

IMPACT OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP ON STAFF ENGAGEMENT AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE IN CAMBODIA: EVIDENCE FROM SECONDARY RESOURCE SCHOOLS

Sarom Mok¹, Ramy Chhun², Chorvy Vong³

^{1,2} Office of Quality Assurance, Royal University of Phnom Penh, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

² Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

ABSTRACT

In order to improve educational leadership and policy in Cambodian Secondary Resource Schools (SRSs), this quantitative, cross-sectional study examined the relationships between servant leadership, staff engagement, and school performance. This survey involved 150 SRS school staff from all throughout Cambodia. The Servant Leadership Questionnaire, the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, and the Organizational Leadership Assessment were the three validated instruments employed in this study. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were used to assess the collected data, while inferential statistics (Pearson correlation, hierarchical multiple regression) were employed to examine the associations between the study variables. The threshold for a statistically significant difference was fixed at 0.05. The findings showed a strong positive correlation between servant leadership and both school achievement and staff engagement. Beyond servant leadership, staff engagement added more explanatory value to school success. These findings imply that servant leadership in Cambodian SRSs may promote employee engagement and enhance school operations. In addition to providing useful information for leaders looking to improve school performance and engagement through service-oriented leadership, the study adds case-specific empirical evidence to the literature on SRS leadership.

Keyword: Servant Leadership, Staff Engagement, and School Performance, Secondary Resource Schools, Cambodia

1. INTRODUCTION

Staff experiences and school performance are greatly impacted by leadership in educational institutions. Particularly in mission-driven settings, more staff engagement has been consistently linked to improved school performance and stability (Chamraeun et al., 2026; Johansen & Sowa, 2019; Mok, 2013; Mok et al., 2026; Ngah et al., 2023, Yi et al., 2026). In Secondary Resource Schools (SRSs), where turnover rates are often higher than in other regular schools, leadership strategies that support employee engagement and retention are especially crucial for maintaining service continuity and school effectiveness (Chamraeun et al., 2026; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Lim, 2023; Schwarz et al., 2016; Yi et al., 2026). In recent years, SRSs have been held to higher standards of ethical accountability, transparency, and responsiveness to stakeholder demands. According to McMullin and Raggo (2020), leaders are under greater pressure to ensure long-term school sustainability, personnel well-being, and

mission satisfaction. Also, increased employee engagement and trust, as well as better performance results over time, are linked to stronger ethical cultures (Chamraeun et al., 2026; Mok, 2013; Mok et al., 2026; Ngah et al., 2023, Yi et al., 2026).

In this regard, non-profit settings have seen a rise in the popularity of servant leadership. According to Hang-Chuon (2019), Lim (2023), Northouse (2018) and Yi et al., (2026), servant leadership places more emphasis on moral behaviour, service to others, and knowledge of the needs of workers and communities than it does on hierarchical authority or self-interest. Servant leadership has been scientifically connected to positive employee experiences, including enhanced trust, teamwork, and job satisfaction—all of which are associated with staff efficiency in learning companies (Aboramadan & Dahleez, 2020; Zhang et al., 2016; Yi et al., 2026). All of these findings suggest that servant leadership may offer a helpful framework for understanding the connection between staff

engagement and school sustainability in Cambodian SRS settings.

With an emphasis on enhancing students' academic achievement, SRS school directors in Cambodia face difficulties akin to those in public education (Chamraeun et al., 2026; Kim et al., 2025; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Lim, 2023; Yi et al., 2026). Leadership in these organizations includes not just administrative supervision but also the active engagement of school directors as instructional leaders and the use of servant leadership. This dual emphasis is essential for developing an SRS culture that supports both academic success and a biblical worldview (Chamraeun et al., 2026; Khan et al., 2025; Kim et al., 2025; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Lim, 2023; Mok, 2013; Yi et al., 2026). However, studying leadership in SRSs provides fresh insights into how leadership philosophies impact SRS culture, promote academic success, staff engagement, and school effectiveness. By analysing the various leadership styles in SRSs and emphasizing the crucial role these school directors play in fusing academic objectives with spiritual values to enhance the school's performance, this study adds to the corpus of existing literature (Chamraeun et al., 2026; Khan et al., 2025; Kim et al., 2025; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Lim, 2023; Mok, 2013; Yi et al., 2026).

The impact of servant leadership on staff engagement and school performance in Cambodian SRS settings is not well studied. Little is known about how servant leadership directly impacts the unique challenges encountered by SRSs in this economically distressed region, despite the literature recognizing it as a positive leadership approach that promotes assisting others and developing community. This study will provide light on the relationship between staff experiences and leadership behaviours in SRS workplaces in Cambodia.

Guided by these perspectives, the fundamental purposes of this study were threefold: (1) to explore the relationships among servant leadership, staff engagement, and school performance in SRS settings in Cambodia; (2) to determine if staff engagement contributed more explanatory value to school success than servant leadership and whether servant leadership was linked to staff engagement and school performance; and (3) to solve leadership issues

that SRSs frequently encounter, such as a lack of chances for leadership growth.

The current investigation was guided by the following three corresponding hypotheses: (H1): Staff involvement in SRS settings in Cambodia is significantly positively correlated with servant leadership; (H2): In SRS settings in Cambodia, servant leadership and academic achievement are significantly positively correlated; and (H3): In SRS settings in Cambodia, staff engagement significantly adds to the variance in school performance beyond servant leadership.

The findings may aid SRS executives and practitioners in evaluating leadership development programs that meet the needs of underfunded schools. Understanding leadership strategies connected to staff engagement and school achievement is particularly important when businesses are under increased demand from the workforce, funding, and community needs. People in leadership and innovation roles in SRS contexts in Cambodia can therefore benefit from the study.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

This study used a quantitative, cross-sectional research approach to investigate the relationships between servant leadership, school performance, and staff engagement. A cross-sectional approach permits variable observation as it occurs naturally in the workplace without alteration or intervention (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Fitzgerald et al., 2004; Thompson et al., 2005). When practical and ethical concerns make experimental procedures less viable, this methodology works well for examining leadership and participation in dynamic educational situations. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), and servant leadership theory (Greenleaf, 1977) are all included in the study's integrated theoretical framework. The moral foundation is provided by servant leadership theory through humility, stewardship, and commitment to others (Eva et al., 2018). Social learning theory explains how servant leadership behaviours are modelled and reinforced within organizations, whereas social exchange theory explains how trust and justice create reciprocal relationships that improve engagement and performance (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Wong & Laschinger, 2012).

2.2. Samples of the Study

Teachers and administrators from Cambodia's Secondary Resource Schools make up the study's population. As of 2026, there are 4,524 instructors and 50 Secondary Resources Schools. Thus, the target demographic consists of all school directors and teachers that teach students in grades 7–12 in SRSs throughout Cambodia. One school director and two teachers were chosen from each of the 50 SRSs in Cambodia that made up the study's samples. As a result, 150 participants in all took part in this study.

2.3. Instrument Development

This study included three proven instruments to evaluate school performance, staff engagement, and servant leadership in SRS contexts in Cambodia. The Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA; Laub, 1999), the Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ; Liden et al., 2008), and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9; Schaufeli et al., 2002) were selected because of their strong validation across SRS settings and obvious alignment with the study's objectives. The SLQ assessed servant leadership behaviours as perceived by employees, the UWES-9 tested levels of work engagement, and the OLA assessed school performance using servant-oriented cultural traits and job satisfaction.

1. Seven facets of servant leadership are covered by the SLQ's 28 items: (1) emotional healing; (2) bringing value to the community; (3) conceptual skills; (4) empowering others; (5) helping subordinates grow and thrive; (6) giving subordinates priority; and (7) acting morally. For every issue, a seven-point Likert scale is employed, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). This is a typical framework for evaluating views of behavior and leadership in the workplace (Ehrhart, 2004). Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) state that this structure is directly related to the ideas of organizational performance and employee engagement that were examined in this study. It encapsulates the organizational and interpersonal facets of servant leadership.

2. This study employed the UWES-9, a shortened, validated nine-item version of the original 17-item scale. The UWES-9 has three items for each dimension and a seven-point Likert scale ranging from never (0) to always (6). Schaufeli et al. (2002) state that commitment shows enthusiasm and pride, absorption captures strong focus and

immersion in job duties, and vigour assesses resilience and vitality at work. The UWES-9's reported reliability coefficients, which typically range from 0.85 to 0.92, show strong internal consistency (Schaufeli et al., 2006). The UWES-9's strong validity in both the public and private sectors can help research on employment motivation, engagement, and well-being (Aboramadan & Dahleez, 2020; Akingbola & van den Berg, 2016).

3. The OLA has 60 items with a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) and a six-item Job Satisfaction Scale that measures employees' job satisfaction and engagement. The tool, which facilitates cross-level comparisons and shows how various positions view leadership and business culture, is available to executives, managers, and employees. Field testing including 823 individuals from 41 organizations produced a Cronbach's alpha of 0.98, indicating exceptional internal reliability (Laub, 1999). Subsequent research has confirmed the validity of the OLA in charitable, educational, and service-oriented organizations, supporting its value as a measure of organizational performance (McCann et al., 2014).

Three popular tools were utilized to provide methodological triangulation: the SLQ, UWES, and OLA. Each instrument improved the measurement breadth within a single-method survey design by assessing different but connected facets of leadership, engagement, and organizational performance. By enabling results from one scale to corroborate and validate those from other scales, this convergence enhanced the findings' dependability and clarity. Despite the study's quantitative and cross-sectional design, statistical controls, power analysis, and reliable measures helped to minimize validity issues and avoid overstating causal associations.

2.4. Data Collection Procedures

The invitation email not only described the study and its objectives, but it also requested candid and open feedback. The message emphasized confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary involvement, and the opportunity to omit or skip questions without repercussions. The researcher's contact information, a time estimate of 20 to 25 minutes, and directions on how to finish the survey were also sent.

The information was gathered through a single online SurveyMonkey survey. Our secure, password-protected website does not record any identifying information, such as names, email addresses, or IP addresses. Participants were given three validated tests: the Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ), the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9), and the Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA). These instruments were selected due to their established use in organizational research and strong psychometric dependability. Together, they looked at the three primary research variables: servant leadership, organizational performance, and employee engagement. The survey was available for around three weeks, with weekly reminder emails sent to encourage participation and maintain answer consistency while lowering fatigue (Dillman et al., 2014; Nulty, 2008).

Because the entire data collection procedure was conducted online, participants could freely and secretly complete the survey from any location. There was no direct interaction with participants throughout the process in order to minimize potential bias and ensure participant anonymity. After the survey was concluded, responses were reviewed for accuracy and completeness. Duplicate or incomplete items were removed prior to analysis.

2.5. Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis in this study carefully examined and examined quantitative data in order to identify connections between the study variables and offer solutions to the research objectives. The objective was to investigate the connections between servant leadership, staff engagement, and school performance in SRS environments in Cambodia.

With an emphasis on accuracy, transparency, and repeatability, the analytical process adhered to the recommendations stated by Field (2018) and Creswell and Creswell (2018). All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 32.0). Correlational analysis and hierarchical multiple regression were used to examine the relationships between servant leadership, staff engagement, and school performance.

The data was examined using IBM SPSS Statistics. In order to gather participant profiles and identify general trends in the research variables, descriptive statistics were employed in preliminary analyses. Reliability analysis was used

to assess the internal consistency of the composite measures. Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was used to examine the relationships among servant leadership, employee engagement, and organizational performance. Simple linear regression and multiple linear regression were used to examine hypotheses 1 and 2, respectively. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis assessed Hypothesis 3 by investigating whether staff engagement explained additional variance in school performance beyond servant leadership. For every test, the threshold for statistical significance was established at $p < .05$.

2.6. Ethical Consideration

Everyone who took part did so voluntarily. The electronic informed consent form described the study's objectives, the data collection process, and the participants' rights, including the ability to stop participating at any time without paying any fees. No IP addresses, email addresses, or names were collected, and all survey responses were kept anonymous. Participant privacy was protected throughout the investigation with extra precautions. Because of SurveyMonkey settings, IP addresses, email addresses, and other identifying information could not be gathered. Survey responses were not linked to specific organizations, and individual data were not available to participating agencies. All electronic documents were stored on a password-protected, encrypted device that was only accessible by the researcher. These materials included SPSS datasets, summary reports, and raw survey data.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Findings

Descriptive statistics were used to begin the data analysis in order to summarize the research variables and search for general trends in the data. Reliability analysis confirmed the acceptable internal consistency of the composite metrics. Correlation and regression analysis were then used to examine the relationships among servant leadership, employee engagement, and organizational performance. The data was examined using IBM SPSS Statistics. In early research, descriptive statistics were employed to gather study data and identify general trends. Reliability analysis was used to assess the internal consistency of the composite measures.

Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was used to examine the relationships among servant leadership, employee engagement, and organizational performance. Regression analyses were used to test the study hypotheses using multiple linear regression and hierarchical multiple regression in order to evaluate predictive relationships among the study variables and determine whether employee engagement explained additional variance in organizational performance beyond servant leadership. Prior to hypothesis testing, data were checked for unusual response patterns and out-of-range values. The correlation and regression assumptions (linearity, homoscedasticity, multicollinearity, and normality of residuals) were evaluated using standard SPSS diagnostics.

Reliability and internal consistency of the composite measures were evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Table 1.1 provides a summary of the findings. Servant leadership had strong internal consistency based on the seven SLQ subscale aggregate scores ($\alpha = 0.91$). Employee involvement is measured by the Utrecht Work involvement Scale (UWES-9), which shown strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.82$). Organizational performance as determined by the Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) also demonstrated excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.95$). Overall, the dependability coefficients exceeded the recommended 0.70 level and demonstrated good to exceptional internal consistency.

Table 1.1: Reliability Analysis for Study Variables

Study Variable	No. Items	α
SLQ	7	0.91
UWES-9	9	0.82
OLA	66	0.95

Surprisingly, Cronbach's alpha for servant leadership reflects dependability determined using seven SLQ subscale composite scores from the original 28-item measure. The reliability of employee involvement was assessed using the nine-item UWES-9 scale. Organizational performance reliability was calculated using all 66 OLA components. All dependability coefficients above the recommended cut off of 0.70, indicating satisfactory to remarkable internal consistency.

In term of descriptive statistics findings, descriptive statistics were calculated for the three

primary study metrics: school performance, staff engagement, and servant leadership. The observed ranges, mean scores, and standard deviations are shown in Table 1.2 below. The scores for staff engagement (STAENG) varied from 0.83 to 5.00 ($M = 4.25$, $S.D. = 0.81$), school performance (SCOPER) from 3.37 to 4.99 ($M = 4.50$, $S.D. = 0.46$), and servant leadership (SERLEA) from 3.79 to 7.00 ($M = 5.95$, $S.D. = 0.75$).

Table 1.2: Study variables, Mean (M), and Standard Deviation (S.D.)

Study Variable	M	S.D.
SLQ: SERLEA	5.95	0.75
UWES-9: STAENG	4.25	0.81
OLA: SCOPER	4.50	0.46

Regarding of outcomes of bivariate associations, Pearson Product-moment Correlation Coefficients were used to examine the relationships among servant leadership, employee engagement, and organizational performance. Table 1.3 displays the correlation study's results. There was a substantial association ($p < 0.001$, two-tailed) between employee engagement and organizational performance, and servant leadership was favourably and strongly associated with both. All constructs were measured using self-report at a single time point, despite the procedural safeguards described in the Methods section. The findings are thought to be associations that common method variance could affect.

Table 1.3: Correlation of Study Variables

Study Variable	SERLEA	STAENG	SCOPER
SERLEA	-	0.65***	0.75***
STAENG	0.65***	-	0.65***
SCOPER	0.75***	0.65***	-

Note: *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed)

For more details, the results of hypothesis 1 (SERLEA and STAENG) were presented.

Table 1.4: Simple Linear Regression Predicting STAENG

Predictor	β	R^2	F	P
SERLEA	0.65	0.30	16.93	< 0.001

Based on Table 1.4 above, a simple linear regression analysis was used to assess the significance of SERLEA as a predictor of STAENG .

The regression model was statistically significant ($F(1,39) = 16.93, p < 0.001$), and the SER-LEA accounted for approximately 30.3% of the variation in STAENNG ($R^2 = 0.30$). The discovery that SERLEA was a significant positive predictor of STAENG ($\beta = 0.65$) supported hypothesis 1.

Regarding of the results of hypothesis 2 (SERLEA and SCOPER), the Table 1.5 is provided the results.

Table 1.5: Multiple Regression Predicting STAENG

Predictor	β	R^2	F	P
SERLEA	0.75	0.50	38.38	< 0.001

Referring to the Table 1.5 above, the multiple linear regression analysis was used to examine the relevance of SERLEA as a predictor of SCOPER. The regression model showed statistical significance ($F(1,39) = 38.38, p < 0.001$), with SERLEA explaining nearly 50.3% of the variance in SCO-PER ($R^2 = 0.50$). The result that SERLEA was a significant positive predictor of SCOPER ($\beta = 0.75$) confirmed hypothesis 2.

Results of hypothesis 3 (STAENG and SCOPER) is presented as shown in Table 1.6 below:

Table 1.6: Hierarchical Regression Predicting SCOPER

Ste	Predict or	β	R^2	ΔR^2	F/ ΔF	P
1	SERLEA	0.70	0.50	-	38.38	< 0.001
2	SERLEA	0.53	0.50	0.08	7.96	0.008
	STAENG	0.34	-	-	-	0.008

As shown in Table 1.6 above, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was employed to ascertain if STA-ENG explained extra variance in SCO-PER beyond servant leadership. SER-LEA ($R^2 = 0.50, F(1,39) = 38.38, p < 0.001$) explained a significant portion of the variance in SCO-PER in Step 1. When STA-ENG was introduced in Step 2, the explained variance increased statistically significantly ($\Delta R^2 = 0.08, \Delta F(1,38) = 7.96, p = 0.008$). STA-ENG ($\beta = 0.34, p = 0.008$) and SERLEA ($\beta = 0.53, p < 0.01$) remained significant predictors of STAPER, which supported hypothesis 3. In addition to statistical significance, effect sizes show substantively meaningful

associations in this applied SRSs context (e.g., $R^2 \approx 0.50$ indicates SERLEA accounts for a significant portion of variance in perceived SCOPER, and $\Delta R^2 \approx 0.09$ indicates engagement adds non-trivial explanatory value).

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. Relationship Between STAENG and SCOPER

The results demonstrated that higher levels of servant leadership are associated with higher levels of STAENG among SRS staff in Cambodia. This study suggests that leadership actions affect how staff view and engage with their jobs. From the perspective of social learning, staff may respond to leadership behaviours they observe and experience at work, particularly when leaders consistently demonstrate respect, engagement, and support (Bandura, 1977). In the current investigation, higher SERLEA levels were linked to higher STAENG levels. This pattern suggests that leadership traits manifest in STA-ENG through consistent interactions and mode led behaviours. The results related to Hypothesis 1 are in line with the study's emphasis on understanding leadership tactics that affect STAENG in SRS contexts in Cambodia. The results demonstrate that the research question pertaining to Hypothesis 1 was adequately addressed. All things considered, these findings demonstrate how important leadership behaviour is in impacting STAENG in SRS environments in Cambodia. This conclusion practically suggests that SRS leaders seeking to enhance [engagement/performance] should prioritize [servant-leadership initiatives], even if they acknowledge that the cross-sectional design does not prove causation.

3.2.2. Relationship Between SERLEA and SCOPER

The regression results show that higher SERLEA levels are associated with higher SCOPER levels. This finding demonstrates a clear relationship between leadership strategies in Cambodia and organizational effectiveness in SRS settings. The servant leadership ideology emphasizes developing trust, helping others, and achieving shared goals (Greenleaf, 1977; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Liden et al., 2008; Yi et al., 2026). This study found that businesses with higher levels of servant leadership also performed better as an organization. These results provide credence to the notion that SRSs might benefit from

supportive and relationship-centered leadership approaches. These findings align with the study's objective, which was to examine the relationship between leadership styles and school effectiveness in SRS settings (Chamraeun et al., 2026; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Lim, 2023; Yi et al., 2026). The results demonstrate the applicability of servant leadership in the examined educational environment. All things considered, the research issue pertaining to Hypothesis 2 was well covered.

3.2.3. Relationship Between STAENG and SCOPER

The results of the hierarchical regression analysis demonstrated that STAENG considerably contributed to the increased variance in SCOPER after SERLEA was included in the regression model. This finding suggests that STAENG enhances comprehension of SCO-PER by going beyond leadership behaviour. SERLEA and STAENG were positioned in relation to SCO-PER in this study. The results demonstrate that STA-ENG and SER-LEA function as complementary but distinct components in the SCO-PER explanation (Chamraeun et al., 2026; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Lim, 2023; Yi et al., 2026). Although SER-LEA was still a powerful predictor, staff involvement revealed more information, suggesting that leadership behaviour does not fully explain performance results in SRS contexts in Cambodia. The social exchange theory (SET) states that SRS employees may reciprocate leadership behaviours. Increased STAENG, which is associated with better SCOPER, may result from supportive leadership. STAENG, which went beyond leadership behaviour to explain SCO-PER, captured one such staff response in this study. According to social exchange theory, higher SLQ ratings should be linked to higher OLA perceptions and better UWES participation because supportive treatment is reciprocated by more effort and commitment (Chamraeun et al., 2026; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Lim, 2023; Yi et al., 2026).

4. CONCLUSION

The relationships between school performance, staff engagement, and servant leadership in SRS contexts in Cambodia were examined in this quantitative, cross-sectional study. This SRS typically deals with ongoing organizational difficulties and budgetary constraints, which highlights the necessity of leadership strategies

that support employees (Chamraeun et al., 2026; Hang-Chuon, 2019; Lim, 2023; Mok et al., 2026; Yi et al., 2026). This study contributes to the body of literature by examining the relationship between servant leadership and staff engagement and school performance in an SRS environment that has not received much empirical scrutiny.

These results extend the trend into an SRS setting (Chamraeun et al., 2026; Yi et al., 2026) and corroborate previous research demonstrating a positive correlation between servant leadership and engagement-related outcomes (e.g., Liden et al., 2008; Eva et al., 2018). The incremental contribution of engagement to perceived organizational functioning is consistent with non-profit findings reported in Aboramadan and Dahleez (2020) and with work using the OLA in rural service settings (McCann et al., 2014), while also emphasizing the necessity of longitudinal designs to test directionality. All things considered, the findings advance our understanding of leadership and participation in SRS environments in Cambodia. By focusing on a local non-profit setting that has received little prior attention, this study builds on servant leadership research and highlights the necessity of examining staff involvement in addition to leadership techniques. The results highlight how crucial relational leadership is in assisting SRSs in navigating difficult organizational environments.

Additionally, the data offer valuable information to schools and SRS leaders. Leadership abilities that assist employees and foster engagement may be particularly important in SRS environments, where schools routinely deal with staffing shortages, financial uncertainty, and shifting worker needs (Chamraeun et al., 2026; Hang-Chuon et al., 2019; Lim, 2023; Mok et al., 2026; Yi et al., 2026). As noted throughout the study, limitations related to design, sample size, self-report measures, and contextual scope should be considered when interpreting these results.

The findings provide useful information, but they also suggest areas for additional research. To guide future study, the following recommendations are offered: (1) future studies may collect SLQ, UWES, and OLA data at three periods over a 12-month period in order to assess temporal ordering; (2) researchers may compare SRSs with students in regular schools with similar demographics in order to examine contextual moderating; and (3) researchers may use staff

questionnaire data on retention, absenteeism, or service delivery in conjunction with supervisor-rated performance.

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