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Hubris in Educational Leadership: Toxic Leadership as a Mechanism Linking Power and Teacher Burnout

Eğitim Liderliğinde Kibir: Güç ile Öğretmen Tükenmişliği Arasındaki Bağı Kuran Bir Mekanizma Olarak Toksik Liderlik

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Summary

Research on dark leadership in education has increasingly documented the harmful consequences of destructive leadership behaviors for teachers and schools. However, less attention has been paid to the psychological antecedents that give rise to such behaviors, particularly those emerging from prolonged exposure to power. Drawing on the concept of hubris syndrome as an acquired leadership pathology, this study examines how school principals' hubristic tendencies contribute to teacher burnout through toxic leadership behaviors. Using data collected from 476 teachers working in public schools, the study tests a mediation model through structural equation modeling. Hubris syndrome is conceptualized as a power-induced distortion characterized by excessive self-confidence, diminished empathy, and detachment from reality. Results indicate that principals' hubris strongly predicts toxic leadership behaviors, which in turn significantly increase teachers' burnout levels. Bootstrapping analyses further reveal that toxic leadership partially mediates the relationship between hubris and teacher burnout, suggesting that the detrimental effects of hubris are largely enacted through observable destructive leadership practices. By positioning hubris as an antecedent rather than a parallel construct within dark leadership frameworks, this study advances theoretical understanding of how leadership pathologies develop and operate in educational organizations. The findings highlight the importance of addressing power-related psychological risks in leadership selection, development, and oversight, offering important implications for preventing toxic leadership and protecting teacher well-being in schools.

Keywords: hubris syndrome; dark leadership, toxic leadership, teacher burnout, educational leadership, power and leadership

Özet

Eğitimde karanlık liderlik üzerine yapılan araştırmalar, yıkıcı liderlik davranışlarının öğretmenler ve okullar üzerindeki zararlı sonuçlarını giderek artan bir biçimde belgelemektedir. Ancak bu tür davranışlara yol açan psikolojik öncüllere, özellikle de uzun süreli güç maruziyetinden kaynaklanan faktörlere yeterince dikkat edilmemiştir. Bu çalışma, edinilmiş bir liderlik patolojisi olarak kibir sendromu kavramına dayanarak okul müdürlerinin kibirli eğilimlerinin toksik liderlik davranışları aracılığıyla öğretmen tükenmişliğine nasıl katkıda bulunduğunu incelemektedir. Devlet okullarında görev yapan 476 öğretmenden toplanan verilerle yapısal eşitlik modellemesi aracılığıyla bir aracılık modeli test edilmektedir. Kibir sendromu; aşırı özgüven, azalan empati ve gerçeklikten kopuklukla karakterize edilen, güce bağlı bir bozulma olarak kavramsallaştırılmaktadır. Bulgular, müdürlerin kibir sendromunun toksik liderlik davranışlarını güçlü biçimde yordadığını, bunun da öğretmenlerin tükenmişlik düzeylerini anlamlı ölçüde artırdığını ortaya koymaktadır. Önyükleme (bootstrapping) analizleri, toksik liderliğin kibir ile öğretmen tükenmişliği arasındaki ilişkiye kısmen aracılık ettiğini göstermekte; bu durum, kibrin zararlı etkilerinin büyük ölçüde gözlemlenebilir yıkıcı liderlik pratikleri aracılığıyla hayata geçirildiğine işaret etmektedir. Kibri karanlık liderlik çerçeveleri içinde eşdüzey bir yapı olarak değil, bir öncül olarak konumlandıran bu çalışma, eğitim örgütlerinde liderlik patolojilerinin nasıl geliştiği ve işlediğine ilişkin kuramsal anlayışa önemli katkılar sunmaktadır. Bulgular, lider seçimi, gelişimi ve denetimine ilişkin güç kaynaklı psikolojik risklerin ele alınmasının önemini vurgulamakta; okullarda toksik liderliğin önlenmesi ve öğretmen refahının korunması bakımından kritik çıkarımlar sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: kibir sendromu, karanlık liderlik, toksik liderlik, öğretmen tükenmişliği, eğitim liderliği, güç ve liderlik

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Introduction

Educational leadership research has long emphasized the constructive role of school leaders in shaping organizational climate, teacher motivation, and instructional quality. Effective leadership is widely regarded as a cornerstone of school improvement, teacher retention, and student success. However, alongside this dominant positive orientation, a growing body of scholarship has begun to interrogate the darker side of leadership, drawing attention to leadership behaviors that undermine organizational functioning and employee well-being (Lipman-Blumen, 2005; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). In educational settings, where leadership authority is often centralized and sustained over long periods, such destructive dynamics may be particularly consequential.

Within this emerging literature, dark leadership has been conceptualized as a broad umbrella encompassing a range of harmful leadership styles, including abusive supervision, despotic leadership, narcissistic leadership, and toxic leadership. These forms of leadership share a common feature: they systematically erode trust, psychological safety, and well-being among organizational members (Einarsen et al., 2007). Empirical studies in education have increasingly linked destructive leadership behaviors to negative teacher outcomes such as emotional exhaustion, cynicism, reduced organizational commitment, and intentions to leave the profession (Harms et al., 2018; Madigan & Kim, 2021). Despite this growing evidence, much of the existing research has focused on the outcomes of destructive leadership, while paying comparatively less attention to the psychological conditions under which such leadership behaviors emerge.

One important limitation of the current dark leadership literature is its tendency to conceptualize destructive leadership styles as relatively stable personality traits. Constructs such as narcissism or Machiavellianism are often treated as dispositional characteristics that leaders bring into organizations. While this approach has generated valuable insights, it risks overlooking the role of power itself as a transformative force that can distort leaders' cognition, judgment, and behavior over time (Keltner et al., 2003). In educational organizations, principals frequently occupy positions of prolonged authority, often with limited external oversight and strong symbolic legitimacy. These conditions may create fertile ground for leadership pathologies that are acquired, rather than merely expressed.

The concept of hubris syndrome offers a compelling framework for addressing this gap. Originally introduced in political psychology, hubris syndrome refers to an acquired personality change associated with the exercise of substantial power, characterized by

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excessive self-confidence, contempt for others, reduced empathy, and a growing detachment from reality (Owen & Davidson, 2009). Unlike narcissism, which is typically understood as a relatively stable personality trait, hubris is theorized as a context-dependent condition that intensifies with success, authority, and the absence of corrective feedback. From this perspective, hubris is not simply a leader's personal flaw, but a psychological distortion that develops through the sustained experience of power.

Although hubris has received increasing attention in political and corporate leadership research, its role in educational leadership remains underexplored. This omission is striking, given that schools are hierarchical organizations in which principals wield significant influence over teachers' evaluations, career trajectories, and daily working conditions. When educational leaders develop hubristic tendencies, their inflated sense of infallibility and diminished regard for others may translate into concrete leadership behaviors that are harmful for teachers and schools. Yet, the mechanisms through which hubris shapes everyday leadership practices in educational contexts are still poorly understood.

One plausible mechanism linking hubris to negative teacher outcomes is toxic leadership. Toxic leadership is commonly defined as a pattern of leader behaviors that systematically harm subordinates and the organization through intimidation, manipulation, humiliation, and self-serving decision-making (Schmidt, 2008). Toxic leaders may not only fail to support their staff but actively create environments marked by fear, injustice, and chronic stress. In schools, such environments can be particularly damaging, as teaching is an emotionally demanding profession that relies heavily on relational trust and professional autonomy (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Previous studies have established robust associations between toxic leadership and employee burnout across organizational settings, including education. Teacher burnout—typically conceptualized as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment—has been linked to adverse organizational climates, lack of administrative support, and perceived injustice (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). However, existing research has rarely examined why some school leaders engage in toxic behaviors in the first place. By treating toxic leadership primarily as an independent explanatory variable, the literature risks neglecting deeper psychological antecedents that may be critical for prevention and intervention.

Building on these insights, the present study integrates hubris syndrome into the dark leadership framework by conceptualizing it as an antecedent condition that gives rise to toxic

leadership behaviors. Rather than positioning hubris alongside other destructive leadership constructs, this study argues that hubris operates upstream, shaping how leaders perceive themselves, their authority, and their subordinates. From this perspective, toxic leadership represents a behavioral manifestation of hubristic cognition enacted within organizational relationships. These behaviors, in turn, create stressful and depleting work environments that accelerate teacher burnout.

By empirically testing this process model, the study makes three key contributions to the literature. First, it extends dark leadership research in education by introducing hubris syndrome as a power-induced leadership pathology that precedes observable destructive behaviors. Second, it clarifies the mechanism through which hubris affects teacher well-being by identifying toxic leadership as a mediating process. Third, it contributes to broader leadership theory by highlighting the dynamic and developmental nature of leadership pathology, emphasizing the role of organizational power in shaping harmful leadership trajectories.

Research Questions

Guided by this theoretical framework, the present study addresses the following research questions:

- To what extent does hubris syndrome in educational leadership predict toxic leadership behaviors as perceived by teachers?
- To what extent does toxic leadership predict teacher burnout?
- Does toxic leadership mediate the relationship between hubris syndrome and teacher burnout in educational organizations?

Method

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the mediating role of toxic leadership in the relationship between hubris syndrome and teacher burnout. Given the study's focus on testing theoretically specified relationships among latent constructs, structural equation modeling (SEM) was selected as the primary analytical strategy. SEM enables the simultaneous estimation of measurement and structural components of complex models while accounting for measurement error, making it particularly suitable for theory-driven mediation analyses in leadership research (Kline,

2016).

Consistent with recommendations for mediation testing in SEM, the study followed a two-step approach, first evaluating the adequacy of the measurement model through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and then testing the hypothesized structural relationships among the latent variables (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

Participants

Participants were 476 teachers working in public primary and secondary schools. Teachers were selected using a simple random sampling approach from schools located in urban districts. Participation was voluntary, and teachers were informed that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential. Data were collected through self-administered questionnaires during the academic year.

Table 1.
Sample Characteristics of Participants (N = 476)

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	286	60.1
	Male	190	39.9
Teaching Level	Primary School	198	41.6
	Secondary School	278	58.4
Teaching Experience	1–5 years	84	17.6
	6–10 years	112	23.5
	11–15 years	146	30.7
	16 years and above	134	28.2

As shown in Table 1, the sample consisted of 476 teachers, the majority of whom were female. Participants represented both primary and secondary school levels and a wide range of teaching experience, indicating a heterogeneous sample suitable for examining leadership perceptions in educational settings.

From a methodological standpoint, the sample size exceeded commonly recommended thresholds for SEM analyses. Previous research suggests that samples larger than 300 are generally adequate for models of moderate complexity, particularly when communalities are high and indicators are well-defined (Kline, 2016; Wolf et al., 2013). Thus, the sample size was deemed sufficient to provide stable parameter estimates and reliable model fit indices.

Data Collection Tools

All constructs were measured using previously validated instruments. Teachers were asked to evaluate their school principals' leadership behaviors as well as their own experiences of burnout. Responses were recorded on five-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Hubris Syndrome

Hubris syndrome was measured using the Leader Hubris Scale, which conceptualizes hubris as a multidimensional, power-induced leadership pathology. The scale captures core characteristics of hubris, including excessive self-confidence, diminished empathy, contempt for others, and detachment from reality. Prior validation studies have demonstrated strong internal consistency and construct validity for the scale (Owen & Davidson, 2009; Özçelik & Kocabaş, 2022).

In the present study, hubris was modeled as a latent construct reflected by its theoretically defined dimensions. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to verify the factorial structure of the scale within the current sample.

Toxic Leadership

Toxic leadership was assessed using the Toxic Leadership Scale, which operationalizes toxic leadership as a pattern of destructive behaviors including authoritarian control, humiliation, unpredictability, and self-centered decision-making. The scale has been widely used in leadership research and has demonstrated strong psychometric properties across organizational contexts (Schmidt, 2008).

Teachers were instructed to evaluate the extent to which their school principals displayed these behaviors. In line with prior research, toxic leadership was specified as a latent variable represented by its observed indicators.

Teacher Burnout

Teacher burnout was measured using the Maslach Burnout Inventory—Educators Survey (MBI-ES), one of the most extensively validated instruments for assessing burnout in educational contexts (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The scale assesses burnout across three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Extensive evidence supports the reliability and validity of the MBI-ES in teacher populations (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

For the purposes of SEM, burnout was modeled as a higher-order latent construct

indicated by its three subdimensions.

Table 2.
Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, and Correlations Among Variables

Variables	M	SD	α	1	2	3
1. Hubris Syndrome	2.85	0.95	.91	—		
2. Toxic Leadership	2.91	1.02	.94	.68**	—	
3. Teacher Burnout	3.12	0.98	.88	.54**	.71**	—

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, reliability coefficients, and correlations among the study variables. Hubris syndrome was positively and significantly correlated with toxic leadership and teacher burnout. Toxic leadership also showed a strong positive association with teacher burnout.

Data Analysis

Preliminary Analyses

Data screening procedures were conducted prior to hypothesis testing. Missing data were minimal and handled using full information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimation, which produces unbiased parameter estimates under conditions of missing at random (MAR) (Enders, 2010). Normality assumptions were assessed through skewness and kurtosis values, which fell within acceptable ranges (±2), supporting the use of maximum likelihood estimation (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019).

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among the study variables were calculated using SPSS.

Measurement Model

The measurement model was evaluated through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using maximum likelihood estimation. Model fit was assessed using multiple fit indices, consistent with best practices in SEM research. These included the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (χ^2/df), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). Following established guidelines, values of χ^2/df below 3, CFI and GFI values above .90, RMSEA values below .06, and SRMR values below .08 were interpreted as indicating good model fit (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 3.
Confirmatory Factor Analysis: Standardized Factor Loadings

Construct	Indicator	λ
Hubris Syndrome	Excessive Self-Confidence	.78
	Contempt for Others	.82
	Power Orientation	.75
	Detachment from Reality	.80
Toxic Leadership	Authoritarian Control	.84
	Humiliation	.88
	Unpredictability	.81
	Self-Centeredness	.86
Teacher Burnout	Emotional Exhaustion	.90
	Depersonalization	.83
	Reduced Personal Accomplishment	.76

As reported in Table 3, all standardized factor loadings exceeded .60 and were statistically significant, providing support for the factorial validity of the measurement model.

To establish convergent validity, standardized factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) values were examined. Discriminant validity was assessed using the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio, with values below .85 indicating adequate discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 4.
Convergent and Discriminant Validity Statistics

Construct	CR	AVE	HTMT (Max)
Hubris Syndrome	.92	.61	.72
Toxic Leadership	.95	.67	.79
Teacher Burnout	.89	.58	.74

Table 4 summarizes the convergent and discriminant validity results. Composite reliability and average variance extracted values met recommended thresholds, and HTMT ratios indicated adequate discriminant validity among the constructs.

Structural Model and Mediation Analysis

After establishing an acceptable measurement model, the hypothesized structural model was tested. Path coefficients were estimated to examine the direct effects of hubris syndrome on toxic leadership, and of toxic leadership on teacher burnout. The direct path from hubris syndrome to teacher burnout was also estimated to determine whether toxic leadership functioned as a mediator.

The mediating role of toxic leadership was tested using bootstrapping procedures with 5,000 resamples. Bootstrapping provides a robust method for estimating indirect effects and does not rely on the assumption of normality (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Mediation was considered statistically significant when the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect did not include zero.

Table 5.
Structural Model Results

Path	β	SE	p
Hubris → Toxic Leadership	.70	.04	< .001
Toxic Leadership → Burnout	.64	.05	< .001
Hubris → Burnout	.15	.06	< .05

The standardized path coefficients for the structural model are presented in Table 5. Hubris syndrome had a strong positive effect on toxic leadership, while toxic leadership significantly predicted teacher burnout. The direct effect of hubris syndrome on burnout was weaker but remained statistically significant.

Table 6.
Bootstrapping Results for Mediation Analysis (5,000 Resamples)

Effect	β	SE	95% CI
Indirect Effect (Hubris → Toxic → Burnout)	.45	.05	[.37, .54]
Direct Effect	.15	.06	[.04, .26]

As shown in Table 6, bootstrapping analyses indicated a significant indirect effect of hubris syndrome on teacher burnout through toxic leadership. The confidence interval did not include zero, supporting the mediating role of toxic leadership.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical principles for research involving human participants. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. No identifying information was collected, and data were used solely for research purposes.

Results

The results are presented in four sections. First, descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables are reported. Second, the measurement model is evaluated through confirmatory factor analysis. Third, the structural model is tested to examine the hypothesized relationships among the latent constructs. Finally, the mediating role of toxic leadership is assessed using bootstrapping procedures.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Means, standard deviations, reliability coefficients, and correlations among the study variables are presented in Table 2. All constructs demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with reliability estimates exceeding commonly recommended thresholds (Hair et al., 2019).

As shown in Table 2, hubris syndrome was positively and significantly correlated with toxic leadership. Hubris syndrome was also positively associated with teacher burnout. Toxic leadership showed a strong positive correlation with teacher burnout. The magnitude and direction of these correlations provided preliminary support for the hypothesized relationships and justified further testing using structural equation modeling.

Measurement Model

The measurement model was evaluated using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the adequacy of the latent constructs prior to testing the structural model. The CFA included hubris syndrome, toxic leadership, and teacher burnout as latent variables, with burnout specified as a higher-order construct indicated by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment.

Fit indices indicated that the measurement model demonstrated good fit to the data: $\chi^2/df < 3$, CFI and GFI values exceeded .90, RMSEA was below .06, and SRMR was below .08, consistent with recommended criteria (Hair et al., 2019). Standardized factor loadings for all indicators were statistically significant and exceeded .60, indicating strong relationships between the observed indicators and their respective latent constructs (Table 3).

Evidence for convergent validity was supported by composite reliability (CR) values above .70 and average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeding .50 for all constructs (Table 4). Discriminant validity was established using the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio, with all values falling below the recommended threshold of .85 (Henseler et al., 2015). Collectively, these results supported the adequacy of the measurement model.

The finalized measurement model is illustrated in Figure 1.

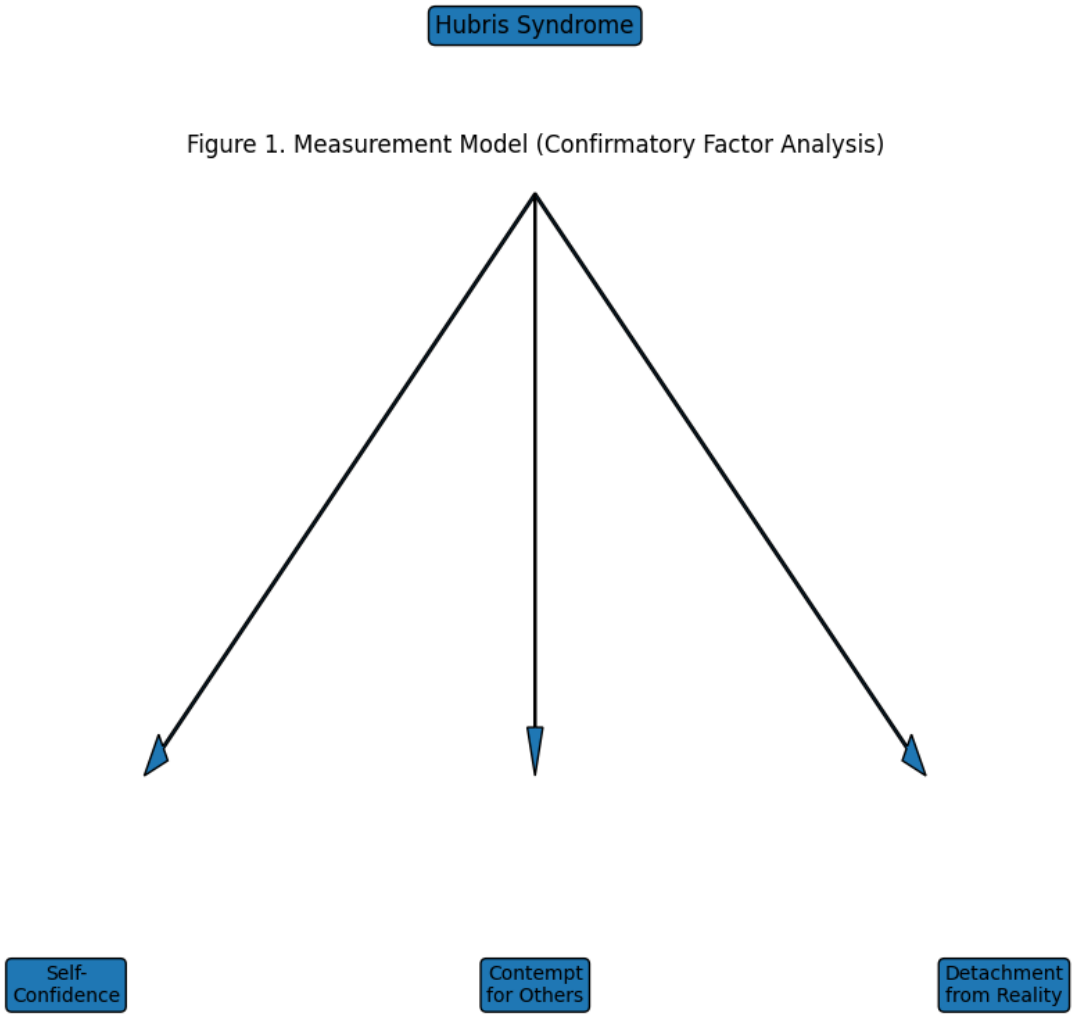

Figure 1. Measurement Model (Confirmatory Factor Analysis)

Figure 1 presents the measurement model tested through confirmatory factor analysis. Hubris syndrome, toxic leadership, and teacher burnout are specified as latent constructs. Hubris syndrome is indicated by excessive self-confidence, contempt for others, power orientation, and detachment from reality. Teacher burnout is modeled as a higher-order construct reflected by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. All factor loadings are statistically significant ($p < .001$).

Structural Model

Following confirmation of the measurement model, the hypothesized structural model was tested. Model fit indices indicated that the structural model fit the data well and met established SEM fit criteria (Hair et al., 2019).

Standardized path coefficients for the structural model are presented in Table 5 and visually depicted in Figure 2. Results showed that hubris syndrome had a strong and positive

effect on toxic leadership. Toxic leadership, in turn, had a strong and positive effect on teacher burnout. The direct path from hubris syndrome to teacher burnout was also statistically significant but notably weaker than the indirect path through toxic leadership.

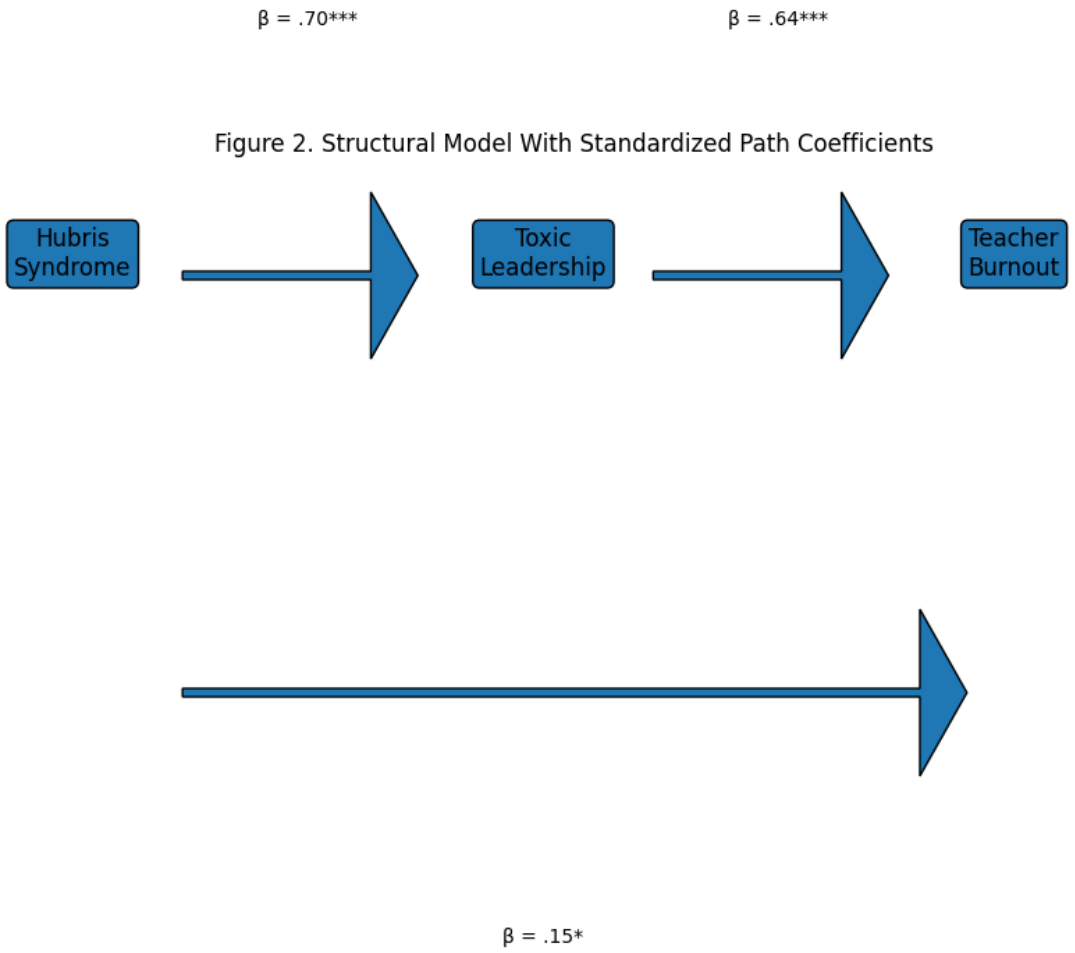

Figure 2. Structural Model With Standardized Path Coefficients

Figure 2 displays the structural equation model with standardized path coefficients. Hubris syndrome positively predicts toxic leadership, which in turn predicts teacher burnout. The direct path from hubris syndrome to teacher burnout remains significant, indicating partial mediation.

Together, these findings indicated that leaders' hubristic tendencies were associated with increased perceptions of toxic leadership behaviors, which were, in turn, associated with higher levels of teacher burnout.

Mediation Analysis

The mediating role of toxic leadership in the relationship between hubris syndrome and teacher burnout was examined using bootstrapping procedures with 5,000 resamples. The

results of the mediation analysis are presented in Table 6.

The indirect effect of hubris syndrome on teacher burnout through toxic leadership was statistically significant, as the 95% confidence interval did not include zero (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The direct effect of hubris syndrome on teacher burnout remained statistically significant after the inclusion of the mediator, indicating partial mediation.

These results suggest that while hubris syndrome exerts a direct influence on teacher burnout, a substantial portion of its effect operates indirectly through toxic leadership behaviors.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how hubris syndrome in educational leadership contributes to teacher burnout through toxic leadership behaviors. By positioning hubris as a power-induced antecedent within the dark leadership framework, the study sought to move beyond descriptive accounts of destructive leadership outcomes and illuminate the psychological processes through which leadership pathology unfolds in educational organizations. Overall, the findings provide strong support for the proposed model and offer several important theoretical insights for leadership and educational administration research.

Hubris as an Antecedent of Toxic Leadership

One of the central findings of this study is that hubris syndrome strongly predicts toxic leadership behaviors. This result advances existing dark leadership literature by empirically supporting the notion that destructive leadership behaviors may originate not solely from stable personality traits but from acquired psychological distortions associated with prolonged power. While prior research has emphasized dispositional constructs such as narcissism or Machiavellianism (Harms et al., 2011), the present findings suggest that hubris represents a distinct and developmentally dynamic risk factor.

This distinction is theoretically significant. Hubris syndrome has been conceptualized as emerging through success, authority, and the absence of corrective feedback, rather than as a fixed personality characteristic (Owen & Davidson, 2009). The strong association between hubris and toxic leadership observed in this study supports arguments that leadership pathology may intensify over time as power becomes normalized and unquestioned (Keltner

et al., 2003). In educational organizations—where principals often hold long-term authority and operate with limited external scrutiny—these conditions may be particularly pronounced.

By empirically linking hubris to toxic leadership, the study helps clarify why some leaders progressively shift from initially effective leadership to increasingly destructive patterns of behavior. Toxic leadership, in this sense, can be understood as a behavioral expression of hubristic cognition, translating inflated self-beliefs and diminished empathy into concrete interpersonal practices such as intimidation, humiliation, and authoritarian control.

Toxic Leadership and Teacher Burnout

Consistent with previous research, toxic leadership was found to be a strong predictor of teacher burnout. This finding reinforces a robust body of evidence demonstrating that destructive leadership behaviors represent a critical organizational stressor for educators (Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Teaching is an emotionally demanding profession that depends heavily on relational trust, professional autonomy, and perceived support from school leadership. Toxic leadership undermines these conditions, exposing teachers to chronic stress, uncertainty, and psychological threat.

From a burnout perspective, the results align closely with the job demands–resources model, which posits that high job demands combined with insufficient resources accelerate emotional exhaustion and disengagement (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Toxic leaders not only fail to provide essential resources such as support and fairness but actively increase job demands through unpredictability, fear, and interpersonal conflict. The strong association between toxic leadership and burnout observed in this study underscores the central role of leadership behavior in shaping teachers' psychological well-being.

The Mediating Role of Toxic Leadership

The most theoretically consequential finding of the study is the mediating role of toxic leadership in the relationship between hubris syndrome and teacher burnout. The results indicate that hubris does not primarily harm teachers through abstract leader attitudes alone; rather, its detrimental effects are largely enacted through observable toxic leadership behaviors. This finding provides empirical support for a process-oriented view of dark leadership, in which upstream psychological conditions give rise to downstream behavioral

patterns that ultimately affect employee outcomes.

Importantly, the mediation was partial rather than full. While toxic leadership accounted for a substantial portion of the relationship between hubris and burnout, the direct effect of hubris remained significant. This suggests that hubristic leadership may generate stress for teachers not only through explicit toxic actions but also through more subtle mechanisms, such as unrealistic expectations, erratic decision-making, and an overall climate of psychological insecurity. Leaders who perceive themselves as infallible may create environments in which teachers feel constantly evaluated, disregarded, or exposed to sudden shifts in priorities, even in the absence of overtly abusive behavior.

This nuanced finding extends dark leadership theory by highlighting the layered nature of leadership harm. It suggests that preventing toxic leadership behaviors, while essential, may not be sufficient if underlying hubristic tendencies remain unaddressed. Consequently, leadership pathology should be understood as a multilevel phenomenon, encompassing cognition, behavior, and organizational climate.

Contributions to Dark Leadership and Educational Leadership Research

The study contributes to the literature in three important ways. First, it introduces hubris syndrome into educational leadership research as a theoretically grounded and empirically supported antecedent of destructive leadership behavior. In doing so, it expands the scope of dark leadership research beyond static trait-based explanations.

Second, by empirically demonstrating a mediation process, the study advances understanding of how leadership pathology translates into teacher burnout. Rather than treating toxic leadership as an isolated predictor, the findings situate it within a broader psychological trajectory shaped by power and authority.

Third, the study contributes to educational administration scholarship by emphasizing the unique vulnerability of educational organizations to power-induced leadership distortions. Schools are not only instructional institutions but also moral and relational organizations. When leadership pathology emerges in such settings, its consequences extend beyond individual well-being to organizational trust, professional culture, and ultimately educational quality.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine how hubris syndrome in educational leadership contributes to teacher burnout through toxic leadership behaviors. By integrating hubris into the dark leadership framework as an antecedent condition, the study moves beyond outcome-focused approaches and offers a process-oriented explanation of leadership pathology in educational organizations. The findings provide consistent support for the proposed model, demonstrating that hubris is strongly associated with toxic leadership and that toxic leadership, in turn, is a significant predictor of teacher burnout.

Most importantly, the mediation analysis revealed that toxic leadership partially mediates the relationship between hubris and teacher burnout. This result suggests that the harmful consequences of hubristic leadership are largely enacted through observable destructive behaviors, while also indicating that hubris may exert additional, more diffuse effects on teachers' work experiences. Taken together, these findings underscore the importance of distinguishing between upstream psychological distortions and downstream behavioral manifestations of dark leadership.

By empirically positioning hubris as a power-induced leadership pathology rather than a stable personality trait, the study contributes to a more dynamic understanding of destructive leadership. Leadership harm in schools should not be viewed solely as the product of "bad leaders," but as a developmental risk embedded in organizational structures that concentrate power and limit corrective feedback. This perspective aligns with broader leadership scholarship emphasizing the transformative effects of power on cognition and behavior (Keltner et al., 2003; Owen & Davidson, 2009).

Theoretical Implications

The study offers several theoretical contributions to dark leadership and educational administration research. First, it extends dark leadership theory by introducing hubris syndrome as a theoretically grounded antecedent that precedes and shapes toxic leadership behaviors. In contrast to trait-based explanations centered on narcissism or Machiavellianism, hubris highlights the contextual and developmental nature of leadership pathology.

Second, the findings advance mediation-based models of destructive leadership by empirically demonstrating a mechanism through which leadership pathology translates into

employee burnout. By identifying toxic leadership as a key behavioral conduit, the study provides a clearer account of how abstract leader cognitions become tangible organizational stressors.

Third, the study contributes to educational leadership research by emphasizing the particular vulnerability of schools to power-related leadership distortions. Educational leaders often operate in environments characterized by moral authority, professional asymmetry, and limited external oversight. These conditions may amplify the risk of hubris and, consequently, the emergence of toxic leadership practices. Recognizing this vulnerability is essential for developing more realistic and psychologically informed theories of school leadership.

Practical Implications

The findings also carry important implications for leadership practice and policy in education. First, leadership selection and promotion processes should extend beyond technical competence and instructional expertise to include assessments of power orientation, humility, and self-regulation. Screening tools, structured interviews, and scenario-based assessments may help identify early signs of hubristic tendencies.

Second, leadership development programs should explicitly address the psychological risks associated with power. Training that fosters self-awareness, openness to feedback, and reflective leadership may serve as a protective factor against the gradual development of hubris. Importantly, such programs should not frame hubris as a moral failing, but as a foreseeable risk that requires ongoing monitoring and support.

Third, organizational safeguards are essential. Schools and educational systems should establish mechanisms that reduce unchecked authority, such as distributed leadership structures, transparent decision-making processes, and secure channels for upward feedback. Prior research suggests that environments characterized by accountability and voice are less conducive to destructive leadership dynamics (Lipman-Blumen, 2005).

Finally, given the strong association between toxic leadership and teacher burnout, interventions aimed at improving teacher well-being must address leadership behavior directly. Efforts focused solely on individual resilience or stress management are unlikely to be effective if toxic leadership practices remain unchallenged.

Limitations and Suggestions

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design precludes definitive causal inferences. Longitudinal research is needed to examine how hubris develops over time and how it interacts with organizational contexts to shape leadership behavior. Second, the study relied on teacher perceptions, which, while highly relevant for understanding leadership effects, may be influenced by individual or contextual factors. Future research could incorporate multi-source data, including leader self-reports or observational measures.

Future studies may also explore boundary conditions that mitigate or exacerbate the effects of hubris, such as organizational culture, leadership tenure, or accountability systems. Cross-cultural research would further enhance understanding of whether hubris operates similarly across different educational systems or is shaped by cultural norms regarding authority and leadership.

Conflict of Interest and Ethics Statement

The author declare no conflicts of interest.

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