

The Role of Work Motivation in Mediating the Influence of School Principal Leadership on Teacher Performance of Teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan

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Abstract

Teacher performance is a key component in determining the success of the educational process, especially in vocational high schools (SMK) that are required to produce graduates with competencies that meet the needs of the industrial world. Teacher performance is influenced by various factors, one of which is the leadership of the principal, both directly and through teacher work motivation. This study aims to analyze the role of work motivation in mediating the influence of principal leadership on teacher performance at SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan. This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey method. The research population consisted of all 119 employees of SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan, all of whom were included as research samples. Data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method with the help of SmartPLS software. The results showed that principal leadership had a positive and significant effect on teacher performance and work motivation. Work motivation also had a positive and significant effect on teacher performance. In addition, work motivation was proven to play a role as an intervening variable that significantly mediates the influence of principal leadership on teacher performance. The coefficient of determination value shows that principal leadership is able to explain 16.2% of the variation in work motivation, while principal leadership and work motivation simultaneously explain 48.9% of the variation in teacher performance. The conclusion of this study confirms that teacher performance can be optimized by strengthening effective school leadership that is oriented towards providing work motivation. The results of this study are expected to serve as a basis for schools and education policy makers in formulating strategies for continuous improvement of teacher performance in vocational high schools.

Keywords: Principal Leadership, Work Motivation, Teacher Performance

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Introduction

Teacher performance is a key component in determining the success of the educational process and the achievement of learning objectives in schools. Teachers with high performance are able to plan, implement, and evaluate learning effectively and sustainably, which has a direct impact on the quality of graduates (Supardi, 2020). Teacher performance is not only measured by teaching ability in the classroom, but also includes professional responsibility, discipline, creativity, cooperation, and commitment to developing oneself and educational institutions. Therefore, improving teacher performance has become a strategic agenda in education management, especially in vocational high schools (SMK) that require students to be competent in accordance with the needs of the industrial world.

In the context of vocational education, the demands on teacher performance are increasingly complex. SMKs are expected to produce graduates with technical competence, professional attitudes, and high competitiveness. This requires teachers to not only master the material but also be able to implement practice-based, work-based, and technology-based learning (Mulyasa, 2021). However, the reality in the field shows that teacher performance still varies. At SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan, there are still differences in the consistency of teachers in preparing lesson plans, utilizing active learning methods, time discipline, and conducting comprehensive learning evaluations. This condition indicates that there are internal and external factors that affect teacher performance.

One external factor that has a significant influence on teacher performance is the leadership of the principal. The principal has a strategic role as a manager, supervisor, motivator, and learning leader who determines the direction and work culture of the school (Hasim et al., 2020). Effective leadership by the principal is reflected in their ability to provide direction, build good communication, set an example, and encourage teacher participation and professional development. Mulyasa (2021) emphasizes that principals with strong and visionary leadership are able to create a conducive work climate that increases teachers' enthusiasm, discipline, and performance. Conversely, ineffective leadership can reduce motivation and result in low-quality teacher performance.

In addition to leadership, work motivation is a psychological factor that plays an important role in determining the level of teacher performance. Work motivation is understood as internal and external drives that influence a person's intensity, direction, and persistence in achieving work goals (Robbins & Judge, 2022). Teachers with high work motivation tend to show enthusiasm for teaching, creativity in learning, and a strong commitment to their professional duties. Conversely, teachers with low motivation tend to work minimally, lack innovation, and are not optimal in carrying out their responsibilities. Based on initial observations, the work motivation of teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan also shows variation, where some teachers actively participate in training and professional development activities, while others still lack initiative in improving their competence.

The relationship between principal leadership and teacher performance is not always direct, but is often influenced by intermediary factors, one of which is work motivation. Robbins and Judge (2022) explain that effective leadership can stimulate the work motivation of subordinates, which ultimately has an impact on performance improvement. In other words, work motivation acts as a mediating variable that bridges the influence of leadership on performance. Previous studies have also shown that work motivation can strengthen the influence of principal leadership on teacher performance (Dwipayana et al., 2022).

Based on this description, research on the role of work motivation in mediating the influence of principal leadership on teacher performance at SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan is important to conduct. This study is expected to provide an empirical description of the mechanism of the relationship between principal leadership, work motivation, and teacher performance. In addition, the results of this study are expected to serve as a basis for schools and education policymakers in formulating strategies to improve teacher performance through

strengthening principal leadership and optimizing work motivation, especially in vocational high schools.

Literature Review Teacher Performance Definition of Teacher Performance

According to Muspawi (2020), teacher performance is the work results or achievements attained by a teacher in carrying out their duties as an educator based on the required standards, procedures, and competencies.

Factors Affecting Teacher Performance

Muspawi (2020) emphasizes that teacher performance is influenced by the following key factors:

- 1) **Teacher Competence**
Competence is the main basis of performance. Teachers with high pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competence will be more effective in teaching.
- 2) **Work Motivation**
Motivation is the driving force behind teachers' work behavior. Teachers with high motivation are more proactive, diligent, and focused on achieving learning objectives.
- 3) **Non-physical work environment**
The work environment encompasses teachers' morality, work ethic, discipline, and sincerity in carrying out their duties.
- 4) **Principal Leadership**
Democratic, communicative, and supportive leadership can boost teachers' morale, encourage creativity, and improve the quality of learning.
- 5) **Work Environment**
The physical and psychological environment of the school (classrooms, facilities, work climate, relationships between teachers) also determines the effectiveness of teachers' work.
- 6) **Training and Professional Development**
Performance improves when teachers receive training, workshops, ongoing guidance, and academic supervision.
- 7) **Welfare/Compensation**
Fair compensation encourages teachers to work more productively and take responsibility for their duties.
- 8) **Work Discipline**
Muspawi emphasizes that high discipline (punctuality, adherence to rules, consistency in tasks) greatly determines teacher performance.

Teacher Performance Indicators

According to Muspawi (2020), teacher performance indicators cover several aspects:

- 1) **Ability to plan learning**
The quality of planning greatly determines the direction, effectiveness, and results of learning because it forms the basis for the implementation of the teaching and learning process.
- 2) **Ability to carry out learning activities**
High-performing teachers must be able to manage the classroom, deliver material clearly, develop active interactions, use varied methods, and create a conducive learning environment. This indicator also includes the teacher's creativity in overcoming learning obstacles.
- 3) **Ability to evaluate learning**
Teachers must be able to assess student learning outcomes using appropriate evaluation techniques. Evaluation indicators include the ability to develop assessment instruments,

conduct formative and summative assessments, provide feedback, and analyze evaluation results to improve the learning process.

4) Responsibility for professional duties

Professional responsibility is not only reflected in technical teaching abilities, but also in the teacher's willingness to comply with rules, complete work programs, and maintain integrity in carrying out tasks.

5) Ability to collaborate with school community members

Collaboration is an important part of performance because teachers cannot work individually to improve the quality of education. This cooperation is also reflected through participation in school activities, teacher meetings, and professional development activities.

6) Discipline and work ethics

Teachers' performance is also measured by their discipline in terms of attendance, adherence to schedules, and orderliness in carrying out learning activities.

7) Ability to develop oneself and professionalism

This professional development strengthens pedagogical, personal, social, and professional competencies, thereby improving the quality of learning.

Work Motivation Understanding Work Motivation

According to Robbins & Judge (2022), work motivation is a process that explains the intensity, direction, and persistence of individuals in achieving a goal. So, in the context of motivation, teachers are internal and external forces that encourage teachers to carry out their educational tasks whether in teaching, educating, guiding, or carrying out other professional responsibilities with enthusiasm, consistency, and a focus on achieving educational goals at school.

Indicators of Work Motivation

According to Robbins & Judge (2022), indicators of work motivation consist of:

1) Intensity

How much effort teachers put into preparing and conducting lessons.

2) Direction

The extent to which teachers focus their efforts on educational goals and character building of students.

3) Persistence

The consistency of teachers in teaching despite facing limitations in facilities or diverse student conditions.

Principal Leadership Understanding Principal Leadership

According to Hasim, et al. (2020), school principal leadership is the ability of the school principal, manifested through personality, knowledge, vision, and concrete actions in directing, guiding, and motivating the school community to achieve educational goals.

Indicators of Principal Leadership

Hasim, et al. (2020) state that principal leadership is measured using four main indicators, namely:

1) Ability to Direct

The principal must be a direction setter who ensures that all school activities move toward the same goal.

2) Ability to Motivate Teachers

School principals serve as a source of psychological energy for teachers, encouraging them to be enthusiastic, optimistic, and willing to work hard. 3) Communication Skills

Communication is the primary tool of a leader; without good communication, effective leadership is impossible.

4) Ability to Set an Example

A principal's leadership will be strong if it is supported by real behavior, not just words.

Conceptual Framework

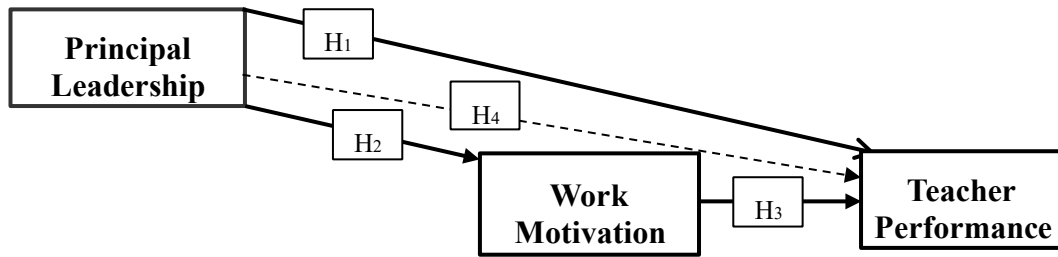


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Research Hypothesis

- H₁): The leadership of the principal has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance at SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan.
- H₂ The leadership of the principal has a positive and significant effect on work motivation at SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan.
- H₃: The work environment has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance at SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan.
- H₄ The work environment has a positive and significant effect on work motivation at SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan.
- H₅ : Work motivation has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance at SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan.
- H₆ : The leadership of the principal has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance through work motivation at SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan.
- H₇ : The work environment has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance through work motivation at SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan.

Research Methodology Type of Research

The type of research used by the researcher is quantitative research. According to Sugiyono (2022), quantitative research can be defined as a method based on positivism philosophy, used to study a specific population or sample, with sampling techniques generally conducted randomly, data collection using research instruments, and quantitative/statistical data analysis with the aim of testing predetermined hypotheses. This type of quantitative research was conducted to create a study aimed at adjusting a study and analyzing the leadership of the principal and the work environment on teacher performance through work motivation at SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan.

Research Location and Time

The research location was at SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan, located at Jl. Kolam No.3, Kec. Percut Sei Tuan, Deli Serdang. The research was conducted over a period of 3 months, from October to December 2025.

Population and Sample

According to Arikunto (2025), if the subject is not too large, 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 SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan, comprising 119 civil servants (PNS), 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 yielded the following results: **Validity Test**

Table 1. Outer Loadings Values

	Principal Leadership	Teacher Performance	Work Motivation
X1.1	0.817		
X1.2	0.840		
X1.3	0.865		
X1.4	0.847		
Y.1		0.700	
Y.2		0.860	
Y.3		0.688	
Y.4		0.842	
Y.5		0.835	
Y.6		0.876	
Y.7		0.814	
Z.1			0.826
Z.2			0.784
Z.3			0.860

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 ≥ 0.70 . 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.

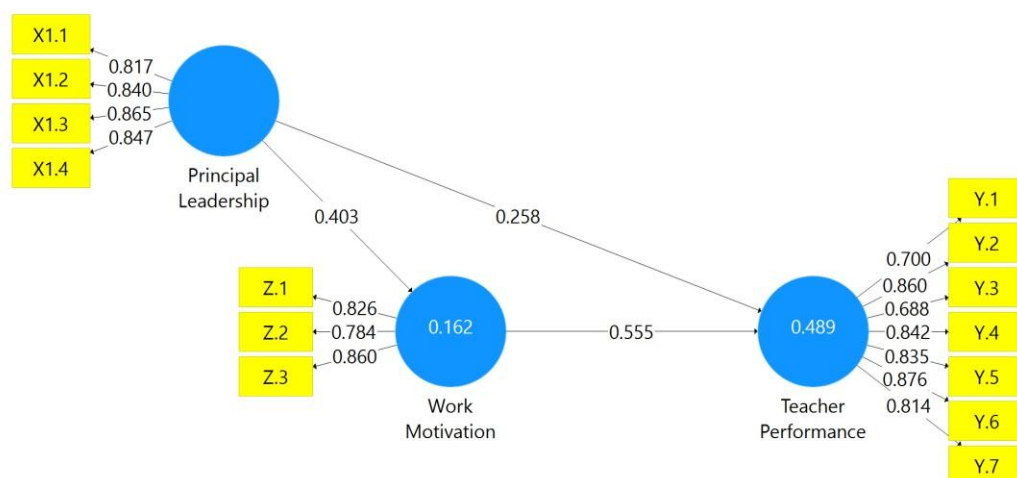


Figure 2.Outer Loading

Reliability Test

Table 2. Construct Reliability and Validity Test

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Principal Leadership	0.864	0.866	0.907	0.710
Teacher Performance	0.908	0.917	0.928	0.648
Work Motivation	0.764	0.778	0.863	0.678

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 (R^2)

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	0.162	0.155
Teacher Performance	0.489	0.481

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 0.162, meaning that the influence of the principal's leadership is 0.162 or 16.2%, with the remainder attributable to other variables outside the model. The R square value for teacher performance is 0.618, meaning that the principal's leadership and work motivation account for 0.489 or 48.9%, 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	0.258	3.432	0.001	Accepted
Principal Leadership -> Work Motivation	0.403	5.433	0.000	Accepted
Work Motivation -> Teacher Performance	0.555	8.083	0	Accepted

Source: Smart PLS Output, 2025

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

1. The principal's leadership has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance with a t-statistic value of 3.432 above 1.96 and a significance of 0.001 below 0.05, meaning that the principal's leadership has a real effect on teacher performance because the significance value is above 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 et al., 2025).

2. The principal's leadership has a positive and significant effect on work motivation with a tstatistic value of 5.433 above 1.96 and a significance of 0.000 below 0.05, meaning that the principal's leadership has a significant 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 (Dwipayana et al., 2022).
3. Work motivation has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance with a tstatistic value of 8.083 above 1.96 and a significance of 0.000 below 0.05, meaning that work motivation 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, which found that work motivation has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance (Silaen et al., 2023; Ginting & Indrawan, 2023; Fauzi & Indrawan, 2023).

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	0.224	4.187	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 4.187 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 SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan.
2. Principal leadership has a positive and significant effect on work motivation at SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan.
3. Work motivation has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance at SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan.
4. Principal leadership has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance through work motivation at SMK Negeri 1 Percut Sei Tuan.

Recommendations

1. Teacher performance with the lowest score was "I prepare lesson plans before teaching." Therefore, the recommendation is that the school needs to strengthen the culture of lesson planning by requiring the preparation and review of lesson plans before teaching, accompanied by regular academic guidance and supervision so that teachers become accustomed to planning lessons systematically and effectively.
2. Job satisfaction with the lowest score was "I work enthusiastically in carrying out my duties as a teacher." The school needs to maintain and improve teacher work enthusiasm by providing appreciation for performance, creating a supportive work environment, and

providing professional development opportunities so that teacher motivation remains high and sustainable.

3. School principal leadership with the lowest score: "The school principal has the ability to manage the school effectively." Schools need to encourage the strengthening of school principals' managerial competencies through leadership training and periodic performance evaluations so that school management becomes more effective, transparent, and oriented towards improving the quality of education.

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