

The Influence of Competence and Cooperation on Principal Performance with School Culture as a Moderator

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of principal competency and collaboration on school performance with school culture as a moderating variable in Mlonggo District, Jepara. This research applies a quantitative explanatory approach, using survey methods and questionnaires to collect data from 52 school principals selected through purposive sampling. Data analysis employed multiple linear regression and moderation analysis to test the proposed hypotheses. The findings indicate that principal competency and collaboration have a significant positive effect on principal performance, both directly and through school culture. School culture was found to strengthen the impact of competency and collaboration on performance, highlighting its critical role in creating a conducive and effective educational environment. Simultaneously, the combined influence of competency, collaboration, and school culture shows a moderate positive relationship with principal performance. The study provides empirical evidence that enhancing principal competency, fostering effective collaboration, and cultivating a strong school culture are essential strategies to improve educational leadership and overall school performance.

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INTRODUCTION

In an era of globalization marked by rapid developments in technology and information, education plays an important role in producing quality human resources. Therefore, the performance of school principals is a crucial factor in determining the success of schools in achieving educational goals (Ariyani et al., 2021a; Kemethofer et al., 2022; Leithwood, 2021). The performance of school principals is

influenced by various factors, including competence and cooperation (Meyer et al., 2022; Mutohhari et al., 2021). The competence of school principals includes the leadership, managerial, and social skills necessary to manage schools effectively and efficiently (Keykha et al., 2022; Palah et al., 2022). A competent principal is not only able to design and implement innovative educational programs, but also able to manage school resources well, thereby improving the quality of learning and student achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022). In addition to

competence, cooperation also plays an important role in supporting the performance of school principals (Çoban et al., 2023; García-Martínez et al., 2021). Good cooperation between the principal, teachers, school staff, parents, and the community will create synergy in realizing the school's vision and mission (Achmad & Utami, 2023; Owan et al., 2022). Effective collaboration enables the exchange of ideas, support in the implementation of school programs, and participatory decision-making (Anaby et al., 2022; Perry-Hazan & Somech, 2023).

School culture plays an important role in creating an educational environment conducive to the development of students' character, attitudes, and learning outcomes. A positive school culture can support the achievement of educational goals by encouraging active participation from the entire school community and creating a comfortable, safe, and productive learning atmosphere (Atasoy, 2020; Kalkan et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021). The principal, as the educational leader in the school, has a strategic role in managing and developing school culture (Balakrishnan, 2020; Brauckmann et al., 2023; DeMatthews et al., 2020). The principal's competence in leadership, management, and social skills is an important factor in shaping a healthy and effective school culture (Hitt et al., 2018; Munawarah et al., 2021). This is in line with the fact that improving the quality of education cannot be separated from the active role of the principal as the main leader in every educational institution (Fourie, 2018; Hartini et al., 2023; Kadariah, 2020). Competent principals who are able to collaborate effectively with all parties in the school will have a major influence in creating a positive school culture that is conducive to learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Meyer et al., 2022). A good school culture, where students feel valued and encouraged to excel, is very important in supporting the improvement of student learning outcomes and character (Morris et al., 2020). The principal's competence in leadership, management, and interpersonal skills is essential in creating a productive and character-building school

environment (Acton, 2021; Gómez-Leal et al., 2022; Sakız et al., 2020).

However, there are still problems faced by school principals. Today, there are still school principals who have low leadership competencies. School principals who do not yet have adequate leadership competencies often face difficulties in developing a strong vision and mission to create a positive school culture. This can result in a lack of clear direction for the entire school community (Mahfud, 2020; Malik et al., 2021). In addition, there are still issues regarding the low managerial competence of school principals, which hinders the design and implementation of programs that support school culture, such as character development programs or extracurricular activities. These limitations can affect the motivation of students and teachers to participate actively (Dawam et al., 2022; Zhahira, 2022). In line with this (Bawamenewi, 2021; Mardizal et al., 2023; Neliwati et al., 2024) stated that there are still some school principals who lack the ability to collaborate. School principals who are unable to establish good relationships with teachers, school staff, and external parties such as parents or the community may find it difficult to create a positive school culture. Weak cooperation reduces synergy between various parties, making it difficult to achieve the goal of building a conducive school culture.

This statement is also supported by observations conducted in several schools in Mlonggo Subdistrict, Jepara Regency. In Mlonggo Subdistrict, efforts to improve school culture still face various challenges, such as limitations in student character development, low parental involvement, and suboptimal cooperation between schools and the surrounding community. This situation shows that the role of the principal in improving school culture requires adequate competence. In addition, good cooperation with teachers, school staff, and external parties such as parents and the surrounding community is also necessary to strengthen efforts to build a positive school culture. A positive school culture (e.g., a collaborative culture, a culture of achievement, an innovative culture, a culture of discipline) is

expected to strengthen the positive influence of the principal's competence and cooperation on their performance. Conversely, a negative school culture can weaken this influence. This problem indicates a gap between the ideal role of the principal in managing school culture and the actual conditions in the field. One of the main causes is the suboptimal competence of principals in leadership, managerial, and social aspects. Some principals still face obstacles in developing a strong vision and mission, formulating innovative development programs, and establishing effective communication with all school stakeholders.

Not only that, but the low ability of principals to build harmonious and productive cooperation with teachers, educational staff, parents, and the surrounding community also worsens the institutional performance of schools. Weak cooperation hinders synergy in the implementation of school programs and creates obstacles in building a collaborative culture that supports the character development and achievement of students. Many schools do not yet have a strong and positive school culture. The existing culture may be permissive, resistant to change, or individualistic. Principals are expected to demonstrate high performance by creating a conducive school climate, optimizing student achievement, and bringing about positive change and continuous improvement in the quality of education in the schools they lead. However, in reality, there are still many principals whose performance is not yet optimal. This can be seen from ineffective leadership in implementing school management, the absence of structured and sustainable professional development programs, the creation of a school climate that is not conducive, and suboptimal student achievement. Although the government has made efforts to improve the quality of education through various programs to improve the competence of principals, in reality, there are still many principals whose performance does not meet the expected standards, as reflected in the performance evaluation results.

Ideally, solid teamwork in schools is one of the keys to the successful implementation of

quality improvement programs. However, initial observations in several schools show that there is still fragmentation and a lack of synergy among teachers in achieving common goals. A conducive school culture is expected to strengthen the positive impact of principal competency on performance. However, a common phenomenon is that the efforts of competent principals become less effective when faced with a school culture that is resistant to change or unsupportive of innovation. In the context of education, principal competency and cooperation between principals, teachers, and other stakeholders have a significant influence on principal performance in improving school culture. Research shows that the managerial competence of principals, including their leadership and communication skills, contributes greatly to teacher performance and school culture as a whole. Research conducted by (Nuraini, 2022) shows that the managerial competence of principals has a positive effect on teacher performance, which in turn can improve the working climate in schools. This is in line with the findings of (Jabar & Susilo, 2021), which emphasize the importance of principal leadership and educational supervision in building a school culture that supports teacher performance.

Cooperation between school principals and teachers is also an important factor in creating a positive school culture. Darmawan (2019) found that the leadership style of school principals and school culture have a significant influence on teacher performance, indicating that good collaboration between school principals and teachers can improve teaching effectiveness. In addition, research by (Mutoharoh et al., 2023) confirms that the principal's academic supervision also plays a role in improving teacher performance, indicating that good cooperation in the context of supervision can strengthen school culture. Furthermore, the principal's competence in supervision and management also contributes to improving teacher performance. Research by (Meidiana et al., 2020) shows that the principal's managerial competence and academic supervision significantly affect teacher performance, indicating that principals who are

competent in management and supervision can create a supportive environment for teachers to excel. This is also supported by research by (Qomusuddin & Bunyamin, 2020), which shows that principal leadership and teacher competence together influence teacher performance, emphasizing the importance of cooperation in achieving educational goals.

From several relevant studies, this study makes a new contribution by analyzing the simultaneous influence of principal competence and cooperation on principal performance in the context of school culture. In an era of globalization that demands improved human resource quality, this study emphasizes the importance of principal competence in managing schools effectively, while strengthening collaboration with relevant parties. Focusing on the Mlonggo District, the urgency of this study lies in the need to improve a quality school culture as an important foundation in student character education. In facing the challenges of 21st-century education, principals in the Mlonggo District need to optimize their competencies and build effective cooperation in order to create a school culture that is conducive to student character development. The findings of this research are expected to serve as a valuable reference for stakeholders in designing strategies to enhance the competence of school principals and strengthen collaboration policies within the education sector. The significance of this study aligns with Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which emphasizes the need to improve education quality through effective leadership and management. Furthermore, the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia No. 6 of 2018 on the Assignment of Teachers as School Principals stipulates that principals must possess professional leadership competencies and the capability to foster strong cooperation with relevant stakeholders to promote school advancement.

Based on the problems encountered in the field, relevant studies have focused on different topics. This study aims to examine "The Influence of Principal Competence and

Cooperation on Principal Performance in Improving School Culture in Mlonggo Subdistrict."

METHOD

This research employs a quantitative method with an explanatory design intended to describe and clarify the causal relationships among specific variables (Sugiyono, 2019). This design not only describes phenomena as in descriptive research but also analyzes the factors that cause or influence the variables under study (Pipit Mulyah, 2020). Through this approach, researchers examine the extent to which principal competence and cooperation influence principal performance in improving school culture, both partially and simultaneously, using regression analysis techniques (Baskerville & Pries-Heje, 2010).

The research population included all school principals in Mlonggo Subdistrict, Jepara Regency, totaling 72 people consisting of 40 elementary school principals, 20 junior high school principals, and 12 high school principals based on data from the Jepara Regency Education Office in 2025. This population was selected because they have the responsibility of managing schools, fostering cooperation with various parties, and building school culture (Sugiyono, 2017). From this population, 52 respondents were selected as samples using purposive sampling, with the following criteria: (1) having served for at least two years, (2) representing various levels of education, and (3) being active in school culture improvement programs.

This study involved three types of variables: two independent variables, namely principal competence and cooperation, and one dependent variable, namely principal performance in improving school culture. In addition, school culture was included as a moderator variable that has the potential to strengthen or weaken the relationship between the independent and dependent variables (Zonyfar et al., 2022). School culture reflects the values, norms, beliefs, and patterns of interaction

that develop in the school environment, thereby influencing the effectiveness of principal leadership. To illustrate more clearly the interrelationship among the variables, the following presents the conceptual framework or relationship pattern that forms the basis of this study.

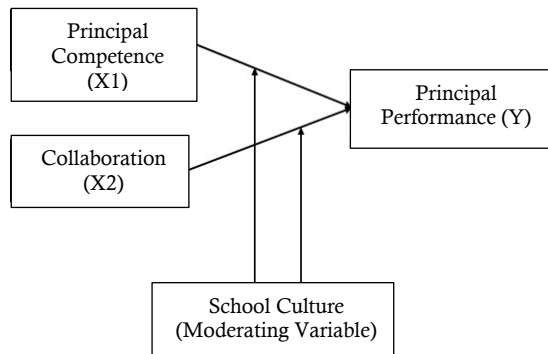


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

The hypotheses in this study are formulated as follows.

- Hypotheses 1: Principal competency has a significant positive effect on principal performance.
- Hypotheses 2: There is a significant effect between principal cooperation and principal performance.
- Hypotheses 3: School culture moderates the effect of principal competency on principal performance.
- Hypotheses 4: School culture moderates the effect of principal cooperation on principal performance.

The data collection instrument was a questionnaire that was tested for validity and reliability. The validity test was conducted using the item-total correlation method with Pearson's correlation, with the criterion that an item was declared valid if the calculated r value was $> r$ table (0.276 at $\alpha = 0.05$ and $n = 51$) (Suharsimi Arikunto, 2017). The test results showed that all items in the four variables of competence, cooperation, performance, and school culture were valid. Meanwhile, the reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha showed values between 0.652 and 1.059, which means that all instruments are

reliable with a high to very high category (Budiastuti, Dyah & Bandur, 2018).

Data analysis consisted of two stages: descriptive and inferential. Descriptive analysis was used to describe the characteristics of respondents and response patterns to the research variables. Inferential analysis includes classical assumption tests (normality, multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity, and autocorrelation) and hypothesis testing through multiple linear regression and Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) to test the moderating role of school culture (Ghozali, 2018). The coefficient of determination (R^2) was also calculated to determine the proportion of variation in principal performance that could be explained by the research variables. All hypothesis testing and statistical calculations were performed using SPSS version 26.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Individual Parameter Significance Test (T-Test)

Partial tests are used to determine the influence of Principal Competence and Principal Cooperation on Principal Performance individually, without considering the moderating variable of School Culture.

Table 1. Regression Test Results for Hypotheses 1 and 2

| No | Hypothesis | Sig. | Results |
|----|---|-------|----------|
| 1 | There is a significant influence between the principal's competence and the principal's performance. | 0.008 | Accepted |
| 2 | There is a significant influence between the principal's cooperation and the principal's performance. | 0.049 | Accepted |

Individual Parameter Significance Test (T-Test)

Partial tests were used to determine the influence of Principal Competence, Principal Cooperation, and School Culture as moderating variables on Principal Performance, including the

interaction effect between the independent variables and the moderating variable.

Table 2. Results of the Individual Parameter Significance Test (T-Test) for Model II

| No | Hypothesis | Sig. | Results |
|----|---|-------|----------|
| 1 | School culture moderates the influence of principal competence on principal performance. | 0.027 | Accepted |
| 2 | School culture moderates the influence of principal cooperation on principal performance. | 0.040 | Accepted |

The Influence of Principal Competence on Principal Performance

The results of the first hypothesis test show that principal competency has a positive and significant effect on principal performance, with a calculated t-value of $3.978 > t\text{-table } 2.011$ and significance of $0.000 < 0.05$. The coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 0.376 shows that competence together with cooperation explains 37.6% of the variation in principal performance, while 62.4% is influenced by other factors outside the study. Thus, improving principal competence has been proven to make a real contribution to improving performance, although there are still other factors that influence it.

The results of this study are supported by various previous findings. Ali & Ahmad, (2023) and Sunaengsih et al (2019) emphasize that principal competence is a fundamental factor in the success of education, because principals who have good managerial, supervisory, and social skills will be able to optimize the school's potential. Karim et al. (2021) and Mei Kin et al (2018) found in their research that principal competency has a significant effect on teacher performance, which ultimately impacts the overall improvement of school performance. Furthermore, Budiyo et al (2020), Saihu, (2020) and Warman, (2022) shows that principals with high managerial and academic supervisory competencies are able to improve the quality of education in the schools they lead. Thus, the results of this study are consistent with various

previous studies, which similarly emphasize the importance of principal competencies as a determining factor in improving school performance.

The Effect of Principal Cooperation on Principal Performance

The results of the second hypothesis test show that principal cooperation has a positive and significant effect on principal performance, with a calculated t-value of $2.208 > t\text{-table } 2.011$ and significance of $0.032 < 0.05$, so the hypothesis is accepted. The coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 0.376 shows that competence and cooperation together explain 37.6% of the variation in principal performance, while 62.4% is influenced by other factors outside the study. Thus, cooperation is an important factor in improving principal performance, in addition to competence.

These findings are consistent with research Martono et al (2020) and Mercader et al (2021) which states that teamwork has a significant influence on the performance of organizational leaders, including school principals. Lutfiartha et al (2025) and Masitha et al (2024) also found that cooperation between teachers, staff, and school principals can create a conducive organizational climate that has a positive impact on improving school performance. Rahmawati and Supriyanto (2020) as well as Seriyanti et al (2020) emphasize that cooperation in educational organizations is one of the keys to the success of school principals in carrying out their leadership and managerial functions. Similar results were shown by Nasir et al (2023) who found that collaboration and synergy among school members encourages the achievement of educational goals more effectively. Similarly, Suryadi et al., (2024) stated that good cooperation between school principals and external stakeholders, such as school committees and the community, also improves the performance of school principals in realizing quality education. Thus, the results of this study reinforce previous empirical evidence that cooperation is one of the determining factors in improving the performance of school principals.

School culture moderates the influence of principal competence on principal performance.

The third hypothesis tests whether school culture moderates the influence of principal competency on principal performance. The results of the moderation regression test show that the interaction variable Principal Competency \times School Culture has a t-value of 2.274 with a significance value of 0.027. This value is greater than the t-table (1.677) and less than the significance level of 0.05. This proves that school culture significantly moderates the relationship between principal competency and principal performance. This means that principal competency, whether in terms of personality, managerial, supervisory, entrepreneurial, or social skills, does not necessarily have a direct impact on performance, but becomes more effective when supported by a conducive school culture.

In practical terms, these findings illustrate that principals with high competence will be better able to manage educational institutions, innovate, and guide teachers and staff to work optimally if the school culture reflects the values of discipline, cooperation, openness, and shared commitment (Ariyani et al., 2021b; Jhonshon et al., 2024; Rostini et al., 2022). Without a strong school culture, the principal's competence can become meaningless, because there is no value system that supports the implementation of these competencies in everyday school life (Choi et al., 2024).

The results of this study are consistent with the opinions of Ansori et al. (2021) and Attsaury et al. (2023) who state that principal competence is a fundamental factor in the implementation of education, because with good competence, a principal is able to optimize the potential that exists in the school. The research by Sultan et al. (2023) also reinforces that the influence of leadership competence on teacher performance will be greater if supported by a conducive school organizational culture. Mustajab et al. (2023) conveyed a similar finding, namely that school culture plays a significant role in strengthening the influence of principal leadership on school quality. Thus, this study emphasizes the

importance of synergy between principal competence and school culture in promoting school performance improvement.

Budaya Sekolah memoderasi pengaruh Kerjasama terhadap Kinerja Kepala Sekolah

The fourth hypothesis tests whether school culture moderates the effect of cooperation on principal performance. The results of the moderation regression test show that the interaction variable Principal Cooperation \times School Culture has a t-value of 2.108 with a significance value of 0.040. This value is greater than the t table (1.677) and smaller than the significance level of 0.05. This means that school culture plays a significant role as a moderating variable in strengthening the influence of principal cooperation on principal performance. In other words, cooperation between principals and teachers, staff, and other related parties will be more effective in improving performance if supported by a strong school culture.

Empirically, these findings show that good cooperation in the school environment not only requires formal coordination but is also influenced by shared cultural values. A healthy school culture will foster mutual trust, openness, and solidarity among school members, so that every form of cooperation will be more productive (Firdaus & Suwendi, 2025; Mayor et al., 2025). Conversely, if the school culture is weak, cooperation has the potential to not run optimally, because it can be hampered by sectoral egos, conflicts of interest, or low commitment to common goals (Cirasola & Midgley, 2023; Singgir et al., 2025).

These findings are consistent with the research by Heenan et al. (2023) and Rahayu & Dong, (2023) which confirms that school culture has a significant influence on the quality of education, particularly through the strengthening of cooperation among school members. Research by Peyravinejad et al. (2025) and Tan, (2024) also shows that a strong school culture can strengthen the relationship between leadership and school quality, as shared cultural values encourage more harmonious cooperation. Furthermore, research by Bashori et al. (2022) and Syahid et al. (2022)

proves that organizational culture in schools is an important factor that strengthens the implementation of leadership in improving teacher performance. Thus, a strong school culture not only supports cooperation but also strengthens its impact so that it can significantly improve the performance of school principals.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research on the influence of competence and cooperation on principal performance with school culture as a moderating variable, it can be concluded that principal competence, cooperation, and school culture have a positive and significant influence on principal performance in Mlonggo Subdistrict, Jepara Regency. The simultaneous relationship shows a positive correlation, which means that an increase in principal competency and cooperation is followed by an increase in school culture, thereby impacting principal performance. Partially, principal competency has a direct effect on school culture and performance, as does cooperation, which strengthens school culture and improves performance. School culture also plays an important role in strengthening principal performance, indicating that the better the competency, the broader the cooperation, and the stronger the school culture implemented, the higher and more professional the principal's performance in carrying out their duties and responsibilities will be.

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