Search for the standard model Higgs boson produced in association with a vector boson and decaying into a tau pair in pp collisions at \( \sqrt{s} = 8\) TeV with the ATLAS detector

ATLAS Collaboration, Hara K., Kim S.H., Okawa H., Sato K., Ukegawa F.

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Search for the standard model Higgs boson produced in association with a vector boson and decaying into a tau pair in \( \sqrt{s} = 8 \) TeV with the ATLAS detector

G. Aad et al.*
(ATLAS Collaboration)
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A search for the standard model Higgs boson produced in association with a vector boson with the decay \( H \rightarrow \tau\tau \) is presented. The data correspond to 20.3 fb\(^{-1}\) of integrated luminosity from proton-proton collisions at \( \sqrt{s} = 8 \) TeV recorded by the ATLAS experiment at the LHC during 2012. The data agree with the background expectation, and 95% confidence-level upper limits are placed on the cross section of this process. The observed (expected) limit, expressed in terms of the signal strength \( \mu = \sigma/\sigma_{\text{SM}} \) for \( m_H = 125 \) GeV, is \( \mu < 5.6 \) (3.7). The measured value of the signal strength is \( \mu = 2.3 \pm 1.6 \).

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I. INTRODUCTION

The investigation of the origin of electroweak symmetry breaking and the experimental confirmation of the Brout-Englert-Higgs mechanism [1–6] is one of the primary goals of the physics program at the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) [7]. With the discovery of a Higgs boson with a mass of 125 GeV by the ATLAS [8] and CMS [9] Collaborations, an important milestone has been reached. To date, measurements of the couplings of the discovered particle [10–13] as well as tests of the spin-parity quantum numbers [14–16] are consistent with the predictions for the standard model (SM) Higgs boson.

In this paper, a search for the associated production of the Higgs boson with a vector boson, where the Higgs boson decays to a pair of tau leptons, is presented. This production mechanism is referred to in the following as \( VH \), where \( V \) is either a \( W \) or \( Z \) boson. The analysis is part of a comprehensive program by the ATLAS Collaboration at the LHC to measure the Higgs boson production mechanisms, its couplings, and other characteristics. Similar studies have been performed with the \( VH \) production mechanism and subsequent decays of the Higgs boson to \( WW^* \) [17,18] and \( b\bar{b} \) [19,20] by the ATLAS and CMS Collaborations and to tau lepton pairs [21] by the CMS Collaboration. The associated production is particularly useful in the decays of the Higgs boson to tau lepton pairs when both tau leptons decay hadronically, where the trigger can be a challenge. For \( VH \) production and leptonic decays of the \( W \) or \( Z \) boson, the \( W \) and \( Z \) boson decay products satisfy the trigger requirements with high efficiency.

\( VH \rightarrow W/Z\tau\tau \) production results in several different final-state signatures, which are exploited by an event categorization designed to achieve both a good signal-to-background ratio and good resolution for the reconstructed \( H \rightarrow \tau^+\tau^- \) invariant mass. Signatures consistent with \( 2H \) and \( WH \) production are exploited, where only the \( W \rightarrow \ell\nu \) and the \( Z \rightarrow \ell\ell \) decays are considered, with \( \ell = e, \mu \). The \( H \rightarrow \tau^+\tau^- \) decay signal is reconstructed in the following two possible final states: both tau leptons decay to hadrons and a neutrino (\( r_{\text{had}} \)), or one tau lepton decays leptonically (\( \tau \rightarrow \ell\nu \)) and one to hadron(s) and a neutrino (\( r_{\text{lep}} \)).

II. ATLAS DETECTOR AND OBJECT RECONSTRUCTION

The ATLAS detector [22] is a multipurpose detector with a cylindrical geometry.\(^1\) It consists of three subsystems: an inner detector (ID) surrounded by a thin superconducting solenoid, a calorimeter system, and a muon spectrometer in a toroidal magnetic field.

The ID tracking system reconstructs the trajectory of charged particles in the pseudorapidity range \( |\eta| < 2.5 \). It enables the accurate determination of charged-particle momentum and the position of \( b \)-hadron decay vertices. The inner detector is built from three concentric detector systems surrounded by a solenoid providing a uniform axial 2 T field. The three detector systems are the pixel

\(^1\)The ATLAS experiment uses a right-handed coordinate system with its origin at the nominal interaction point (IP) in the center of the detector and the \( z \) axis along the beam direction. The \( x \) axis points from the IP to the center of the LHC ring, and the \( y \) axis points upward. Cylindrical coordinates \((r, \phi)\) are used in the transverse \((x, y)\) plane, \( \phi \) being the azimuthal angle around the beam direction. The pseudorapidity is defined in terms of the polar angle \( \theta \) as \( \eta = -\ln \tan(\theta/2) \). The angular distance \( \Delta R \) in the \( \eta-\phi \) space is defined as \( \Delta R = \sqrt{(\Delta \eta)^2 + (\Delta \phi)^2} \).
detector, the silicon microstrip detector, and the transition radiation tracker.

The ID tracking system is surrounded by high-granularity lead/liquid-argon (LAr) sampling electromagnetic calorimeters covering the pseudorapidity range $|\eta| < 3.2$. A steel/scintillator tile calorimeter provides hadronic energy measurements in the pseudorapidity region $|\eta| < 1.7$. In the regions $1.5 < |\eta| < 4.9$, the hadronic energy measurements are provided by two end-cap LAr calorimeters using copper or tungsten as absorbers.

The muon spectrometer surrounds the calorimeters. It extends tracking beyond the calorimeter, which enables the identification of muons and a precision measurement of their properties. It consists of three large superconducting eight-coil toroids, a system of tracking chambers, and detectors for triggering. Muon tracking is performed with monitored drift tubes covering $|\eta| < 2.7$ and cathode strip chambers covering $|\eta| > 2.0$, while trigger information is collected in the resistive plate chambers in the barrel ($|\eta| < 1.05$) and thin-gap chambers in the end-cap regions ($1.05 < |\eta| < 2.4$).

A three-level trigger system [23] is used to select events. A hardware-based level-1 trigger uses a subset of detector information to reduce the event rate to a value of 75 kHz or less. The rate of accepted events is then reduced to about 400 Hz by two software-based trigger levels, level-2 and the event filter.

A primary vertex is identified for each event. The reconstructed primary vertex position [24] is required to be consistent with the interaction region and to have at least five associated tracks with transverse momentum $p_T > 400$ MeV; when more than one such vertex is found, the vertex with the largest summed $p_T^2$ of the associated tracks is chosen.

The tau leptons that decay to hadron(s) and a neutrino, or $\tau_{\text{had}}$, are reconstructed using clusters of energy deposited in the electromagnetic and hadronic calorimeters that are matched to tracks in the inner detector. The identification algorithm separates $\tau_{\text{had}}$ candidates from jets using $\tau_{\text{had}}$ decay characteristics, namely the number of tracks, the collimation of energy deposits in the calorimeter, and the mass of the $\tau_{\text{had}}$ candidate. The analysis presented here utilizes $\tau_{\text{had}}$ candidates seeded by an anti-$k_t$ jet algorithm with radius parameter $R = 0.4$ [25,26], with jet $p_T > 20$ GeV and $|\eta| < 2.5$. The $\tau_{\text{had}}$ candidates must have only one or three associated tracks in a cone of size $\Delta R = 0.2$. All $\tau_{\text{had}}$ candidates are required to have charge $\pm 1$, calculated by summing the charges of the associated tracks. The $\tau_{\text{had}}$ decay products are identified by a boosted decision tree (BDT) [27], which returns a number between zero and one depending on how jetlike or tau-like the reconstructed object is. The BDT selects taus with a 55%–60% efficiency (medium $\tau_{\text{had}}$ identification) depending on the $\tau_{\text{had}}$ number of tracks, $\eta$, and $p_T$. Dedicated algorithms reject candidates originating from electrons and muons.

Electron candidates are reconstructed from clusters of energy deposited in the electromagnetic calorimeter that are matched to tracks in the inner detector. They are required to be within the pseudorapidity range $|\eta| < 2.47$ and must have shower shape and track measurements that fulfill the set of medium quality criteria [28], which provides electron identification efficiencies of 80%–90% depending on the transverse energy $E_T$, and $\eta$ of the electron candidate. Electrons are considered isolated based on tracking and calorimeter information. The calorimeter isolation requires the sum of the transverse energy in the calorimeter in a cone of size $\Delta R = 0.4$ around the electron cluster, divided by the $E_T$ of the electron cluster, to be less than 8% of the electron cluster $E_T$. The track-based isolation requires the sum of the transverse momenta of tracks within a cone of $\Delta R = 0.2$ around the electron, divided by the $E_T$ of the electron cluster, to be less than 8% of the electron cluster $E_T$.

Muons are considered isolated based on tracking and calorimeter information with similar requirements as are used for electrons, with the muon track $p_T$ in place of the electron cluster $E_T$.

Jets are reconstructed from clusters in the calorimeter using the anti-$k_t$, $R = 0.4$ jet algorithm. Corrections for the detector response are applied [30,31]. To reduce the contamination of jets by additional interactions in the same or neighboring bunch crossings (pileup), tracks originating from the primary vertex must contribute at least 50% of the total scalar sum of track $p_T$ within the jets. This requirement is only applied to jets with $p_T < 50$ GeV and $|\eta| < 2.4$.

A $b$-tagging algorithm that relies on tracking information and $b$-hadron characteristics, such as the presence of a decay that can be separated from the primary vertex, is used to identify $b$-jets [32]. The operating point for $b$-tagging chosen for this analysis has a 70% efficiency for $b$-jets in simulated $t\bar{t}$ events with a corresponding misidentification probability for light-quark jets of 1%.

Missing transverse momentum, with magnitude $E_T^{\text{miss}}$, is reconstructed using the energy deposits in calorimeter cells calibrated according to the reconstructed physics objects ($e, \mu, \tau_{\text{had}},$ jets) with which they are associated. Energy deposits not associated with a physics object tend to have low $p_T$ and are scaled by a dedicated algorithm tuned to improve the resolution in high-pileup conditions [33].
III. DATA AND SIMULATION SAMPLES

The analysis uses those data collected when the detector systems were certified as functioning properly. The resulting data sample corresponds to an integrated luminosity of 20.3 fb\(^{-1}\) of \(pp\) collisions at \(\sqrt{s} = 8\) TeV. Samples of signal and background events are simulated using a number of Monte Carlo (MC) generators, listed in Table I. The cross-section values to which the simulation is normalized and the perturbative order in quantum chromodynamics (QCD) for each calculation are also provided. For the signal samples, the central value of the factorization scale equals the sum of the Higgs boson mass and the vector boson mass.

The generated events are combined with minimum-bias events simulated using the AU2 [44] parameter tuning of PYTHIA8 [45] to take into account multiple interactions. All simulated events undergo full simulation of the ATLAS detector response [46] using the GEANT4[47] simulation program before being processed through the same reconstruction algorithms as the data. The signal samples use the CTEQ6L1 [48] PDF set.

IV. EVENT CATEGORIZATION AND SELECTION

A characteristic of \(VH\) production is the presence of a \(W\) or \(Z\) boson in each signal event. The analysis categories are optimized to exploits the leptonic decays of the vector bosons that provide a candidate for the electron or muon triggers and to reduce the backgrounds from multijet processes. The presence of additional leptonic and/or hadronic tau decays from the Higgs boson allows for the event selection to include a requirement on three or four objects, depending on the channel, to define the final state.

The single-lepton and dilepton triggers used to select the events in this analysis are listed in Table II. The \(p_T\) requirements on the particle candidates in the analysis are 2 GeV higher than the trigger thresholds, to ensure that the trigger is maximally efficient.

The four analysis event categories are determined by the type of associated vector boson and the topology of the \(H \to \tau \tau\) decay. These are summarized in Table III and described below.

(i) The \(W \to \mu/\nu, H \to \tau_{\text{lep}} \tau_{\text{had}}\) channel: These events are required to have one isolated electron, one isolated muon, and one \(\tau_{\text{had}}\) candidate. The electron and muon candidates are required to have an electric charge of the same sign to reduce the backgrounds from \(Z/\gamma^* \to \tau \tau +\text{jets}\) events. \(W\) events, and \(\tau\) events where both \(W\) bosons decay leptonically. The electron or muon candidate with the higher \(p_T\) is assumed to arise from the \(W\) boson decay, which is correct 75% of the time in the MC simulation. The \(\tau_{\text{had}}\) candidate is required to have \(p_T > 25\) GeV and to have opposite electric charge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trigger</th>
<th>Trigger threshold(s) (GeV)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single electron</td>
<td>(p_T^e &gt; 24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single muon</td>
<td>(p_T^\mu &gt; 24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined electron and muon</td>
<td>(p_T^e &gt; 12) (p_T^\mu &gt; 8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symmetric dielectron</td>
<td>(p_T^{\ell\ell} &gt; 12) (p_T^{\ell\ell} &gt; 12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymmetric dielectron</td>
<td>(p_T^{\ell\ell} &gt; 24) (p_T^{\ell\ell} &gt; 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symmetric dimuon</td>
<td>(p_T^{\mu\mu} &gt; 13) (p_T^{\mu\mu} &gt; 13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymmetric dimuon</td>
<td>(p_T^{\mu\mu} &gt; 18) (p_T^{\mu\mu} &gt; 8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The $W \rightarrow \mu/e$, $H \rightarrow \tau_{lep}\tau_{had}$ channel: Events containing exactly one $\tau_{had}$ candidate and two leptons are required to have one isolated electron or muon and two $\tau_{had}$ candidates. The two $\tau_{had}$ candidates are required to have $p_T > 20$ GeV and to have opposite charge. The lepton is assumed to come from the W boson. Events containing $b$-tagged jets with $p_T > 30$ GeV are vetoed to reduce the background from $t\bar{t}$ events. The scalar sum of the $p_T$ of the lepton and two $\tau_{had}$ candidates must be greater than 100 GeV in order to reduce the background from multijet events. The transverse mass $m_T$ of the lepton and $E_T^{miss}$ must be greater than 20 GeV. To reduce the background from events with jets misidentified as $\tau_{had}$ candidates, $0.8 < \Delta R(\tau_{had}^1, \tau_{had}^2) < 2.8$ is required, which results in a reduction of the background from misidentified jets by almost a factor of 2 while losing less than a third of the signal events.

The $Z \rightarrow \mu/e$, $H \rightarrow \tau_{lep}\tau_{had}$ channel: Signal candidates are selected by requiring exactly two electron (muon) candidates and two $\tau_{had}$ candidates. The two light leptons are assigned to the $Z$ boson decay, are required to have the same flavor, and are required to have opposite electric charge. The invariant mass of the two $\tau_{had}$ candidates assigned to the $Z$ boson must be between 80 and 120 GeV. The remaining light lepton and the $\tau_{had}$ candidate are assumed to originate from the Higgs boson decay. They are thus required to have opposite charge and the scalar sum of their $p_T$ values must be greater than 60 GeV.

After all the analysis selection criteria are applied, the number of events migrating from other Higgs boson channels, in particular from $VH$ production where the Higgs boson decays into $WZ$, is found to be negligible. This analysis selection has an acceptance of 1.9% for the combined $WH$ channels, where the denominator requires a light lepton from the $W$ boson decay ($W \rightarrow \mu/e, \tau_{lep}/\nu$) and for the Higgs boson to decay through the considered tau decay chains ($H \rightarrow \tau_{lep}\tau_{had}$ or $H \rightarrow \tau_{had}\tau_{lep}$).
H → τ_{had}M^\mathrm{lep}, and the numerator includes all analysis cuts. The acceptance for the combined ZH channels is 5.3%, where the denominator requires a light lepton pair from the Z boson decay (Z → μμ/ee) and for the Higgs boson decay through the considered tau decay chains (H → τ_{lep}M^\mathrm{had} or H → τ_{had}M^\mathrm{had}), and the numerator includes all analysis cuts.

**V. BACKGROUND ESTIMATION**

The number of expected background events and the associated kinematic distributions are derived using data-driven methods as well as simulation. There are two classes of backgrounds for this analysis: processes in which all three or four final-state lepton and τ_{had} candidates are actually produced, and those in which some lepton or τ_{had} candidates are actually misidentified jets. Jets are most likely to be misidentified as τ_{had} objects, although the rate at which jets mimic electrons is, in some instances, not negligible.

Backgrounds containing real electrons, muons, and τ_{had} leptons primarily arise from diboson, Z → ττ, and ττ events. These backgrounds are determined from Monte Carlo simulation. The background arising from jets misidentified as electron or τ_{had} candidates is estimated using a data-driven method, the so-called fake-factor method. The τ_{had} fake factor is defined as the ratio of the number of τ_{had} candidates identified with medium τ_{had} criteria to the number satisfying the loosened but not the medium identification criteria. The electron fake factor is defined as the number of electrons satisfying the identification criteria divided by the number of those that do not. The fake-factor measurements are described below. For the W → μμ/ev, H → τ_{lep}τ_{had} channel both the τ_{had} and electron fake factors are used, while for the other three channels the τ_{had} fake-factor method alone performs well enough for modeling the background from misidentified jets. The background from misidentified jets is the dominant background, or comparable to the background from diboson production, in all channels of the analysis.

Since the fake rates are sensitive to the underlying physics of the event, the fake factors are measured in a region with similar kinematics and composition of misidentified objects to the signal region. Applying the analysis selection to MC simulation reveals that Z/γ^* + jets events are the primary source of the background from misidentified jets in the analysis. The rate of jets mimicking the τ_{had} selection is therefore measured using a tag-and-probe method from jets in well-reconstructed Z/γ^* → μμ + jets events. The tag here is the dimuon system and the probe is the additional jet(s) that may be suitably taumlke (pass medium τ_{had} identification) or suitably jetlike (pass a loosened τ_{had} identification but fail the medium one). The fake factor is measured as a function of the jet p_T, η, and number of associated tracks. The fake rate for electrons is calculated separately, using well-reconstructed Z → μμ events containing additional jets or photons, using the same procedure as described above.

To estimate the background from misidentified jets for the WH and ZH signal regions, these factors are then applied to the event combinations that have all selections the same as the signal selection with the exception that at least one τ_{had} candidate has passed the loosened but failed the medium τ_{had} identification. For the W → μμ/ev, H → τ_{lep}τ_{had} channel, a contribution from jets misidentified as the electron candidate is also taken into consideration.

### Table IV

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Loosened signal selection</th>
<th>Validation regions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W → μμ/ev, H → τ_{lep}τ_{had}</td>
<td>One isolated electron, one isolated muon, p_T(τ_{had}) &gt; 25 GeV</td>
<td>Z → ττ: Z mass selection (60–120 GeV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W → μμ/ev, H → τ_{had}τ_{had}</td>
<td>Two (opposite charge) τ_{had} candidates, one electron or muon, or two opposite charge τ_{had} candidates</td>
<td>Z → ττ: Z mass selection (&gt; 60 GeV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z → μμ/ee, H → τ_{lep}τ_{had}</td>
<td>Three isolated electrons or muons, opposite-charge, same-flavor lepton pair, or two opposite-charge τ_{had} candidates, each with opposite charge to the unpaired lepton</td>
<td>Z → ττ: Z mass selection (60–120 GeV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z → μμ/ee, H → τ_{had}τ_{had}</td>
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### Table IV continued

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</tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE IV.** The loosened signal selection and the list of validation regions used to validate the fake-factor method are given for each of the four analysis channels. Missing mass calculator (MMC) and M_{2T} are mass reconstruction techniques defined in Sec. VI.
account using objects that have failed electron identification. Since many background events contain multiple jets that could potentially pass the τ had or electron identification, more than one possible combination of passing and failing objects is allowed to contribute per event. In these cases, the multiple copies of the events contribute with the various weights calculated for each combination of objects considered.

The fake-factor method is validated independently in each of the four analysis channels. In each case a comparison between the data and the background prediction is made with a loosened signal selection, which provides a test of the method with a large number of events in a data set that is dominated by the background from misidentified jets. In addition, a series of orthogonal regions are formed to validate the method for each of the analysis channels. The definition of the loosened signal selection and validation regions are given for each channel in Table IV.

Example distributions of the $p_T$ of $\tau_{\text{had}}$ candidates for the loosened signal selection and validation regions are shown in Fig. 1 for the $W \rightarrow \mu\nu/\tau\tau, H \rightarrow \tau\tau\tau\tau$ channel. MC simulation studies show that this $Z \rightarrow \tau\tau$ validation region is dominated by $Z \rightarrow \tau\tau$ events where an additional jet in the event is misidentified as a $\tau_{\text{had}}$ candidate. Likewise, MC simulation studies show that this $t\bar{t}$ validation region is dominated by $t\bar{t}$ events where at least one $W$ boson decays leptonically and where a jet is misidentified as a $\tau_{\text{had}}$ candidate. The number of expected signal events and estimated total number of background events for each channel in the signal region are given in Table V.

VI. MASS RECONSTRUCTION

The result is extracted using a fit to the reconstructed invariant mass or transverse mass spectrum of the $\tau_{\text{lep}}\tau_{\text{had}}$ or $\tau_{\text{had}}\tau_{\text{had}}$ pair. The mass is reconstructed using one of

![Graphs showing distributions of transverse energy of $\tau_{\text{had}}$ candidates for validation of the fake factor method.](image-url)
two methods, depending on the signal category. The Higgs boson mass in \( ZH \) events is calculated using the missing mass calculator (MMC) method described in Ref. [49]. This method takes the \( x \) and \( y \) components of the event missing transverse momentum as an input as well as the visible mass of the \( \tau_{\text{lep}}-\tau_{\text{had}} \) or \( \tau_{\text{had}}-\tau_{\text{had}} \) pair. Because the neutrinos from the tau decays have unknown \( x \), \( y \), and \( z \) components and there are multiple neutrinos (two for the \( \tau_{\text{had}}-\tau_{\text{had}} \) case and three for the \( \tau_{\text{lep}}-\tau_{\text{had}} \) case), the system is underconstrained. A scan is therefore performed over possible momenta for the neutrinos, and a most-likely di-\( \tau \) mass is found.

In the \( WH \) category, the presence of an additional neutrino from the \( W \) decay makes the MMC mass reconstruction not optimal. In this case the \( M_{2T} \) variable defined in Ref. [50] is used, which calculates an
event-by-event lower bound (within the detector resolution) of the transverse mass of the $\tau_{\text{had}} - \tau_{\text{had}}$ or $\tau_{\text{lep}} - \tau_{\text{had}}$ pair by performing a minimization over the allowed phase space of possible momenta of assumed neutrinos in the event. In the general case described in Ref. [50] the only constraint on the phase space is that the sum of the transverse momenta of all neutrinos equals the observed $E_T^{\text{miss}}$. For this analysis, the additional constraint that the invariant mass of the lepton and neutrino assigned to the $W$ boson be equal to, or as close as possible to, the mass of the $W$ boson is imposed. The mass distributions after all the selection criteria are applied are shown in Fig. 2.

VII. SYSTEMATIC UNCERTAINTIES

The numbers of expected signal and background events, and the distributions of the discriminating variables $M_{\text{MMC}}$ and $M_{2T}$, are affected by systematic uncertainties. These uncertainties are discussed below and are grouped into three categories: experimental uncertainties, background modeling uncertainties, and theoretical uncertainties. For all uncertainties, the effects on both the total signal and background yields and on the shape of the mass distributions, $M_{\text{MMC}}$ or $M_{2T}$ respectively, are evaluated. Table VI shows the systematic uncertainties, their impact on the number of expected events for the signal and the relevant background, and their impact on the postfit signal strength, $\mu$, where $\mu = \sigma/\sigma_{\text{SM}}$ and the value $\mathcal{B}(H \rightarrow \tau^+ \tau^-)$ corresponds to the standard model prediction for $m_H = 125$ GeV.

Experimental systematic uncertainties arise from uncertainties on trigger efficiencies, particle reconstruction, and identification, as well as uncertainties on the energy scale and resolution of jets, leptons, and $\tau_{\text{had}}$ candidates. The efficiency-related uncertainties are estimated in data using tag-and-probe techniques. The MC samples used are corrected for differences in these efficiencies between data and simulation and the associated uncertainties are propagated through the analysis. The lepton energy scale uncertainties are measured in data. For $\tau_{\text{had}}$ candidates, where the uncertainty is dominated by calorimeter response, this is done by fitting the visible $Z \rightarrow \tau \tau$ mass [27]. The systematic uncertainties due to energy resolution have a negligible impact on the result. Systematic effects from electron- and muon-related uncertainties are smaller in general than those from jets and $\tau_{\text{had}}$ candidates. The soft-scale $E_T^{\text{miss}}$ resolution accounts for low-$p_T$ energy deposits that do not contribute to the clustered energy of physics objects ($e$, $\mu$, $\tau$, jet). The $b$-jet tagging efficiency is measured in data with $t\bar{t}$ events and has an uncertainty of a few percent, which in turn has a small impact on the prediction of the $t\bar{t}$ background in the signal region.

The systematic uncertainty on the background from jets misidentified as leptons is estimated for each type of lepton separately. It is assumed to be uncorrelated with all other uncertainties. The uncertainty on the contribution to the background from jets misidentified as $\tau_{\text{had}}$ is dominated by uncertainty in the fraction of quark- and gluon-initiated jets. This accounts for the potential difference between the fraction of quark-initiated jets in the fake-factor measurement region and the analysis signal region, where the fake factor is applied. Because quark- and gluon-initiated jets can fake $\tau_{\text{had}}$ candidates at different rates, a difference in their ratio between the fake-factor measurement and signal region would bias the fake factors themselves. The systematic uncertainty is evaluated by varying the ratio of quark- to gluon-initiated jets from half to two times the nominal value, as determined in MC simulation. The systematic uncertainty for the electron fake factor is determined in a way similar to the $\tau_{\text{had}}$ fake factor, although the compositions of misidentified candidates from jets and photons are varied as opposed to the relative fractions of quark- and gluon-initiated jets.

The uncertainty on the luminosity ($\pm 2.8\%$) derived from beam-separation scans performed in 2012 using the method described in Ref. [51] affects the number of signal and simulated background events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Impact on event yield (%)</th>
<th>Impact on $\mu$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luminosity</td>
<td>$\pm 2.8$</td>
<td>$\pm 0.30$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tau identification</td>
<td>$\pm 2$–$6$</td>
<td>$\pm 0.41$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lepton identification and trigger</td>
<td>$\pm 1$–$1.8$</td>
<td>$\pm 0.15$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$b$-tagging</td>
<td>$\pm 2$</td>
<td>$\pm 0.16$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\tau$ energy scale</td>
<td>$\pm 0$–$2.9$</td>
<td>$\pm 0.57$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jet energy scale and resolution</td>
<td>$\pm 4$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$E_T^{\text{miss}}$ soft scale and resolution</td>
<td>$\pm 0.1$–$0.5$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background model</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling of BG from misidentified jets</td>
<td>$\pm 15$–$38$</td>
<td>$\pm 0.72$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher-order QCD corrections</td>
<td>$\pm 2$–$8$</td>
<td>$\pm 0.26$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underlying event/parton shower modeling</td>
<td>$\pm 1$–$4$</td>
<td>$\pm 0.07$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generator modeling</td>
<td>$\pm 1.4$</td>
<td>$\pm 0.05$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EW corrections</td>
<td>$\pm 2$</td>
<td>$\pm 0.06$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDF</td>
<td>$\pm 3$–$4$</td>
<td>$\pm 0.18$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\mathcal{B}(H \rightarrow \tau \tau)$</td>
<td>$\pm 3$–$7$</td>
<td>$\pm 0.17$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The observed signal strength $\mu$, is determined from a binned global maximum-likelihood fit to the reconstructed Higgs boson candidate mass distributions, with nuisance parameters $\hat{\theta}$ corresponding to the systematic uncertainties. The $M_{2T}$ distribution is used for the $WH$ topologies and the $M_{\text{MMC}}$ distribution for the $ZH$ categories. For each signal and background process, each nuisance parameter is separately tested to determine whether it affects the $M_{2T}$ or $M_{\text{MMC}}$ distributions. For background processes only, the effect of a nuisance parameter on the shape of the distributions is neglected if the difference between the up and down variations of the yield in all bins of the distribution is less than 10% of the total background statistical error. Overall systematic uncertainties that differ from the nominal by less than 0.5% are not considered. The only exception is the treatment of systematic uncertainties due to theoretical aspects, which are fully considered even though they have a small overall impact on the fit.

The expected numbers of signal and background events in each bin are functions of $\theta$. The test statistic $q_\mu$ is then constructed according to the profile likelihood ratio, $q_\mu = -2 \ln [\hat{\mathcal{L}}(\mu, \hat{\theta})/\mathcal{L}(\hat{\mu}, \hat{\theta})]$, where the numerator $\hat{\mathcal{L}}(\mu, \hat{\theta})$ is the conditional maximum likelihood with $\theta$ the value of the nuisance parameters that maximize $\mathcal{L}$ for a given $\mu$ and the denominator $\mathcal{L}(\hat{\mu}, \hat{\theta})$ is the unconditional maximum likelihood. This test statistic is used to measure the compatibility of the background-only hypothesis with the observed data and for setting limits derived with the $CL_s$ method [54,55]. To quantify this compatibility, a significance is calculated, giving the probability of obtaining $q_\mu$ if $\mu = 1$ is the true signal strength.

The measured signal strength, normalized to the SM expectation, is $\mu = 2.3 \pm 1.6$ for $m_H = 125$ GeV. The 95% confidence-level (C.L.) upper limits for each of the four channels and their associated signal strengths are shown in Fig. 3. The expected and observed significances for each of the four channels are shown in Table VII.

The overall 95% C.L. limit on the observed ratio of the cross section to the SM prediction is 5.6 at $m_H = 125$ GeV, which is above the expected values of 3.5 if no signal is assumed and 3.7 if signal is included, but is consistent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Expected significance</th>
<th>Observed significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$W \to \mu / e + H \to \tau_{\text{lep}} \tau_{\text{had}}$</td>
<td>0.36$\sigma$</td>
<td>0.44$\sigma$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$W \to \mu / e + H \to \tau_{\text{had}} \tau_{\text{had}}$</td>
<td>0.32$\sigma$</td>
<td>0.60$\sigma$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$Z \to \mu / e + H \to \tau_{\text{lep}} \tau_{\text{had}}$</td>
<td>0.28$\sigma$</td>
<td>0.29$\sigma$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$Z \to \mu / e + H \to \tau_{\text{had}} \tau_{\text{had}}$</td>
<td>0.32$\sigma$</td>
<td>1.38$\sigma$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIG. 3. The combined result for the $VH$ channels. The 95% C.L. cross section limit is shown for each individual channel on the left. The right figure shows the signal strength in each individual channel, along with the combination.
within the uncertainties of the expected limit. The weaker limit in the data comes mostly from the slight excesses seen in the two channels with $H \rightarrow \tau_\text{had} \tau_\text{had}$.

**IX. CONCLUSION**

The analysis presented in this paper, a search for the associated production of the SM Higgs boson with a vector boson where the Higgs boson decays to a pair of tau leptons, is based on 20.3 fb$^{-1}$ of LHC proton-proton collisions recorded by the ATLAS experiment at the center-of-mass energy $\sqrt{s} = 8$ TeV. The overall 95% C.L. upper limit on the ratio of the observed cross section to the SM predicted cross section, at 5.6, is higher than the expected values of 3.5 if no signal is assumed and 3.7 if signal is included, but is consistent within the statistics and uncertainties of the analysis. The measured signal strength, normalized to the standard model expectation for a Higgs boson of $m_H = 125$ GeV, is $\mu = 2.3 \pm 1.6$.

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Graduate School of Science, Osaka University, Osaka, Japan
Department of Physics, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway
Department of Physics, Oxford University, Oxford, United Kingdom
INFN Sezione di Pavia, Pavia, Italy
Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Pavia, Pavia, Italy
Department of Physics, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA
National Research Centre “Kurchatov Institute” B.P. Konstantinov Petersburg Nuclear Physics Institute, St. Petersburg, Russia
INFN Sezione di Pisa, Pisa, Italy
Dipartimento di Fisica E. Fermi, Università di Pisa, Pisa, Italy
Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA
Laboratório de Instrumentação e Física Experimental de Partículas—LIP, Lisboa, Portugal
Faculdade de Ciências, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisboa, Portugal
Department of Physics, University of Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal
Centro de Física Nuclear da Universidade de Lisboa, Lisboa, Portugal
Departamento de Física, Universidade do Minho, Braga, Portugal
Departamento de Física Teorica y del Cosmos and CAFPE, Universidad de Granada, Granada, Spain
Dep Fisica and CEFITEC of Faculdade de Ciencias e Tecnologia, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Caparica, Portugal
Institute of Physics, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Praha, Czech Republic
Czech Technical University in Prague, Praha, Czech Republic
Faculty of Mathematics and Physics, Charles University in Prague, Praha, Czech Republic
State Research Center Institute for High Energy Physics (Protvino), NRC KI, Russia
Particle Physics Department, Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, Didcot, United Kingdom
INFN Sezione di Roma, Roma, Italy
Dipartimento di Fisica, Sapienza Università di Roma, Roma, Italy
INFN Sezione di Roma Tor Vergata, Roma, Italy
Dipartimento di Fisica, Università di Roma Tor Vergata, Roma, Italy
INFN Sezione di Roma Tre, Roma, Italy
Dipartimento di Matematica e Fisica, Università Roma Tre, Roma, Italy
Faculté des Sciences Ain Chock, Réseau Universitaire de Physique des Hautes Energies—Université Hassan II, Casablanca, Morocco
Centre National de l’Energie des Sciences Techniques Nucleaires, Rabat, Morocco
Faculté des Sciences Semlalia, Université Cadi Ayyad, LPHEA-Marrakech, Morocco
Faculté des Sciences, Université Mohamed Premier and LPTPM, Oujda, Morocco
Faculté des sciences, Université Mohammed V, Rabat, Morocco
DSM/IRFU (Institut de Recherches sur les Lois Fondamentales de l’Univers), CEA Saclay (Commissariat à l’Energie Atomique et aux Energies Alternatives), Gif-sur-Yvette, France
Santa Cruz Institute for Particle Physics, University of California Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz, California, USA
Department of Physics, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, USA
Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, United Kingdom
Department of Physics, Shinshu University, Nagano, Japan
Fachbereich Physik, Universität Siegen, Siegen, Germany
Department of Physics, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby BC, Canada
SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory, Stanford, California, USA
Faculty of Mathematics, Physics & Informatics, Comenius University, Bratislava, Slovak Republic
Department of Subnuclear Physics, Institute of Experimental Physics of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Kosice, Slovak Republic
Department of Physics, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa
Department of Physics, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa
School of Physics, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa
Department of Physics, Stockholm University, Sweden
The Oskar Klein Centre, Stockholm, Sweden
Physics Department, Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden
Departments of Physics & Astronomy and Chemistry, Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, New York, USA
Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Sussex, Brighton, United Kingdom
School of Physics, University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia
Department of Physics, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan
Department of Physics, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, Greece
International Center for Elementary Particle Physics and Department of Physics, The University of Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan
Graduate School of Science and Technology, Tokyo Metropolitan University, Tokyo, Japan
Department of Physics, Tokyo Institute of Technology, Tokyo, Japan
Department of Physics, University of Toronto, Toronto ON, Canada
TRIUMF, Vancouver BC, Canada
Department of Physics and Astronomy, York University, Toronto ON, Canada
Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences, and Center for Integrated Research in Fundamental Science and Engineering, University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba, Japan
Department of Physics and Astronomy, Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts, USA
Centro de Investigaciones, Universidad Antonio Narino, Bogota, Colombia
Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of California Irvine, Irvine, California, USA
INFN Gruppo Collegato di Udine, Sezione di Trieste, Udine, Italy
ICTP, Trieste, Italy
Dipartimento di Chimica, Fisica e Ambiente, Università di Udine, Udine, Italy
Department of Physics, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois, USA
Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Uppsala, Uppsala, Sweden
Instituto de Física Corpuscular (IFIC) and Departamento de Física Atómica, Molecular y Nuclear and Departamento de Ingeniería Electrónica and Instituto de Microelectrónica de Barcelona (IMB-CNMM), University of Valencia and CSIC, Valencia, Spain
Department of Physics, University of British Columbia, Vancouver BC, Canada
Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Victoria, Victoria BC, Canada
Department of Physics, University of Warwick, Coventry, United Kingdom
Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan
Department of Particle Physics, The Weizmann Institute of Science, Rehovot, Israel
Department of Physics, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, USA
Fakultät für Physik und Astronomie, Julius-Maximilians-Universität, Würzburg, Germany
Fachbereich C Physik, Bergische Universität Wuppertal, Wuppertal, Germany
Department of Physics, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, USA
Yerevan Physics Institute, Yerevan, Armenia
Centre de Calcul de l’Institut National de Physique Nucléaire et de Physique des Particules (IN2P3), Villeurbanne, France

Deceased.
Also at Department of Physics, King’s College London, London, United Kingdom.
Also at Institute of Physics, Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences, Baku, Azerbaijan.
Also at Novosibirsk State University, Novosibirsk, Russia.
Also at TRIUMF, Vancouver BC, Canada.
Also at Department of Physics, California State University, Fresno, California, USA.
Also at Department of Physics, University of Fribourg, Fribourg, Switzerland.
Also at Departamento de Física e Astronomía, Facultad de Ciencias, Universidad do Porto, Portugal.
Also at Tomsk State University, Tomsk, Russia.
Also at CPPM, Aix-Marseille Université and CNRS/IN2P3, Marseille, France.
Also at Universita di Napoli Parthenope, Napoli, Italy.
Also at Institute of Particle Physics (IPP), Canada.
Also at Particle Physics Department, Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, Didcot, United Kingdom.
Also at Department of Physics, St. Petersburg State Polytechnical University, St. Petersburg, Russia.
Also at Louisiana Tech University, Ruston, Louisiana, USA.
Also at Institucio Catalana de Recerca i Estudis Avancats, ICREA, Barcelona, Spain.
Also at Department of Physics, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.
Also at Graduate School of Science, Osaka University, Osaka, Japan.
Also at Department of Physics, National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan.
Also at Department of Physics, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas, USA.
Also at Institute of Theoretical Physics, Ilia State University, Tbilisi, Georgia.
Also at CERN, Geneva, Switzerland.
Also at Georgian Technical University (GTU), Tbilisi, Georgia.
Also at Manhattan College, New York, New York, USA.
Also at Hellenic Open University, Patras, Greece.
Also at Institute of Physics, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan.
Also at Institute of Physics, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan.
Also at LAL, Université Paris-Sud and CNRS/IN2P3, Orsay, France.
Also at Academia Sinica Grid Computing, Institute of Physics, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan.
Also at School of Physics, Shandong University, Shandong, China.
Also at Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology State University, Dolgoprudny, Russia.
Also at School of Physics, Shandong University, Shandong, China.
Also at Section de Physique, Université de Genève, Geneva, Switzerland.
Also at International School for Advanced Studies (SISSA), Trieste, Italy.
Also at Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina, USA.
Also at School of Physics and Engineering, Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, China.
Also at Faculty of Physics, M.V.Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia.
Also at National Research Nuclear University MEPhI, Moscow, Russia.
Also at Department of Physics, Stanford University, Stanford, California, USA.
Also at Institute for Particle and Nuclear Physics, Wigner Research Centre for Physics, Budapest, Hungary.
Also at University of Malaya, Department of Physics, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.