

## **Why Do Some Schools Perform Better Than Others? Exploring the Black Box of the School Effect**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the factors behind the "school effect" or "school value added", defined as the difference between students' actual performance and their predicted performance based on background characteristics. Analysing a nationally representative sample of Italian students who took standardized academic achievement tests in grades 2, 5, and 8 (INVALSI), the paper explores the impact of factors beyond individual characteristics, including the quality of classmates and the attributes of teachers and principals. Regarding teachers, the study examines gender, educational qualifications, experience, and contract type (fixed-term or permanent). For school principals, it considers leadership style (autocratic or democratic), organizational approach, and the school climate they help foster, assessing how these factors may affect students' learning achievements. The literature concerning the teacher value added is extensive (Carrel et al. 2010, Chetty et al. 2014, Barrios- Fernández and Riudavets-Barcons, 2024), whereas the contribution of school principals is less explored, especially in Italy. Utilizing multilevel regression models and factor analysis to uncover latent dimensions such as leadership style and school climate, the analysis investigates how these variables influence student outcomes and reduce the unexplained variance in learning achievements across classes and schools. The findings provide insights into the determinants of school effectiveness, thereby informing educational policy and school management strategies.

## References

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