

From Motivation to Performance: The Crucial Role of Job Satisfaction in the World of Teaching Vocational Teachers

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Abstract

The performance of vocational high school (SMK) teachers is key to enhancing the relevance of vocational education to industry needs. However, evidence shows that high work motivation does not always directly correlate with performance achievements, necessitating a deep understanding of the underlying mechanisms. This study aims to analyze the role of job satisfaction as a mediating variable in the relationship between work motivation, organizational culture, and self-efficacy on the performance of SMK teachers. A quantitative method with a survey design was applied to 164 public SMK teachers in East Semarang District, using a proportional random sampling technique. Data were analyzed using path analysis and the Sobel test. The results reveal that: (1) work motivation does not have a direct effect on teacher performance; (2) job satisfaction acts as a full mediator between work motivation and performance; (3) organizational culture and self-efficacy have both direct and indirect effects through job satisfaction; (4) self-efficacy is the strongest predictor of teacher performance. The study concludes that job satisfaction functions as a psychological bridge that transforms motivation into actual performance. The scientific contribution of this research lies in demonstrating a full mediation model that revises the conventional understanding of the direct motivation-performance relationship, while also offering an integrative perspective on the development of vocational teacher performance through a simultaneous organizational-individual-psychological approach.

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INTRODUCTION

Vocational education has long been recognized as a strategic pillar in building competitive and productive human resources in Indonesia. At the vocational high school (SMK) level, the role of teachers becomes highly complex and multidimensional. SMK teachers not only function as conveyors of theoretical material but also act as facilitators of industrial skills, practical guides, and mentors in shaping students' work character. The quality of SMK teachers' performance directly impacts graduates' readiness to enter the workforce, making the factors influencing teacher performance an important and strategic area of research to support quality educational development.

In recent years, technological advancements, industrial digitalization, and rapid labor market dynamics have demanded that SMK teachers continuously enhance their competencies and implement learning strategies relevant to industry needs. However, field realities indicate that teachers still face various complex challenges related to teaching readiness and adaptation to changes in the vocational education system. Structural obstacles such as limited practical facilities, low participation in industry-based training, and less than optimal organizational support have resulted in an imbalance between competency demands and teachers' actual performance (Akmalia et al., 2023; Pramesti & Suharto, 2024).

Empirical evidence of these challenges can be seen from available macro data. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek, 2023) recorded that SMK teachers' job satisfaction tends to stagnate at around 65%, a figure still far from ideal considering the strategic roles they undertake. Meanwhile, the Central Statistics Agency (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2022) reported that nearly 40% of SMK graduates face difficulties securing jobs because their competencies do not align with industry standards. This phenomenon clearly shows that improving the quality of teacher performance is no longer merely a discourse, but an urgent necessity to strengthen the relevance of vocational education in Indonesia in facing global challenges.

Theoretically, teacher performance is influenced by a combination of internal, psychological, and organizational factors that interact dynamically. One important factor influencing work behavior is organizational culture. Organizational culture can be understood as a system of shared values, beliefs, and norms that develop within an institution and guide the behavior of its members. This includes patterns of collaboration, adaptation to change, and approaches to problem-solving that collectively shape the work environment. Various contemporary studies prove that a strong, adaptive, and collaborative organizational culture can enhance teacher discipline, work engagement, and creativity (Harahap et al., 2023; Huda et al., 2025). In the context of SMKs, which are laden with practical and technical demands, organizational culture becomes a crucial foundation for promoting consistent learning practices relevant to industry.

Work motivation is also a significant determinant in driving teacher spirit, commitment, and dedication. Work motivation refers to the psychological forces that drive an individual's enthusiasm, persistence, and direction toward achieving work goals. It encompasses both internal drives, such as personal fulfillment and growth, and external incentives, including recognition and career advancement. Several empirical studies show that work motivation positively contributes to teacher satisfaction and performance (Andriani & Rahayu, 2022; Yanti, 2021). However, other studies have found the interesting phenomenon that motivation does not always directly affect performance, but requires psychological mediation such as job satisfaction (Ahmad & Faisal, 2023; Muslim et al., 2024). This finding indicates that the relationship between motivation and performance is not linear and simple, but involves more complex psychological mechanisms.

In addition to motivation, another psychological factor with a strong influence is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy can be understood as an individual's confidence in their ability to organize and execute actions required to accomplish specific goals and overcome challenges. Teachers with high self-efficacy tend to be more confident

in managing their classrooms, capable of innovating in their teaching, and possess high perseverance and resilience in facing the challenging dynamics of vocational learning. Previous research consistently shows that self-efficacy has a positive relationship with teacher job satisfaction and performance (Lestari & Wibowo, 2021; Setyorini & Widodo, 2023). In the context of constantly evolving vocational education, self-efficacy becomes a crucial psychological asset not only for enhancing teacher professionalism but also for the ability to adapt to rapidly changing curricula and technology.

Job satisfaction emerges as a key psychological variable that bridges the relationship between organizational factors and individual factors on teacher performance. Job satisfaction can be understood as the positive emotional state and sense of fulfillment that individuals experience regarding their work, reflecting their overall evaluation of various aspects of their professional experience. Various recent studies indicate that job satisfaction strongly influences organizational commitment, emotional stability, and teacher performance (Achmadi & Heslina, 2024; Hanafi & Yusuf, 2022). More importantly, job satisfaction not only directly affects performance but also functions as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between organizational culture, motivation, self-efficacy, and various other external factors with teacher performance. This mediation pattern has been observed in several educational studies, both at the general school and SMK levels, strengthening the strategic position of job satisfaction in educational performance improvement models.

At the local level, public SMKs in East Semarang District reflect conditions not far different from the national picture. Field observations and preliminary studies indicate significant variation in work motivation levels among teachers, differences in self-efficacy in managing learning, uneven implementation of organizational culture across all schools, and less than optimal levels of job satisfaction. This condition, if not addressed comprehensively and promptly, will directly impact the quality of

learning and graduates' readiness to face an increasingly competitive job market.

Based on the background described above, this study aims to analyze the influence of organizational culture, work motivation, and self-efficacy on teacher performance with job satisfaction as an intervening variable in public SMKs in East Semarang District. Specifically, this study seeks to test whether job satisfaction acts as a mediator in the relationship between the three independent variables and teacher performance. The results of this study are expected not only to provide a theoretical contribution by enriching the conceptual model for improving teacher performance but also to offer practical contributions for schools and educational policymakers in designing strategies to strengthen work culture, enhance motivation, and develop teacher self-efficacy within the context of continuously evolving vocational education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative approach with a survey design to analyze the causal relationships between variables, namely organizational culture, work motivation, and self-efficacy as independent variables; job satisfaction as the intervening variable; and teacher performance as the dependent variable. The quantitative approach was chosen because it can produce objective numerical data through standardized measurement, aligning with the characteristics of research aimed at testing relationships and influences between variables.

The population in this study included all teachers from four public vocational high schools in East Semarang District, totaling 278 individuals. The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error, resulting in a sample of 164 teachers. Proportional random sampling was employed based on the teacher distribution across schools: SMK Negeri 1 Semarang contributed 54 teachers (from 92), SMK Negeri 2 Semarang 33 teachers (from 56), SMK Negeri 5 Semarang 37 teachers (from 62), and SMK Negeri 6 Semarang 40 teachers (from 68). This approach ensured proportional representation from each institution

while maintaining the statistical reliability of the sample.

This study involved five variables operationalized based on their underlying theories. Organizational culture (X_1) was measured with reference to Schein's theory, using indicators of innovation, attention to detail, results orientation, and team orientation. Work motivation (X_2) was developed based on Vroom's theory, with indicators of intrinsic motivation, expectancy, and instrumentality. Self-efficacy (X_3) was measured using Bandura's theory, with indicators of belief in overcoming challenges and task completion capability. Job satisfaction (Z) was operationalized based on Locke's theory, with indicators of satisfaction with salary, work relationships, working conditions, recognition, and career development. Meanwhile, teacher performance (Y) was measured using Robbins & Judge's theory, with indicators of work quality, punctuality, initiative, achievement of results, and communication.

Data collection was conducted through closed-ended questionnaires with a 1-5 Likert scale, distributed directly to the respondents. Prior to data collection, coordination with school authorities was carried out to obtain research permits and schedule questionnaire sessions that did not interfere with teaching activities. The questionnaire distribution was accompanied by the researcher to ensure respondents' understanding of all question items.

Data analysis was performed through three systematic methodological stages. The preparation stage included tests for instrument validity and reliability, as well as classical assumption tests comprising normality test using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, linearity test using ANOVA, multicollinearity test through Tolerance and VIF, and heteroscedasticity test using the Glejser test. The main analysis stage

employed path analysis to estimate direct and indirect effects between variables. The third stage was the mediation test using the Sobel test, aiming to verify the significance of job satisfaction's role as an intervening variable, where the decision criterion was based on a significance value (p-value) below 0.05, indicating a statistically significant mediation effect. All data processing was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 25.0 software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

This study successfully revealed the mechanism explaining the relationship between work motivation, organizational culture, and self-efficacy with the performance of SMK teachers through the mediating role of job satisfaction. Quantitative data analysis of 164 public SMK teachers in East Semarang District revealed a complex and significant relationship pattern among the research variables. The main findings of this study provide empirical evidence on the importance of job satisfaction as a psychological mechanism that bridges the relationship between performance drivers and teachers' actual performance.

Research Instrument Quality

Based on the validity and reliability tests of the instrument, out of a total of 100 initial questionnaire items, 89 items were declared valid and met the construct validity criteria. The reliability test results showed that all research variables had excellent internal consistency with Cronbach's Alpha values well above the minimum threshold of 0.70. This high level of reliability ensures that the measurement of constructs in this study has been conducted consistently and reliably.

Table 2. Results of Research Instrument Validity and Reliability Tests

Variable	Initial Items	Valid Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Description
Organizational Culture	20	17	0.858	Highly Reliable
Work Motivation	20	18	0.981	Highly Reliable
Self-Efficacy	15	14	0.981	Highly Reliable
Job Satisfaction	20	19	0.903	Highly Reliable
Teacher Performance	25	23	0.924	Highly Reliable

Patterns of Direct Relationships Between Variables

Analysis of direct effects using path analysis revealed varied relationship patterns between the independent and dependent variables. Regarding the influence on job satisfaction, all three independent variables

showed significant effects, with work motivation being the strongest predictor. However, a different pattern emerged for the direct influence on teacher performance, where only organizational culture and self-efficacy proved to be significant, while work motivation did not show a significant direct effect.

Table 3. Direct Effects Test Results

Variable Relationships	Path Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Description
$X_1 \rightarrow Z$	0.277	4.141	0.000	Significant
$X_2 \rightarrow Z$	0.376	5.187	0.000	Significant
$X_3 \rightarrow Z$	0.178	2.599	0.010	Significant
$X_1 \rightarrow Y$	0.172	2.356	0.020	Significant
$X_2 \rightarrow Y$	0.123	1.520	0.131	Not Significant
$X_3 \rightarrow Y$	0.270	3.734	0.000	Significant
$Z \rightarrow Y$	0.256	3.161	0.002	Significant

Indirect Influences and Mediation Mechanisms

Analysis of indirect effects revealed the strategic role of job satisfaction as a mediator in the relationship between the independent variables and teacher performance. Work

motivation showed the largest indirect effect through the job satisfaction mediation mechanism, even though it did not have a significant direct effect on teacher performance.

Table 4. Indirect Effects Test Results

Variable Relationships	Indirect Path Coefficient	Effect Size	Description
$X_1 \rightarrow Z \rightarrow Y$	$0.277 \times 0.256 = 0.071$	7.1%	Significant
$X_2 \rightarrow Z \rightarrow Y$	$0.376 \times 0.256 = 0.096$	9.6%	Significant
$X_3 \rightarrow Z \rightarrow Y$	$0.178 \times 0.256 = 0.046$	4.6%	Significant

Verification of the Significance of Mediation

The Sobel test was conducted to verify the statistical significance of job satisfaction's mediating role. The analysis results confirm that

job satisfaction significantly mediates the relationship between all three independent variables and teacher performance, with different mediation patterns for each independent variable.

Table 5. Mediation Test with Sobel Test

Variable Relationships	z-value	p-value	Types of Mediation	Description
$X_1 \rightarrow Z \rightarrow Y$	2.518	0.012	Partial Mediation	Significant
$X_2 \rightarrow Z \rightarrow Y$	2.707	0.007	Full Mediation	Significant
$X_3 \rightarrow Z \rightarrow Y$	2.004	0.045	Partial Mediation	Significant

Path Analysis Results Model

Based on all analytical results, a complete model of variable relationships can be constructed, describing the mechanisms of direct and indirect effects through job satisfaction

mediation. This model explains the complexity of relationships between organizational, individual, and psychological factors in determining SMK teacher performance.

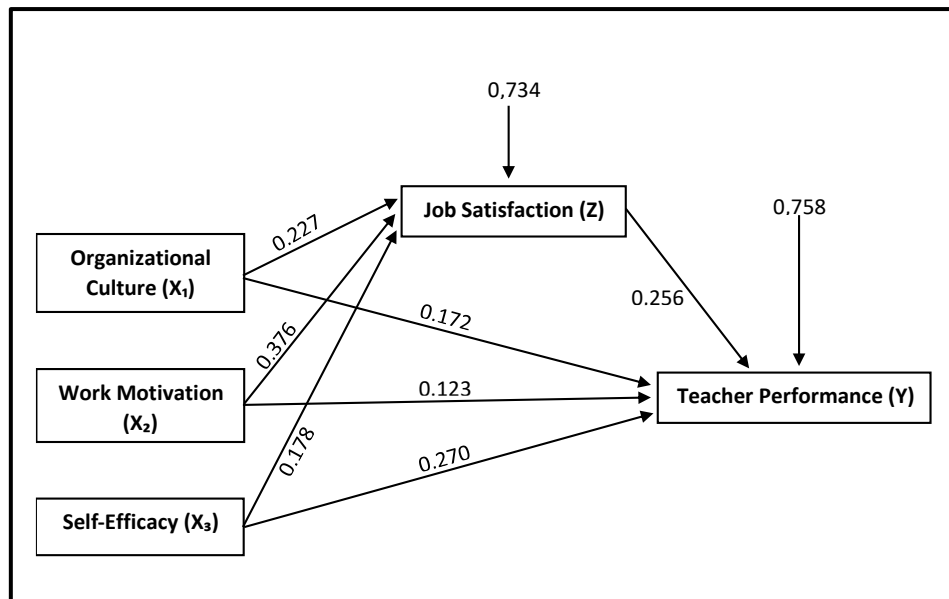


Figure 1. Path Analysis Results Model

These findings confirm that improving SMK teacher performance requires a comprehensive approach that considers not only direct driving factors such as self-efficacy and organizational culture, but also psychological factors in the form of job satisfaction, which serves as a key mechanism in transforming motivation into actual performance.

Discussion

Based on the comprehensive data analysis conducted, this study successfully reveals the complex dynamics within the performance improvement mechanism of SMK teachers through job satisfaction's mediating role. The primary finding indicates that work motivation does not directly affect teacher performance, challenging conventional understanding of performance determinants in vocational education. This finding is consistent with previous research in vocational education contexts, where work motivation requires mediating variables to influence teacher performance (Ahmad & Faisal, 2023; Muslim et al., 2024). The mediation mechanism can be explained through previous studies demonstrating that motivation requires supporting organizational conditions and psychological processes to translate into actual performance outcomes (Dewi et al., 2021; Andriani & Rahayu, 2022). Recent research by Wijaya & AlFahmi (2024) further supports

this finding, showing that at SMK Negeri 9 Medan, work motivation significantly influences teacher performance only when mediated by job satisfaction. In the specific context of SMK teachers, high administrative burdens and limitations in practical facilities emerge as disruptive factors that hinder motivation transformation into optimal performance, aligning with findings from contemporary vocational education studies (Pramesti & Suharto, 2024; Huda et al., 2025).

Self-efficacy emerged as the strongest predictor of teacher performance, demonstrating that teachers' confidence in their professional capabilities serves as the most significant factor in driving performance outcomes (Lestari & Wibowo, 2021). Teachers' belief in their professional abilities proved to be more determinant in enhancing performance compared to external factors. This result is consistent with previous research which revealed that teachers with high self-efficacy levels demonstrated better adaptation capabilities to curriculum changes and educational innovations (Setyorini & Widodo, 2023). Recent studies further confirm that self-efficacy serves as the main predictive factor in the success of SMK teachers implementing project-based learning and technology-integrated instruction (Fitriani & Siregar, 2024). However, the recorded low level of self-efficacy among participants indicates that most teachers still lack confidence in their professional abilities, which

consequently limits the actualization of optimal performance, a concern also identified in previous vocational education research (Pramesti & Suharto, 2024).

Organizational culture proved to have a significant effect on teacher performance, demonstrating that institutional values and collaborative practices substantially influence work behavior and professional outcomes (Harahap et al., 2023). The consistency of this finding confirms that dimensions of organizational culture, particularly team orientation and innovation, serve as significant predictors of improved teacher performance (Huda et al., 2025). Recent studies further substantiate that teachers working in environments with positive organizational cultures demonstrate higher discipline and work commitment, ultimately enhancing their instructional effectiveness (Sari et al., 2023). In the context of SMKs with their demanding practical requirements, a collaborative and adaptive organizational culture becomes an essential prerequisite for creating a supportive work ecosystem that facilitates optimal teacher performance (Fitriani & Siregar, 2024; Pramesti & Suharto, 2024).

The most crucial finding of this study reveals a complex mediation pattern, where job satisfaction functions as a full mediator in the relationship between work motivation and teacher performance, while serving as a partial mediator in the relationships of organizational culture and self-efficacy with teacher performance (Achmadi & Heslina, 2024; Sari et al., 2023). The full mediation pattern in the motivation-performance relationship gains empirical support from previous research concluding that work motivation only impacts performance improvement when accompanied by increased job satisfaction (Dewi et al., 2021). Aprilyansyah & Djamil (2023) also found similar results in their study at Sandikta Vocational School, Bekasi, where job satisfaction fully mediated the effect of work motivation on teacher performance. Meanwhile, the partial mediation pattern for organizational culture and self-efficacy aligns with existing studies demonstrating that job satisfaction partially mediates the influence of organizational factors and personal efficacy on

performance outcomes (Fitriani & Siregar, 2024). This comprehensive mediation model underscores job satisfaction's pivotal role in translating various psychological and organizational factors into tangible performance improvements in vocational education contexts.

From the perspective of social exchange principles, these findings explain the psychological mechanism whereby teachers reciprocate satisfying work conditions with optimal performance contributions (Achmadi & Heslina, 2024; Sari et al., 2023). Job satisfaction functions as a key mechanism that enables the transformation of motivational resources, organizational support, and self-belief into tangible performance contributions (Fitriani & Siregar, 2024).

The integration of self-efficacy principles, motivational frameworks, and social exchange dynamics in the context of vocational education provides a significant theoretical contribution. The resulting model offers a more comprehensive perspective that improving teacher performance requires a synergy between strengthening individual factors, organizational factors, and psychological factors simultaneously (Huda et al., 2025).

Practical implications lead to strategic recommendations in the form of strengthening organizational culture through the development of collaborative values, enhancing self-efficacy through applicative training programs, and optimizing job satisfaction through improvements to the compensation system and the creation of a conducive work environment (Harahap et al., 2023; Pramesti & Suharto, 2024). A holistic approach in developing the professionalism of SMK teachers is a necessity, not just focusing solely on motivational aspects.

The existing limitations actually open opportunities for future research by expanding the research scope, adding other mediating variables such as organizational commitment, and using a mixed-methods approach to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of vocational teacher performance improvement.

Overall, it is proven that the transformation from motivation to performance in SMK teachers involves complex psychological mechanisms where job satisfaction plays a crucial bridging role

(Dewi et al., 2021; Muslim et al., 2024). This new perspective affirms that improving teacher performance requires the creation of satisfying work conditions and the strengthening of teachers' professional self-belief, alongside efforts to enhance work motivation. These findings not only map the complex mechanism of transforming motivation into performance but also provide significant theoretical and practical contributions to the development of SMK teacher professionalism in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

Based on comprehensive analysis, the improvement of SMK teachers' performance is influenced by the dynamic interaction of organizational, individual, and psychological factors. Organizational culture and self-efficacy demonstrate significant direct effects on teacher performance, with self-efficacy emerging as the strongest predictor. Meanwhile, work motivation does not directly affect performance but provides substantial indirect contribution through the mediation mechanism of job satisfaction. The crucial finding reveals the strategic role of job satisfaction as a full mediator in the relationship between work motivation and teacher performance, while simultaneously serving as a partial mediator in the relationships of organizational culture and self-efficacy with teacher performance. This mediation pattern explains why high motivation does not automatically translate into performance improvement and emphasizes the importance of creating a satisfying work environment as a prerequisite for transforming various driving factors into actual performance. Practical implications affirm the necessity of a holistic approach through strengthening collaborative-based organizational culture, enhancing teacher self-efficacy, and optimizing job satisfaction as prerequisites for transforming work motivation into sustainable performance improvement. Strategies for enhancing SMK teacher performance must prioritize the improvement of job satisfaction to optimize the impact of motivation toward enhancing the quality of vocational education.

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