



The Effect of Transformational Leadership and Work Culture on Teacher Performance: The Mediating Role of Work Motivation

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of transformational leadership and work culture on teacher performance, both directly and indirectly through teacher work motivation at State Vocational High Schools in Sukoharjo Regency. This study used a quantitative approach with a survey method. The study population was 438 teachers, with 209 respondents determined using probability sampling techniques. Data collection was carried out through a questionnaire using a Likert scale of 1–5. Data analysis was carried out using IBM SPSS through validity tests, reliability tests, descriptive analysis, regression analysis, path analysis, and mediation tests. The results showed that transformational leadership and work culture had a positive and significant effect on teacher work motivation and performance. Work motivation also had a positive and significant effect on teacher performance. In addition, work motivation was proven to be able to significantly mediate the influence of transformational leadership and work culture on teacher performance. These findings indicate that improving the quality of the principal's transformational leadership and strengthening a positive work culture can increase teacher work motivation, which ultimately has an impact on improving teacher performance. This study provides insights for school administrators in designing policies that focus on development, leadership, work culture, and work motivation to improve teacher performance.

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INTRODUCTION

Teacher performance is a key determinant in improving the quality of national education, particularly at the Vocational High School (SMK) level, which is oriented toward preparing graduates for the workforce. SMKs require teachers not only to master pedagogical competencies but also to be able to respond to technological developments, industry needs, and changes in competency-based curricula. The “Merdeka Belajar” (Freedom to Learn) policy and the SMK revitalization program emphasize the direction of strengthening vocational education to align with the demands of Industry 4.0. However, implementation on the ground has not yet been fully optimized. Various evaluations indicate that the learning process remains insufficiently innovative, teacher involvement in developing teaching methods is limited, and there is a gap between graduates’ competencies and the needs of the workforce (Kemendikbudristek, 2024). These conditions position teacher performance as a strategic issue that requires systematic analysis based on empirical data.

National data from the National Assessment reveal disparities in learning quality across regions and educational institutions. Teachers’ adaptation to the digitization of learning is also uneven, particularly in public schools at the district level (Kemendikbudristek, 2023). From the perspective of educational organizational behavior, teacher performance is influenced by the principal’s leadership and the work culture that develops within the school environment. Transformational leadership plays a role in building a vision, providing inspiration, and driving changes in teachers’ work behavior (Hidayat et al., 2023). On the other hand, a strong work culture fosters discipline, commitment, and professional collaboration (Schein, 2010). Empirical findings indicate that transformational leadership and school culture have a positive influence on the motivation and performance of vocational high school (SMK) teachers (Zulkarnaen et al., 2020).

Work motivation serves as a psychological factor that bridges the relationship between leadership and performance. Teachers with high motivation tend to demonstrate greater creativity, responsibility, and consistency in their work. Conversely, low motivation leads to a decline in the quality of instruction and a lack of innovation. Within the framework of motivation theory, McClelland (1987) asserts that the needs for achievement, affiliation, and power influence an individual’s work behavior. Empirical research indicates that transformational leadership influences teacher performance through work motivation as a mediating variable (Joel et al., 2022). This suggests that work motivation plays a crucial role in explaining the mechanisms underlying improvements in teacher performance.

Previous research findings indicate a relationship between transformational leadership, work culture, work motivation, and teacher performance. Transformational leadership and work motivation have been shown to significantly influence teacher performance (Nena et al., 2021). Organizational culture also contributes to shaping teacher performance, although there is variation in findings regarding the direct influence of work motivation (Lustriningsih, 2021). Furthermore, transformational leadership and school culture together have a positive relationship with teacher performance (Jumniartini, 2021). These findings indicate that the relationships among the variables are complex and interrelated.

Based on the 2025 Sukoharjo Regency Indonesian Education Report Card, the quality of learning, teacher competencies, and the educational institution climate still need to be strengthened (Ministry of Primary and

Explaining the background, problems, importance of research, brief literature review that relates directly to research or previous findings that need to be developed, and ended with a paragraph of research purposes. A balance must be kept between the pure and applied aspects of the subject.

METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach, which is a research method that utilizes numerical data to test relationships between variables through statistical analysis (Creswell, 2009). Data for this study were collected using a survey method by distributing questionnaires to respondents. The sampling technique used was proportional multistage random sampling, a probability sampling technique that gives every member of the population an equal chance of being selected as a sample in accordance with the proportion of each stratum (Sugiyono, 2019).

The study population consisted of all teachers at public vocational high schools (SMK) in Sukoharjo Regency, with a total of 438

teachers. From this population, 209 teachers were selected as the study sample to represent the characteristics of the population. The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics software, which included descriptive statistical analysis, normality tests, and validity and reliability tests. Meanwhile, hypothesis testing was conducted through partial tests, F-tests, and mediation analysis using path analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results of Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis in this study aims to describe the independent and dependent variables. The following table presents the results of the descriptive analysis in this study:

Table 1. Results of the descriptive analysis of the study variables

Variable	Mean	Variable
Transformational Leadership	87.50	High
Work Culture	93.89	High
Work Motivation	90.83	High
Teacher Performance	90.70	High

Based on the results of the descriptive analysis, the principal's transformational leadership falls into the high category. This indicates that, in general, respondents assessed that the principal has effectively applied transformational leadership behaviors in leading the school organization. Similarly, the work culture among vocational high school teachers throughout Sukoharjo Regency has been well internalized and has become part of their daily work behavior in carrying out their professional duties and responsibilities. This reflects the existence of work values, norms, and habits that have been consistently applied within the school environment.

Furthermore, teachers' work motivation is high, reflecting a strong internal drive to carry out

their duties and responsibilities as educators. In line with these conditions, teacher performance also shows high results, as evidenced by teachers' ability to carry out their professional duties optimally from planning and implementation to the evaluation of learning. These findings indicate that transformational leadership, work culture, work motivation, and teacher performance are generally in a positive state at public vocational high schools throughout Sukoharjo Regency.

Validity Test

Item validity can be observed in the "Corrected Item-Total Correlation" column, where an item is considered valid if its correlation value is ≥ 0.30 .

Table 2. Validity Test Results

Variable	Number of Items	Valid Items
Transformational Leadership	25	25
Work Culture	25	25
Work Motivation	25	25
Teacher Performance	25	25

Based on Table 2, which presents the results of the validity test for the teacher performance variable consisting of 25 items, the pilot test of the instrument on 30 respondents showed that all items had an r calculated value > 0.30 (valid). Consequently, the Y variable in this study was defined by 25 items.

Reliability Test

The reliability test was conducted under the condition that r -calculated $>$ r -table at a significance level of 0.05; if this condition is met, the measurement instrument can be considered reliable. Conversely, if r -calculated $<$ r -table, the measurement instrument is considered unreliable.

Table 3. Results of the Research Instrument Reliability Test

No	Variable	Cronbach Alpha (a)	Description
1	Transformational Leadership	0.982	Reliable
2	Work Culture	0.981	Reliable
3	Work Motivation	0.976	Reliable
4	Teacher Performance	0.967	Reliable

Path Analysis

Table 3. Summary of Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects Among Variables

No.	Relationship Between Variables	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	Result
1	Transformational Leadership $\rightarrow$ Work Motivation	0.736	–	0.736	Significant
2	Work Culture $\rightarrow$ Work Motivation	0.655	–	0.655	Significant
3	Transformational Leadership $\rightarrow$ Teacher Performance	0.339	$0.736 \times 0.431 = 0.3172$	0.6562	Significant
4	Work Culture $\rightarrow$ Teacher Performance	0.267	$0.655 \times 0.431 = 0.2823$	0.5493	Significant
5	Work Motivation $\rightarrow$ Teacher Performance	0.431	–	0.431	Significant

Source: Primary Data Processed, 2026

The Effect of Transformational Leadership on Work Motivation

The analysis results indicate that transformational leadership plays a role in enhancing teachers' work motivation. These

findings suggest that school principals who are able to provide a clear vision, serve as role models, offer individual attention, and encourage teachers to innovate can boost teachers' work motivation. Teachers will feel valued, receive

support in carrying out their duties, and have the confidence to develop their competencies, thereby being motivated to work more effectively

These research results align with the theory of transformational leadership proposed by Bass (1985), which states that transformational leaders are able to build commitment and motivation among subordinates through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. Through these characteristics, teachers will feel valued, supported, and motivated to give their best performance in carrying out their educational duties.

The findings of this study are also consistent with the research by Saprudin et al. (2025), which states that transformational leadership plays a crucial role in enhancing employee work motivation and performance. Research conducted by Anjani & Rachmanda (2026) also explains that leaders who can provide inspiration, individual attention, motivation, and intellectual stimulation can boost employees' work enthusiasm, discipline, and sense of responsibility in performing their duties. Leaders who can build a shared vision, provide inspiration, and create a positive work environment have been proven to enhance the commitment and motivation of organizational members in achieving established goals.

Thus, improving teachers' work motivation can be achieved by strengthening the practice of transformational leadership in schools. The better a principal's ability to inspire, guide, and empower teachers, the higher the work motivation teachers will have in carrying out their duties and responsibilities.

The Influence of Work Culture on Work Motivation

Research indicates that work culture plays a significant role in enhancing teachers' work motivation. This suggests that a work environment that upholds the values of discipline, responsibility, cooperation, professionalism, and commitment to quality will

encourage teachers to work with greater enthusiasm and a strong sense of responsibility. Conversely, a less conducive work culture has the potential to diminish teachers' motivation in carrying out their duties and obligations.

These research findings are supported by the theory proposed by Robbins (2018), which explains that a positive work culture can foster a sense of belonging, increase commitment, and encourage organizational members to work more effectively. In the context of education, a positive work culture creates a school environment that supports teachers' professional development, thereby leading to increased work motivation.

The results of this study are consistent with the research by Ariani et al. (2024), which found that the consistent application of organizational values can boost teachers' work morale, which in turn contributes to improved performance. School organizations with a strong work culture will find it easier to foster both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among teachers to perform their duties optimally.

Furthermore, the study by Tryastuti et al. (2024) also explains that a work culture emphasizing discipline, commitment, responsibility, professionalism, and cooperation can create a conducive work environment, thereby increasing individuals' drive to work more effectively. These findings reinforce the results of this study, which indicate that work culture is a key determinant in enhancing work motivation, including within educational settings.

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that work culture is one of the key factors capable of enhancing teachers' work motivation. The stronger the work culture implemented at a school, the higher the teachers' work motivation in carrying out their professional duties. Therefore, school principals need to continue fostering a positive work culture by instilling discipline, strengthening collaboration, setting a good example, and creating a conducive work environment to boost teachers' work motivation.

The Influence of Transformational Leadership on Teacher Performance

This study shows that transformational leadership makes a significant contribution to improving teacher performance. School principals who are able to serve as role models, provide inspiration, build trust, and encourage the development of teachers' potential will be able to create working conditions that support improved performance. Teachers who feel valued, supported, and empowered by their leaders tend to demonstrate a higher level of commitment in carrying out their teaching duties and other professional responsibilities.

The results of this study are consistent with the theory of transformational leadership proposed by Bass (1985), which states that transformational leaders are able to change the values, attitudes, and behaviors of their subordinates through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Through these four dimensions, leaders can enhance the commitment and performance of organizational members in achieving shared goals.

Research conducted by Meliana et al. (2023) found that school principals who are able to provide inspirational motivation, build trust, and pay attention to teachers' individual needs can create a conducive work environment that encourages teachers to perform at their best. These findings are also consistent with the results of a study by Suryati et al. (2023), which revealed that the transformational leadership of school principals exerts an influence reflected in their ability to build a shared vision, provide inspiration, encourage learning innovation, and facilitate teachers' professional development.

These findings are further supported by the research of Nizam et al. (2025), which explains that leadership behaviors such as individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation play a role in enhancing teacher engagement, learning effectiveness, and continuous professional development. Teachers who receive support, appreciation, and opportunities for growth from their principals tend to be more motivated to innovate, improve

the quality of learning, and make greater contributions toward achieving the school's organizational goals.

Based on these research findings, it can be concluded that transformational leadership is a key factor in improving teacher performance. The more effectively a principal applies the principles of transformational leadership, the higher the performance demonstrated by teachers. Therefore, the development of principals' leadership competencies must be continuously enhanced so they can create an inspiring work environment, support work motivation, and encourage continuous improvement in teacher performance.

The Influence of Work Culture on Teacher Performance

The results of the hypothesis testing indicate that a positive work culture remains a crucial factor in supporting teachers' success in carrying out their professional duties. A work culture characterized by discipline, responsibility, cooperation, commitment to quality, and adherence to organizational rules will encourage teachers to work more effectively and productively.

These research findings align with the theory proposed by Schein (2010), who states that organizational culture is a set of values, norms, and beliefs that serve as guidelines for the behavior of organizational members. A strong culture fosters positive work patterns, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of both individuals and the organization. In the school context, a positive work culture can create an environment that supports teachers in carrying out their instructional duties optimally.

These research results are supported by Badaruddin's (2023) study, which shows that teachers with a strong work culture such as discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and professional commitment tend to demonstrate higher performance. These findings are further reinforced by Sukanto et al. (2023), who demonstrated that work culture has a significant impact on teacher performance. A work culture characterized by integrity, professionalism,

innovation, responsibility, and exemplary conduct can motivate teachers to work more effectively in delivering instruction.

In line with Rahmadhani et al. (2024), who state that a work culture built on collaboration, effective communication, and professional commitment can enhance the effectiveness of teachers' task performance, thereby leading to improved performance. Research by Uran et al. (2024) also explains that a strong work culture enhances teachers' dedication and engagement in their work. Therefore, school principals need to continue strengthening a positive work culture by instilling the values of professionalism, discipline, and collaboration to improve teacher performance.

The Influence of Work Motivation on Teacher Performance

This study shows that teachers with high work motivation tend to demonstrate greater enthusiasm, responsibility, commitment, and dedication in carrying out their professional duties. Conversely, low work motivation can lead to a decline in the quality of teachers' performance and fulfillment of their responsibilities at school.

The results of this study are consistent with Herzberg's two-factor theory, which states that intrinsic motivators such as achievement, recognition, responsibility, and opportunities for growth are factors that drive individuals to improve their job performance (Herzberg et al., 1959). These findings are also supported by McClelland's theory of needs, which explains that individuals with a high need for achievement tend to set high work standards, are results-oriented, and strive to achieve optimal performance (McClelland, 1961). In the context of education, teachers with high work motivation will demonstrate greater enthusiasm, responsibility, and commitment in carrying out the learning process, thereby improving the quality of their performance.

The findings of this study are supported by research by Ahyani and Fitria (2022), which shows that teachers with high job motivation tend to be more disciplined, responsible, and capable

of performing their duties optimally to achieve school goals. Zarwini et al. (2022) also state that job motivation plays a crucial role in improving teacher performance, both directly and when supported by the principal's leadership style. These findings indicate that job motivation serves as a driving factor capable of enhancing teachers' commitment, productivity, and the quality of their work.

Research by Satria et al. (2024) explains that the impact of motivation on performance will be even more optimal when supported by effective academic supervision and a conducive work environment. Thus, the results of this study further emphasize that work motivation is one of the key determinants in improving teacher performance, both independently and through the support of organizational factors that facilitate the effective execution of duties.

The Effect of Transformational Leadership on Teacher Performance Through Work Motivation

The test results show that the influence of transformational leadership on teacher performance occurs not only directly but also through an increase in teachers' work motivation. School principals who are able to effectively implement transformational leadership will foster higher work motivation among teachers, which in turn leads to improved performance in carrying out their professional duties.

The results of this study are consistent with the theory of transformational leadership proposed by Bass and Avolio (1994), which states that transformational leaders are able to increase subordinates' motivation through an inspiring vision, exemplary behavior, intellectual stimulation, and individual attention. This approach reinforces subordinates' belief that their efforts will lead to optimal performance and yield valuable results, as explained in expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964).

Research by Caksana (2019) shows that the principal's leadership style has a positive effect on teachers' work motivation. Principals who are able to provide direction, guidance, and motivation, and make sound decisions can boost

teachers' enthusiasm in carrying out their professional duties. These findings indicate that leadership quality is a key factor in fostering work motivation within the school environment.

This aligns with the findings of Joen et al. (2022), who demonstrated that a principal's transformational leadership can enhance teachers' work motivation, thereby leading to improved performance. Similarly, Dethan et al. (2025) confirmed that a principal's leadership has a positive and significant effect on teachers' work motivation through the leader's ability to build a shared vision, establish effective communication, and create a conducive work environment. The consistency of these various findings reinforces that the implementation of transformational leadership is an effective strategy for enhancing teachers' work motivation while supporting the achievement of the school's organizational goals.

The Influence of Work Culture on Teacher Performance Through Work Motivation

The test results show that work culture not only has a direct influence on teacher performance but also an indirect influence through increased work motivation. In other words, the better the work culture that develops in the school environment, the higher the teachers' work motivation, which will ultimately improve their performance in carrying out their professional duties.

These findings align with the organizational culture theory proposed by Schein (2010), which explains that work culture is a set of values, norms, and beliefs that guide the behavior of organizational members. A strong work culture can foster positive work behavior and encourage individuals to work more effectively and productively. These findings are also supported by Robbins and Judge (2018), who state that organizational culture plays a crucial role in shaping the attitudes, commitment, and motivation of organizational members. Therefore, the better the work culture implemented in a school, the higher the teachers' work motivation to carry out their duties and responsibilities optimally.

This research is supported by Angela et al. (2023) demonstrated that organizational culture has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance, both directly and indirectly, through work motivation as a mediating variable. In line with Zulaida and Parwoto (2023), who state that work motivation mediates the influence of organizational culture on teacher performance. A positive work culture fosters teachers' motivation to work more effectively, which ultimately leads to improved performance.

School principals need to foster a work culture that supports collaboration, open communication, recognition of achievements, and opportunities for professional development for teachers. Such a work environment will foster higher work motivation, thereby encouraging teachers to perform their duties optimally and demonstrate better performance. Thus, strengthening the work culture not only serves as a guide for organizational behavior but also becomes an effective strategy for sustainably improving teachers' work motivation and performance quality (Nurhidayah et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of data analysis and the discussion of this study on the influence of the principal's transformational leadership and work culture on teacher performance with work motivation as a mediating variable among teachers at public vocational high schools in Sukoharjo Regency, it can be concluded that the principal's transformational leadership and work culture have a positive and significant influence on teachers' work motivation. The better the implementation of transformational leadership and the stronger the work culture that develops within the school environment, the higher the teachers' work motivation.

Furthermore, the principal's transformational leadership and work culture also have a direct, positive, and significant effect on teacher performance. This indicates that leadership that is inspirational, supportive, and oriented toward human resource development, as well as a work culture that is conducive,

collaborative, and quality-oriented, can enhance the quality of teachers' professional performance.

This study also demonstrates that work motivation acts as a significant mediating variable in the relationship between the principal's transformational leadership and work culture on teacher performance. Thus, improvements in teacher performance are influenced not only directly by transformational leadership and work culture but also through increased teacher work motivation. Therefore, efforts to improve teacher performance at public vocational high schools in Sukoharjo Regency need to be carried out in an integrated manner by strengthening the principal's transformational leadership, fostering a positive work culture, and enhancing teacher work motivation as factors that reinforce performance outcomes.

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