVE	√AVE
Organisational Culture	0.930	0.770	0.877
Strategic Planning	0.863	0.684	0.827
Institutional Performance	0.948	0.786	0.887

All constructs demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, with CR values ranging from .863 to .948, exceeding the recommended threshold of .70. Convergent validity was also established, as all AVE values exceeded the recommended criterion of .50.

Furthermore, the square roots of the AVE values were greater than the inter-construct correlations, providing evidence of discriminant validity among the study constructs.

Mediation Analysis. Path analysis was conducted to examine the mediating role of organisational culture in the relationship between strategic planning and institutional performance.

As shown in Table 8, strategic planning had a significant direct effect on institutional performance (β = .592, p < .05). In addition, strategic planning exerted a significant indirect effect on institutional performance through organisational culture (β = .266, p < .05). The total effect of strategic planning on institutional performance was also significant (β = .858, p < .05).

Table 8
Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects of Strategic Planning on Institutional Performance

Path	Direct Effect (β)	Indirect Effect (β)	Total Effect (β)
Strategic Planning → Institutional Performance	0.592*	0.266*	0.858*

Note. $p < .05$.

Because both direct and indirect effects were statistically significant, organisational culture was found to partially mediate the relationship between strategic planning and institutional performance.

Dimension-Level Mediation Analysis. Additional analyses were conducted to examine mediation effects at the dimensional level (Table 9).

Table 9
Significant Indirect Effects of Strategic Planning Dimensions on Institutional Performance via Organisational Culture

Strategic Planning Dimension	Effectiveness	Efficiency	Relevance
Strategic Orientation	0.086*	—	0.093*
Strategic Analysis	0.189*	0.165*	0.182*

Strategic Implementation	0.120*	0.111*	0.119*

Note. $p < .05$. Non-significant paths omitted for clarity.

DISCUSSION

This study used an exploratory approach to analyse the correlations between strategic planning, organisational culture, and institutional performance in Omani public schools, as well as the mediating role played by the organizational culture. The results suggest a positive direct and indirect relationship between strategic planning and institutional performance, respectively, through the organisational culture, thus empirically supporting the proposed model.

The strong direct link between strategic planning and institutional performance was broadly consistent with the literature in education, suggesting that strategic leadership practices are key to school effectiveness and improvement. The results indicate that strategic planning is not just an administrative process but a tool for ensuring that schools' vision, resources, and improvement efforts are aligned with the educational priorities. This interpretation aligns with a number of previous studies that argue for the link between strategic leadership and school effectiveness in terms of school cohesion, evidence-based decision-making, and the capacity for change within the organisation (Carvalho et al., 2021; Leithwood, 2021; Tan et al., 2024).

The study has found that organisational culture partially mediates the relationship between strategic planning and institutional performance; this is a major contribution of the study. This implies that the connection between planning and institutional performance exists partly through the level of conditions that exist in the organisation that support the interpretation and implementation of the strategic priorities. Schools that have a culture of trust, collaboration, shared values and collective commitment, then, might be more likely to turn strategic priorities into coordinated improvement practices. The result aligns with the findings of previous empirical studies that found organisational culture to be a significant mechanism related to leadership practices, institutional effectiveness and school improvement (Hallinger et al. 2025; Mugwaze & Smith, 2024; Widodo et al. 2024).

At the dimensional level, strategic analysis and strategic implementation exhibited the highest indirect relationships with institutional performance via organisational culture. The identification of this finding illustrates the need for environmental scanning, evidence-based planning, and systematic implementation in developing the conditions of an organisation that enhance school improvement. These dimensions could be especially useful to help schools plan their work for improvement and have a shared focus on priorities.

The results are useful for educational reform in Oman from a contextual point of view. The themes of educational quality, effective governance, innovation, and developing human capital are all highlighted in Oman Vision 2040. In this context, the findings indicate that strategic planning is more relevant when it is supported by the conditions of the organisation that enable working together, taking responsibility, and striving for improvement. Therefore, strategic planning and organizational culture can be considered complementary organizational mechanisms that are related to school improvement in Omani public schools.

The results also have implications at various levels of educational leadership. At school, principals must see strategic planning as an ongoing leadership activity and attend to the processes of environmental scanning, engaging stakeholders, making decisions based on evidence, and ongoing monitoring, while building trust, collaboration, and shared accountability. Leadership development programmes at the governorate or district level may be used to build up principals' skills in strategic planning, organizational change and cultural leadership. At the level of the Ministry of Education (MoE), school evaluation and improvement frameworks could include strategic leadership practices and indicators of organisational culture, and help foster collaborative school leaders, professional learning communities, and data-informed decision-making.

Organisational conditions are also confirmed by recent studies as an explanation for educational outcomes. To this end, the study by Thien and Adams (2024) revealed that the relationship between principal instructional leadership and teachers' affective commitment was mediated by collective teacher efficacy and the study by Rabi and Mohamad (2025) showed that school culture was found to be correlated with continuous school improvement. Likewise, Wahjunianto et al. (2025) found that the school climate factor was significantly correlated with school effectiveness, but not with visionary leadership. The results complement the present research by revealing that OC can be an important interface between leadership and institutional performance.

Zakariah et al. (2025) pointed out the increasing significance of strategic leadership in education, especially in providing direction and ensuring that institutional priorities are aligned with the education goals. This helps to clarify the present study's separation of strategic leadership as the higher-level concept from strategic planning as a leadership tool. It also indicates that strategic planning influences institutional performance to some degree because of the institutional culture in which the strategic priorities are realised.

The results indicate that, in addition to having formal strategic plans, the value of strategic planning is dependent upon the conditions within which strategic plans are interpreted, coordinated and implemented across the school.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There are several limitations that need to be considered when interpreting the results of this study. The first one is that due to the cross-sectional nature of this study, it is not possible to draw any conclusions regarding the causality among the variables of this study. In order to explore the relationships among strategic planning, organisational culture and institutional performance from a longitudinal perspective, future research needs to be conducted.

The second limitation of this study is that self-report measures have been used as the only source of data collection. As a result, there is a higher probability that the participants' answers were influenced by common method bias and social desirability. Future research could use various measures, such as teachers' views and performance indicators, to evaluate the relationships between the examined constructs.

Furthermore, this research was conducted among Oman's public schools. Hence, it is necessary to be cautious when generalizing the results to other contexts. Comparative studies of different cultures and educational systems would enable understanding of the conditions in which strategic planning, organisational culture and institutional performance take place.

Finally, future research could identify additional mediators and moderators, including organisational learning, teacher commitment, leadership style and school climate.

CONCLUSION

The current study adds value to educational leadership research by demonstrating that strategic planning, being a form of strategic leadership, positively correlates with institutional performance at public schools not only in a direct way but also indirectly through organisational culture. Based on the results of the current study, it can be concluded that organisational culture is one of the crucial mechanisms through which strategic planning is related to school effectiveness.

Additionally, it is shown that sustainable school development not only requires strategic planning but also organisational cultures built upon cooperation, trust, common values, and learning. Such organisational characteristics will allow public schools to implement their strategic priorities effectively and transform them into actions and performance.

In conclusion, it should be mentioned that by applying the example of Omani public schools, this study enriches current knowledge about strategic planning, organisational culture, and institutional performance in a centralised system of education undergoing reforms. In general, the findings of the current research show that strategic planning is most effective in combination with organisational culture that can implement strategic priorities effectively.

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