

The Role of Work Motivation in Mediating the Influence of School Principal Leadership on Teacher Performance of Teachers at Smp Negeri 1 Bandar Bener Meriah Regency

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Abstract

Teacher performance is an important factor in determining the success of education in schools. Teacher performance is not only influenced by individual abilities, but also by organizational and psychological factors, particularly school leadership and work motivation. This study aims to analyze the influence of school leadership on teacher performance with work motivation as a mediating variable at SMP Negeri 1 Bandar, Bener Meriah Regency. This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey method. The population in this study was all 74 teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Bandar, Bener Meriah Regency, who were also used as the research sample. Data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using Partial Least Squares (PLS) with the help of SmartPLS software. The results showed that principal leadership had a positive and significant effect on teacher performance. In addition, principal leadership also had a positive and significant effect on teacher work motivation. Work motivation was proven to have a positive and significant effect on teacher performance. Furthermore, the results of the indirect effect test showed that work motivation was able to significantly mediate the effect of principal leadership on teacher performance. These findings indicate that improving teacher performance does not only depend on the quality of principal leadership directly, but also through increasing teacher work motivation. This study provides practical implications for schools to strengthen principal leadership oriented towards teacher development and increase work motivation through professional support, clear communication of vision, and the creation of a conducive work climate in order to improve teacher performance sustainably.

Keywords: Principal Leadership, Work Motivation, Teacher Performance

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Introduction

Teacher performance is one of the key factors in determining the quality of education in schools. Teachers with high performance are able to carry out their professional duties optimally, from planning lessons, implementing the teaching and learning process, to evaluating student learning outcomes. According to Robbins and Judge (2021), performance is the result of an individual's work that is influenced by ability, motivation, and work environment support. In the context of education, teacher performance not only affects student academic achievement but also character building and the sustainable quality of human resources.

One organizational factor that greatly influences teacher performance is the leadership of the principal. The principal has a strategic role as an educational leader who is responsible for directing the school's vision, creating a conducive work climate, and encouraging the improvement of teacher professionalism. Yukl (2019) states that effective leadership can influence the behavior, attitudes, and performance of subordinates through guidance, support, and positive role modeling. Thus, the style and quality of principal leadership are important determinants in improving teacher performance.

However, the influence of principal leadership on teacher performance is not always direct. In many cases, leadership works through psychological factors at work, one of which is teacher motivation. Work motivation is an internal and external drive that causes a person to be willing and eager to exert their abilities, time, and energy to achieve organizational goals (Mangkunegara, 2020). Teachers with high work motivation tend to show enthusiasm for teaching, commitment to their duties, and a willingness to develop their competencies continuously.

Inspirational, fair, and participatory leadership by school principals is believed to be able to increase teacher work motivation. This is in line with the opinion of Gibson, Ivancevich, and Donnelly (2018), who state that leader behavior plays an important role in shaping employee work motivation through rewards, recognition, and emotional support. When teachers feel valued and supported by the principal, their work motivation will increase and ultimately have a positive impact on their performance.

This condition is relevant to the situation faced by SMP Negeri 1 Bandar in Bener Meriah Regency. As one of the public schools that plays an important role in providing junior high school education in the area, SMP Negeri 1 Bandar is required to continuously improve the quality of teacher performance in order to produce competitive graduates. However, in practice, there are still variations in teacher performance influenced by differences in work motivation levels and perceptions of principal leadership. Therefore, it is important to empirically examine the role of work motivation in mediating the influence of principal leadership on teacher performance.

Based on this description, this research is important to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between principal leadership, work motivation, and teacher performance. The results of this study are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of educational management science and practically to schools and policy makers in formulating strategies to improve teacher performance through strengthening leadership and work motivation.

Literature Review

Teacher Performance

Definition of Teacher Performance

According to Rahman and Lataruva (2023), teacher performance is the level of success of teachers in carrying out their professional duties and responsibilities as measured by applicable work standards.

Factors Affecting Teacher Performance

According to Rahman and Lataruva (2023), teacher performance is influenced by:

1. Teachers' abilities and competencies
Good competencies enable teachers to complete tasks with high quality.
2. Work motivation
Teachers who are highly motivated tend to perform better.
3. Work discipline and responsibility
Discipline ensures that work is completed on time and according to procedure.
4. Cooperation with coworkers
Collaboration improves work effectiveness and learning quality.

Teacher Performance Indicators

Teacher Performance Indicators According to Rahman and Lataruva (2023)

- 1) Quantity of Work
Describes the number of tasks and workload that teachers can complete in accordance with the standards set by the school.
- 2) Work Quality
Demonstrates the quality of teachers' work in carrying out teaching and professional tasks effectively and in accordance with standards.
- 3) Punctuality
Reflects the ability of teachers to complete tasks and obligations on time according to the predetermined schedule.
- 4) Attendance and Discipline
Demonstrates the level of teachers' compliance with working hours, attendance, and school regulations.
- 5) Cooperation
Describes the teacher's ability to cooperate and collaborate with colleagues and school administrators.
- 6) Initiative and Responsibility
Demonstrates teachers' proactive attitude in carrying out their duties and willingness to take responsibility for the work they undertake.

Work Motivation

Understanding Work Motivation

According to Ryan and Deci (2020), work motivation is an internal drive that directs, strengthens, and maintains an individual's work behavior, which is greatly influenced by the fulfillment of basic psychological needs.

Factors that Influence Work Motivation

According to Ryan and Deci (2020), work motivation is influenced by the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs:

1. Autonomy
Individuals feel they have the freedom to determine how they work and make decisions.
2. Competence
Individuals feel capable and confident in carrying out their tasks.
3. Social connectedness
Individuals feel accepted and have positive relationships with colleagues and leaders.

Work Motivation Indicators

Work motivation indicators according to Ryan and Deci (2020) are described as follows:

1. Autonomy
The degree of freedom in performing work
2. Competence
Belief in one's own abilities

3. Relatedness

Quality of social relationships in the work environment

Principal leadership

Definition of Principal Leadership

According to Hallinger (2020), school leadership (instructional leadership) is the ability of school principals to set the direction of learning, manage instructional programs, and create a school climate that supports continuous improvement in the quality of learning and teacher performance.

Factors that Influence Principal Leadership

According to Hallinger (2020), the effectiveness of principal leadership is influenced by several key factors directly related to learning practices in schools, namely:

1. Clarity of vision and learning objectives
A principal with a clear learning vision is able to direct all school activities toward achieving academic goals. A shared vision will make it easier for teachers to align their planning and implementation of learning.
2. Quality of academic supervision
Supervision that is carried out systematically and continuously enables the principal to provide constructive feedback to teachers, thereby improving teacher competence and performance.
3. Support for teacher professional development
Effective leadership is demonstrated through support for teacher training, workshops, and learning communities. This support enhances teachers' professional capacity in facing the demands of ever-evolving learning.
4. Conducive school climate
The principal plays an important role in creating a safe, collaborative, and learning-oriented work environment, so that teachers are motivated to work optimally.

Indicators of Principal Leadership

Based on Hallinger (2020), the indicators of principal leadership are described as follows:

1. Setting and communicating school goals
The principal actively develops and communicates learning goals to the entire school community.
2. Managing learning programs
The principal ensures that the curriculum, learning methods, and evaluation are carried out according to standards.
3. Conducting supervision and evaluation of learning
The principal observes classes and provides feedback to improve the quality of teaching.
4. Supporting teacher professional development
The principal facilitates the improvement of teachers' competencies through training and mentoring.
5. Creating a conducive learning environment
The principal builds a school culture that supports collaboration and continuous learning.

Conceptual Framework

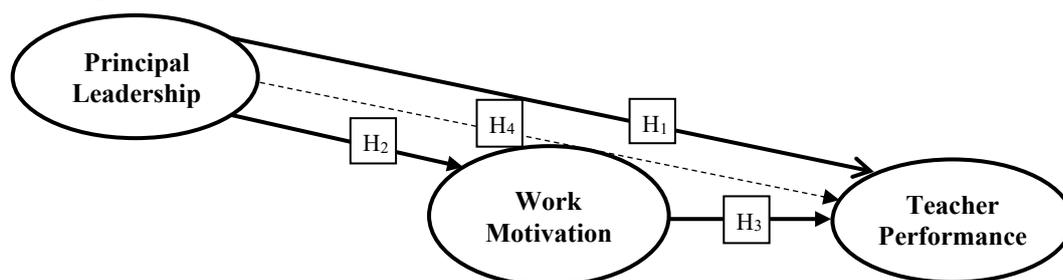


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework**Research Hypothesis**

- H₁ : The leadership of the principal has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance at SMP Negeri 1 Bandar, Bener Meriah Regency.
- H₂ The leadership of the principal has a positive and significant effect on teacher work motivation at SMP Negeri 1 Bandar, Bener Meriah Regency.
- H₃ Work motivation has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance at SMP Negeri 1 Bandar, Bener Meriah Regency.
- H₄ Work motivation mediates the influence of principal leadership on teacher performance at SMP Negeri 1 Bandar, Bener Meriah Regency.

Research Methodology**Type of Research**

The type of research used by the researcher is quantitative research. This type of quantitative research is conducted to create a study that aims to adjust a study and to analyze the leadership of school principals on teacher performance with work motivation as a mediating variable at SMP Negeri 1 Bandar, Bener Meriah Regency.

Research Location and Time

The research location was SMP Negeri 1 Bandar, Bener Meriah Regency, located at Jalan Blangkejeren No. 1, Kampung Blang Trienggadeng, Bandar District, Bener Meriah Regency, Aceh. The research was conducted over a period of 3 months, from December 2025 to March 2026.

Population and Sample

According to Arikunto (2025), if the number of subjects is less than 100, it is better to take all of them so that the research is a population study. In this study, the population consists of all employees at SMP Negeri 1 Bandar, Bener Meriah Regency, with a total of 74 teachers, and the entire population will be used as the sample.

Research Data Sources

The data source used in this study is primary data.

Results**Outer Model Analysis**

Outer Model Analysis using the PLS Algorithm produced the following results:

Validity Test**Table 1.** Outer Loadings Values

	Principal Leadership	Teacher Performance	Work Motivation
X1.1	0.776		
X1.2	0.809		
X1.3	0.857		
X1.4	0.834		
X1.5	0.788		
Y.1		0.722	
Y.2		0.826	
Y.3		0.639	
Y.4		0.848	
Y.5		0.829	
Y.6		0.885	

	Principal Leadership	Teacher Performance	Work Motivation
Z.1			0.791
Z.2			0.743
Z.3			0.886

Source: Smart PLS Output, 2025

Based on the values in Table 1 above, which show the results of outer model testing through loading factor/outer loadings values, all indicators in each variable have a loading value ≥ 0.60 . This indicates that each indicator is measured validly and strongly. Therefore, it can be concluded that all items in the questionnaire have met the validity criteria, as shown in the following figure.

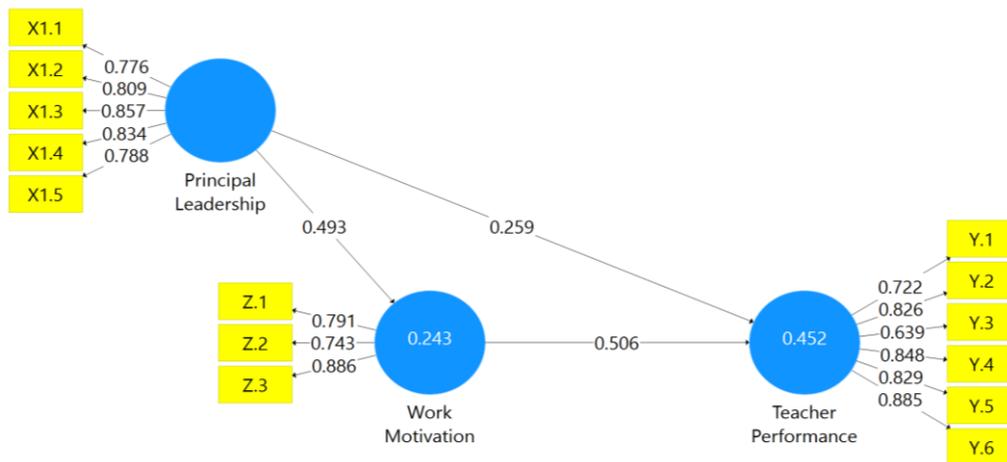


Figure 2. Outer Loading

Reliability Test

Table 2. Construct Reliability and Validity Test

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Principal Leadership	0.872	0.876	0.907	0.662
Teacher Performance	0.882	0.888	0.912	0.635
Work Motivation	0.738	0.770	0.850	0.655

Source: Smart PLS Output, 2025

From Table 2 above, the reliability test results show that the Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values for all constructs are above 0.70. This indicates that all indicators have high internal consistency and are reliable in measuring their respective constructs. Thus, the research instrument is declared reliable and suitable for use in structural model testing.

Coefficient of Determination (R²)

In assessing the model with PLS, we begin by looking at the R-square for each dependent latent variable. The table below shows the Rsquare estimation results using SmartPLS.

Table 3. R Square Results

	R-Square	Adjusted R-Square
Work Motivation	0.243	0.235
Teacher Performance	0.452	0.441

Source: Smart PLS, 2025

Table 3 shows the R square values for both dependent variables. For the work motivation variable, the R square value is 0.243, meaning that the influence of the principal's leadership (

) and teacher competence () is 0.243 or 24.3%, with the remainder attributable to other variables outside the model. The R-square value for teacher performance is 0.452, meaning that the influence of principal leadership, teacher competence, and work motivation is 0.452 or 45.2%, with the remainder attributable to other variables outside the model.

Structural Model Testing (Inner Model)

Hypothesis Testing

Direct Influence Between Variables

The direct effect between variables can be seen in the path coefficients. The data analysis results show the direct effect values in the following table.

Table 4. Path Coefficients (Direct Effects)

	Original Sample	T Statistics	P Values	Conclusion
Principal Leadership -> Teacher Performance	0.259	2.669	0.008	Accepted
Principal Leadership -> Work Motivation	0.493	5.324	0.000	Accepted
Work Motivation -> Teacher Performance	0.506	5.373	0	Accepted

Source: Smart PLS Output, 2025

The results in Table 4 show the following direct effect values:

1. The leadership of the principal has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance with a t-statistic value of 2.669 above 1.96 and a significance of 0.000 below 0.05, meaning that the leadership of the principal has a real effect on teacher performance because the significance value is below 0.05. The results of this study are in line with previous studies, namely that principal leadership has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance (Jayadi & Ferine, 2024).
2. The leadership of the principal has a positive and significant effect on work motivation with a t-statistic value of 5.324 above 1.96 and a significance of 0.000 below 0.05, meaning that the leadership of the principal has a real effect on work motivation because the significance value is below 0.05. The results of this study are in line with previous studies, namely that school principal leadership has a positive and significant effect on work motivation (Siregar & Indrawan, 2025).
3. Work motivation has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance with a t-statistic value of 5.373 above 1.96 and a significance of 0.003 below 0.05, meaning that work motivation has a significant effect on teacher performance because the significance value is below 0.05. The results of this study are in line with previous studies, namely that work motivation has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance (Mesra & Rahayu, 2025).

Indirect Influence Between Variables

The indirect effect between variables can be seen in the specific indirect effects value. The data analysis results show the indirect effect value in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Specific Indirect Effects (Indirect Effects)

	Original Sample	T Statistics	P Values	Conclusion
Principal Leadership -> Work Motivation -> Teacher Performance	0.250	3.805	0.000	Accepted

Source: Smart PLS, 2025

Table 5 shows the indirect effect between variables, namely: principal leadership has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance through work motivation with a t-statistic value

of 3.805 above 1.96 and a significance value of 0.000 below 0.05, meaning that work motivation acts as an intervening variable between principal leadership and teacher performance.

Conclusion

1. Principal leadership has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance at SMP Negeri 1 Bandar, Bener Meriah Regency.
2. Principal leadership has a positive and significant effect on teacher work motivation at SMP Negeri 1 Bandar, Bener Meriah Regency.
3. Work motivation has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance at SMP Negeri 1 Bandar, Bener Meriah Regency.
4. Work motivation mediates the effect of principal leadership on teacher performance at SMP Negeri 1 Bandar, Bener Meriah Regency.

Recommendations

1. Teacher performance with the lowest score was "I always complete my teaching and administrative tasks on time according to the schedule." Schools need to improve the management of teachers' working time through more realistic task scheduling, the use of digital administration systems, and regular monitoring and evaluation so that teaching and administrative tasks can be completed on time.
2. Work motivation with the lowest score was "I feel I have sufficient ability to carry out my duties as a teacher effectively." Schools need to improve teachers' confidence and competence through continuous training, coaching/mentoring, and constructive feedback so that teachers feel more capable of performing their duties effectively.
3. Principal leadership with the lowest score: "The principal clearly communicates the school's vision and goals to all teachers." Principals need to regularly and openly communicate the school's vision and goals through meetings, internal media, and discussion forums so that all teachers clearly understand the direction and goals of the school's development.

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