

The Influence of Principal Leadership on Teacher Performance with Work Motivation as a Mediating Variable in Public High Schools/Vocational Schools in Jepara Regency

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the effect of principal leadership on teacher performance with work motivation as a mediating variable in public senior high schools (SMA) and public vocational high schools (SMK) in Jepara Regency. This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey method. The research sample consisted of 230 teachers with a sampling technique using probability sampling. Research data were collected through questionnaires distributed to respondents. The research instruments were tested for validity and reliability using SPSS software to ensure the suitability of the measuring tools used. The results showed that principal leadership had a positive and significant effect on teacher performance. Work motivation also has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance and is the most dominant factor in improving teacher performance. However, principal leadership has a negative and significant effect on teacher work motivation. In addition, the mediation analysis results show that work motivation does not mediate the effect of principal leadership on teacher performance. This indicates that the effect of principal leadership on teacher performance occurs more effectively through a direct relationship.

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INTRODUCTION

Human resources (HR) are an important factor in determining the success of an organization, including in the field of education. In addition to funding, infrastructure, and information systems, the quality of human resources greatly determines the effectiveness of organizational management. Assets and facilities cannot be utilized optimally without the support of competent human resources. The importance of education is emphasized in Article 31 of the

1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, which states that every citizen has the right to education. Furthermore, Article 5 paragraph (1) of Law Number 20 of 2003 of the Republic of Indonesia emphasizes that every citizen has the right to quality education. Therefore, schools have an important role in producing quality human resources.

The success of schools in carrying out their roles is greatly influenced by the quality of their teaching staff. The presence of educators as professionals in schools is essential for effective

learning processes. Based on Law Number 14 of 2005 concerning Teachers and Lecturers, teachers have the main tasks of planning learning, implementing learning processes, assessing and evaluating learning outcomes, and developing their competencies on an ongoing basis.

However, phenomena in the field show that teacher performance is not always optimal. Rachman et al. (2023) found that teacher performance problems are often characterized by incomplete learning tools such as lesson plans and activity journals, as well as a low understanding of learning strategies appropriate to student characteristics. Therefore, improving teacher performance cannot be done partially, but requires strategies that involve external factors such as leadership and school culture, as well as internal factors such as motivation.

According to Susanto (2016), educational execution is the ability of a teacher to complete their tasks and responsibilities. To improve the quality of education, educators should have the space to develop the quality of their work. In addition, teachers are also expected to be part of a network that provides emotional support in realizing the vision, mission, and goals of the school. Based on Law Number 14 of 2005 concerning Teachers and Lecturers, teacher performance assessments include planning, implementing, and evaluating learning outcomes.

To improve the quality of education, educators need to develop the quality of their work. Teachers are also expected to be part of a network that provides support in realizing the school's vision, mission, and goals. In addition, teachers are required to master four competencies as stipulated in Law Number 14 of 2005, namely academic, personal, professional, and social competencies. Professional educators are expected to be role models, possess ethics, teaching skills, mastery of subject matter, learning administration skills, and the ability to establish relationships with various parties.

In efforts to improve teacher performance, school principal leadership plays an important role. Leadership is an individual's capacity to influence others to achieve predetermined goals.

Stone (2023) states that leadership is a series of activities in directing, influencing, and coordinating the behavior of others. Research by Syafitri et al., (2022) found that effective school leadership can motivate teachers, thereby improving teacher performance in schools. Furthermore, research Fadilah et al., (2024); Surbakti & Siti Aisyah, (2024) also shows that school principal leadership has a positive effect on teacher performance, where an increase in leadership quality will be followed by an increase in teacher performance.

Work motivation is a set of energies originating from within and outside an individual that drives a person to initiate work-related behaviors and determines the direction, intensity, and duration of those behaviors (Vo et al., 2022). Work motivation is the strongest predictor of teacher performance (Mandela et al., 2026). In addition, work motivation has also been proven to play an important mediating role in strengthening the influence of leadership on teacher performance.

These findings are in line with the research conducted by Hetharion et al. (2025) in Ambon City and the Lease Islands, which showed that work motivation has the greatest influence on teacher performance compared to the variables of school climate and work discipline. The results of this study indicate that teachers with high work motivation tend to be more disciplined, innovative, and have a strong commitment to carrying out their professional duties.

Research conducted by Rachman et al. (2023) on elementary school teachers in Kotabaru Regency shows that work motivation plays an important mediating role. The results of the analysis show that the indirect influence of school culture on teacher performance through work motivation is greater than its direct influence. This finding is in line with the research by Erlangga et al. (2024), which shows that work motivation can mediate the influence of leadership on teacher performance. In addition, research by Sahbani et al. (2026) found that work motivation successfully mediates the influence of instructional leadership on teacher performance.

In an effort to improve the quality of education, high schools and vocational schools in the Jepara region continuously implement educational strategies that emphasize the optimal completion of the learning process and the provision of firm and focused guidance to students. This step aims to enable students to develop comprehensively, build strong personal capacity, and have a solid personality foundation. Thus, students are expected to develop self-confidence, strengthen their faith, hone their self-control skills, cultivate good character and morals, broaden their horizons, and develop the necessary competencies independently without relying on support from external parties, including the community and the state.

Based on the above description, this study was conducted to analyze the influence of school principal leadership on teacher performance and to examine the role of work motivation as a mediating variable in this relationship. This study was conducted on public high school/vocational school teachers in Jepara Regency so that it could provide an empirical description of the factors that influence teacher performance in the context of secondary education. Therefore, this study is entitled "The Influence of Principal Leadership on Teacher Performance with Work Motivation as a Mediating Variable in Public High Schools/Vocational Schools in Jepara Regency."

METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach that aims to collect numerical data that can be measured and analyzed statistically in order to test the relationship between variables objectively and systematically. The quantitative method is a research method based on the philosophy of positivism, used to study a specific population or sample by collecting data using research instruments and quantitative or statistical analysis to test predetermined hypotheses (Sugiyono, 2019). This study uses a quantitative survey design with data collection at a specific time (cross-sectional survey design).

The population in this study is all public high school and vocational school teachers in

Jepara Regency, totaling 1,238 teachers spread across 10 public high schools and 9 public vocational schools based on Dapodik data from July 2025. The research sample is a part of the population that represents the entire population (Sugiyono, 2018). The sample size in this study was determined using the sample determination table from Isaac and Michael and the Krejcie table with a 5% error rate, resulting in 230 respondents.

The sampling technique used probability sampling with the proportionate stratified random sampling method, in which the sample was divided proportionally in each school stratum and respondents were selected randomly from the list of teachers at each school. The research instruments were tested using validity and reliability tests with the help of SPSS, while data analysis was carried out through descriptive analysis, multiple regression, and path analysis to test the direct and mediating relationships between the research variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

RESULTS

Validity Test

The validity test results show that all items in the variables of principal leadership, teacher performance, and motivation have a calculated r value greater than the table r (0.312) at a significance level of 0.05. Thus, all items in the three variables are declared valid and can be used as research instruments. These results indicate that each indicator in the research instrument is capable of accurately measuring the constructs of principal leadership, teacher performance, and motivation. Therefore, the research instrument is considered suitable for use in data collection in the next stage of research.

Reliability

The reliability test results show that Cronbach's Alpha values for the variables of principal leadership, teacher performance, and motivation are 0.769, 0.767, and 0.762, respectively. All of these values are greater than the minimum threshold of 0.70, so all three variables are considered reliable.

These results indicate that the research instrument has a good level of internal consistency. Thus, all items in the principal leadership, teacher performance, and motivation variables are reliable and suitable for use in the research data collection process.

Partial Hypothesis Testing (t-test)

Table 1. Hypothesis Testing Table (t-test).

Model	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
Model	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	6.208	2.455	-	2.529	.012
Principal Leadership	.287	.043	.183	4.323	.000
Work Motivation	.716	.041	.743	17.571	.000

Dependent Variable: Teacher Performance

The regression analysis results show that principal leadership and motivation have a positive and significant effect on teacher performance. Principal leadership has a significance value of 0.000 (< 0.05) with a regression coefficient of 0.187, which means that the better the principal's leadership, the higher the teacher's performance. Motivation also shows a positive and significant effect with a significance value of 0.000 (< 0.05) and a regression coefficient of 0.716, indicating that motivation is the most dominant factor in improving teacher performance.

Determination Coefficients

Table 2. Table of Determination Coefficients

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.870	.758	.756	2.939

An R value of 0.870 indicates that the relationship between principal leadership and motivation with teacher performance is very strong. An R Square value of 0.758 indicates that 75.8% of the variation in teacher performance can be explained by these two independent variables, while the remaining 24.2% is influenced by other factors outside the model. The Adjusted R Square value of 0.756 confirms that the regression model

is good and stable. Meanwhile, the Std. Error of the Estimate of 2.939 indicates a relatively small level of model prediction error, making the model suitable for predicting teacher performance.

Hypothesis testing

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing Results Summary

Hypothesis	Variable Relationship	Sig. Value	Coefficient	Conclusion
H1	Principal Leadership → Teacher Performance	0,000	0,187	Accepted
H2	Work Motivation → Teacher Performance	0,000	0,716	Accepted
H3	Principal Leadership → Motivation	0,000	-0,569	Significant Negative
H4	Principal Leadership → Work Motivation → Teacher Performance	-	-0,399	Rejected

Based on the results of the hypothesis testing that has been conducted, it can be concluded that the leadership of the principal has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance, so that the better the leadership applied, the better the teacher performance will be. In addition, teacher work motivation also has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance and is the most dominant factor in improving teacher performance. However, principal leadership has been proven to have a negative and significant effect on teacher work motivation. Furthermore, the results of the mediation analysis show that teacher work motivation is unable to mediate the effect of principal leadership on teacher performance, so that the effect of principal leadership on teacher performance is more effective when it occurs directly.

DISCUSSIONS

The Effect of Principal Leadership on Teacher Performance

The results show that principal leadership has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance with a regression coefficient value of 0.187, a t-value of 4.323 (> 1.96), and a

significance value of 0.000 (<0.05). Dimension analysis using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) shows that the indicators of teacher empowerment and development have the greatest contribution in forming the leadership variable with a value of 0.797. Other indicators that also contribute significantly are effective communication (0.778), school resource management (0.776), and participatory decision making (0.722).

Meanwhile, the school vision and direction indicator had a value of 0.682, but it was still above the feasibility limit, so it was able to adequately explain the leadership variable. These findings indicate that teacher performance is not only influenced by the principal's instructions but also by empowerment efforts, effective communication, and teacher involvement in the school decision-making process.

Theoretically, these findings are in line with the concepts of instructional leadership and transformational leadership. Effective principals not only act as administrative managers but also as instructional leaders who focus on improving the quality of learning and teacher professionalism. According to Bass and Avolio, transformational leaders who are able to provide intellectual stimulation and individual attention to subordinates can increase commitment and work motivation, which ultimately has an impact on performance improvement.

The results of this study are in line with research conducted by Ulfathmi et al., (2021), which found that principal leadership has a significant influence on teacher performance. Good leadership can create a positive work environment and increase teachers' morale, thereby improving the quality of their performance. In addition, research by Maisinur & Rosidin, (2022) dan Sugiyanto et al., (2025) also shows that school principal leadership contributes significantly to improving the performance of elementary school teachers. These findings confirm that school principal leadership is an important factor in improving the quality of education through improving teacher performance.

Effective leadership is not only measured by teachers' compliance with instructions, but also by the principal's ability to stimulate intrinsic motivation, create a supportive organizational culture, and empower teachers' professional potential through constructive supervision (Imamuddin, 2024). Thus, it can be concluded that the success of improving teacher performance is inseparable from the principal's ability to carry out leadership functions effectively, both as a manager, supervisor, and motivator for teachers.

The Effect of Teacher Work Motivation on Teacher Performance

The regression test results show that teacher work motivation has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance with a t-value of 17.571, which is greater than the t-table (1.96) and a significance value of 0.000 (<0.05). This indicates that an increase in work motivation will be followed by an increase in teacher performance. In this research model, motivation is even the most dominant factor in improving teacher performance compared to the variable of principal leadership. Simultaneously, work motivation and principal leadership are able to explain most of the variation in teacher performance.

The results of factor analysis using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) show that all indicators that form motivation have a strong contribution. The most dominant indicators in shaping teacher work motivation are responsibility and commitment to tasks, followed by enthusiasm and passion for work, the need for self-development, persistence or diligence at work, and motivation to achieve. These findings indicate that teacher motivation is mainly influenced by a sense of professional responsibility and enthusiasm for work in carrying out their duties as educators.

These findings are in line with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of Motivation, which explains that motivation acts as a driving factor that can improve performance beyond minimum standards. Teachers who have a high sense of responsibility and receive recognition for their performance tend to show more optimal

performance. In addition, the results of this study are also in line with Vroom's Expectancy Theory, which states that individuals will work to their fullest potential when they believe that their efforts will result in valuable achievements.

The results of this study are in line with research conducted by Sari et al. (2022), which found that work motivation has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance. High work motivation can encourage teachers to work optimally in carrying out their duties and responsibilities, thereby improving the quality of teacher performance. In addition, research conducted by Ulul Albab et al. (2019); Wusqo et al. (2023); (Aprilio & Daud, (2025) also shows that work motivation has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance. Teachers who have high work motivation tend to show greater enthusiasm, high responsibility, and commitment in carrying out the learning process at school.

Work motivation is one of the important factors that can encourage individuals to achieve organizational goals optimally. Teachers who have high work motivation will show greater dedication, responsibility, and commitment in carrying out their professional duties as educators. Thus, it can be concluded that the higher the work motivation of teachers, the better their performance in carrying out the learning process (Sari et al., 2022).

The Influence of Principal Leadership on Teacher Work Motivation

Based on the results of the regression test between the variables of Principal Leadership (X) and Teacher Work Motivation (M), the regression coefficient (B) value is -0.538, with a t-value of -11.061 and a significance value of 0.000, which is smaller than the significance level of 0.05. This indicates that the principal leadership variable has a negative and significant effect on the work motivation variable. However, the negative regression coefficient value in this partial test indicates that principal leadership alone is not fully capable of optimally increasing teacher work motivation without the support of other factors.

The results of the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) show that several leadership

indicators are strongly related to the teacher work motivation indicators. The Teacher Empowerment and Development indicator has a loading factor value of 0.797, which correlates with the Self-Development Needs indicator in the motivation variable with a value of 0.831. This shows that teacher motivation tends to increase when the principal provides opportunities for teachers to develop professionally, either through training, giving responsibilities, or supporting career development.

Theoretically, these research findings can be explained through Robert House's Path-Goal Theory, which states that leaders have an important role in helping organization members achieve goals by providing direction, support, and removing obstacles that may interfere with the achievement of these goals. In addition, the results of this study are also in line with McClelland's motivation theory, which explains that individuals have a need for achievement, a need for power, and a need for affiliation.

The results of this study are in line with research conducted by Sijabat and Saputra (2025), which found that a school principal's leadership style that tends to be closed, authoritarian, and non-participatory can have a negative impact on teachers' work motivation. The study explains that teachers feel less involved in the decision-making process, receive less professional support, and experience treatment that is considered unfair from their leaders. These conditions can ultimately reduce teachers' work enthusiasm and loyalty to the school organization.

Principals play an important role in influencing teacher motivation through the creation of supportive school management (Sakerani et al., 2019). Therefore, the absence of supportive leadership, as reflected in the findings of this study, reinforces the notion that an unsupportive work environment can reduce teachers' comfort, appreciation, and trust in their leaders. Thus, the leadership style of the principal plays a very important role; if the leadership style applied does not empower teachers, their work motivation will tend to decrease significantly.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the leadership of the principal has a positive and significant influence on teacher performance in public high schools/vocational schools in Jepara Regency. Effective leadership, both in the role of manager, motivator, and supervisor, can directly improve the quality of work and professionalism of teachers. In addition, principal leadership has also been shown to influence teacher work motivation through the provision of guidance, support, and rewards for their performance. However, the results of the analysis show that teacher work motivation does not act as a mediating variable in the relationship between principal leadership and teacher performance. This indicates that the improvement in teacher performance in this study was more directly influenced by principal leadership than by changes in teacher work motivation.

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