

(Original Article)

Leadership, Work Environment, and Teacher Performance: The Mediating Role of Work Motivation in Indonesian Islamic High Schools

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Abstract : *Teacher performance remains a central determinant of educational quality, particularly in Islamic secondary schools where organizational leadership and institutional climate play strategic roles. This study examines the structural relationships between leadership and work environment on teacher performance, with work motivation acting as an intervening variable. A quantitative explanatory research design was employed involving 80 teachers from two State Islamic Junior Secondary Schools (Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri) in Pelaihari District, Tanah Laut Regency. Data were collected using Likert-scale questionnaires and analyzed through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings reveal that leadership and work environment do not have a significant direct effect on teacher performance. However, leadership significantly influences work motivation, and work motivation significantly affects teacher performance. Furthermore, work motivation mediates the relationship between leadership and teacher performance, while it does not significantly mediate the relationship between work environment and teacher performance. These results suggest that motivational mechanisms play a crucial role in translating leadership practices into improved teacher outcomes, whereas environmental factors alone are insufficient to directly enhance performance. This study contributes to educational management literature by clarifying the mediating function of work motivation within Islamic school contexts. The findings imply that strengthening motivational strategies through effective leadership practices is essential for improving teacher performance in public religious educational institutions.*

Keywords: *Leadership; Work Environment; Work Motivation; Teacher Performance; Educational Management.*

1. Introduction

Improving educational quality remains a strategic priority in Indonesia's national development agenda, particularly in strengthening the competitiveness of human resources. Data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Kemendikbudristek, 2023) indicate that national literacy and numeracy achievement still requires significant improvement, particularly at the junior secondary education level. Furthermore, the 2023 National Assessment Report revealed persistent disparities in learning quality across regions, especially between urban and

non-urban areas. These conditions highlight the importance of strengthening factors that directly contribute to educational effectiveness, particularly teacher performance.

Teachers play a central role in the educational process as the primary actors responsible for delivering learning activities. In Indonesia, Law No. 14 of 2005 concerning Teachers and Lecturers defines teachers as professional educators responsible for educating, teaching, guiding, directing, training, assessing, and evaluating students. The fulfilment of these professional responsibilities is reflected through teacher performance, which encompasses work quality, responsibility, initiative, and effectiveness in carrying out educational duties. Consequently, teacher performance is widely recognised as a key indicator of educational quality and institutional success.

Despite its importance, teacher performance is influenced by multiple factors beyond individual competence. Contemporary educational management literature suggests that organisational factors, particularly leadership and the work environment, play a substantial role in shaping employee behaviour and performance outcomes. Within educational institutions, principals serve not only as administrators but also as instructional leaders who are responsible for creating a supportive organisational climate, facilitating professional development, and ensuring the achievement of institutional goals. According to Yukl (2023), leadership refers to the process of influencing individuals or groups to achieve organisational objectives. Effective leadership is therefore expected to provide direction, foster communication, and strengthen teachers' commitment to institutional goals.

However, previous studies have reported inconsistent findings regarding the relationship between leadership and teacher performance. While some studies have identified a direct positive effect of leadership on performance, others have found that such effects occur indirectly through intervening variables, particularly work motivation. This inconsistency suggests that leadership may influence performance through complex psychological mechanisms rather than through direct organisational control alone.

In addition to leadership, the work environment represents another critical determinant of employee performance. The work environment encompasses both physical and non-physical aspects, including workplace facilities, infrastructure, interpersonal relationships, and organisational climate. A supportive work environment can enhance employee comfort, engagement, and productivity, whereas inadequate working conditions may reduce motivation and negatively affect performance. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework further argues that organisational resources, such as social support, adequate facilities, and positive workplace relationships, contribute significantly to employee motivation and work engagement.

The relevance of these issues is evident within the context of State Islamic Junior High Schools (*Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri*—MTsN) in Pelaihari District, Tanah Laut Regency. Although perceptions of principal leadership among teachers are generally positive, several organisational challenges remain evident, including limitations in teachers' facilities, differences in employment status among civil servants, PPPK employees, and honorary teachers, as well as disparities in welfare and employment benefits. These conditions suggest that favourable leadership and organisational environments may not automatically translate into improved teacher performance. Instead, other mechanisms may influence how organisational conditions affect employee outcomes.

One such mechanism is work motivation. According to Robbins and Judge (2023), motivation refers to the processes that account for an individual's intensity, direction, and persistence in pursuing organisational goals. Motivation functions as a psychological force that encourages individuals to perform their duties effectively and consistently. Teachers with higher levels of motivation are generally more committed to their professional responsibilities, demonstrate greater initiative, and produce higher-quality work outcomes. Consequently, motivation may serve as an important mediating variable linking organisational factors to teacher performance.

Although numerous studies have examined leadership, work environment, motivation, and performance separately, empirical evidence investigating the simultaneous relationships among these variables within the context of state Islamic schools remains limited. Furthermore, studies focusing on madrasah institutions in regional areas are relatively scarce compared with research conducted in general public schools. This gap highlights the need for a more comprehensive examination of the structural relationships among leadership, work environment, work motivation, and teacher performance.

Therefore, this study aims to analyse the effects of leadership and work environment on teacher performance, both directly and indirectly through work motivation, among teachers at State Islamic Junior High Schools in Tanah Laut Regency. By employing a structural model approach, this research seeks to provide empirical evidence regarding the mechanisms through which organisational and psychological factors contribute to teacher performance within the context of Indonesian madrasah education.

2. Method

This study employed a quantitative approach using an explanatory research design to examine the causal relationships between leadership, work environment, and teacher performance, with work motivation serving as an intervening variable. The explanatory approach was considered appropriate because it enables the testing of theoretical relationships

among variables and provides empirical evidence regarding direct and indirect effects within a structural model.

The study was conducted at State Islamic Junior High Schools (*Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri*—MTsN) in Pelaihari District, Tanah Laut Regency, South Kalimantan, Indonesia. The research population consisted of 80 teachers, comprising 55 teachers from MTsN 2 Tanah Laut and 25 teachers from MTsN 4 Tanah Laut. Given the relatively small population size, a saturated sampling (census) technique was employed, whereby all members of the population were included as research respondents.

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire designed to measure respondents' perceptions of leadership, work environment, work motivation, and teacher performance. The instrument utilised a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Measurement indicators for each construct were adapted from relevant theoretical and empirical literature to ensure conceptual consistency. Prior to the main analysis, the instrument was subjected to validity and reliability testing to confirm the adequacy of the measurement model.

Data analysis was conducted using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) approach with the assistance of SmartPLS software. PLS-SEM was selected because it is suitable for analysing complex structural models involving latent variables and mediation effects simultaneously, while also being effective for studies with relatively small sample sizes. Furthermore, the method is particularly useful for prediction-oriented research and theory development in the social sciences.

The analytical procedure consisted of two stages: evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) and evaluation of the structural model (inner model). The measurement model assessment included tests of convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability. Convergent validity was evaluated using factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), whilst discriminant validity was assessed through established criteria to ensure adequate distinction between constructs. Reliability was examined using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values.

Subsequently, the structural model was evaluated by examining path coefficients, coefficients of determination (R^2), and predictive relationships among variables. The significance of direct and indirect effects was assessed through the bootstrapping procedure, which generated *t*-statistics and *p*-values for hypothesis testing. This analytical approach enabled the comprehensive examination of both direct and mediated relationships among leadership, work environment, work motivation, and teacher performance, thereby providing a robust understanding of the factors influencing teacher performance within the context of state Islamic junior high schools.

3. Results And Discussion

Data analysis was conducted using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) approach to test the direct and indirect relationships between leadership, work environment, work motivation, and teacher performance. Based on the results of the structural model testing, it was found that leadership did not have a significant direct effect on teacher performance. Similarly, the work environment did not show a significant direct effect on teacher performance. Conversely, leadership was found to have a significant effect on work motivation, and work motivation had a significant effect on teacher performance. Furthermore, work motivation was found to mediate the effect of leadership on teacher performance, whilst the mediating role of motivation in the relationship between the work environment and performance was not found to be significant.

A summary of the structural model test results is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Summary of Structural Model Test Results

Relationships Between Variables	Significance	Description
Leadership → Teacher Performance	Not significant	No direct link has been established
Working Environment → Teacher Performance	Not significant	No direct link has been established
Leadership → Work Motivation	Significant	A positive effect has been demonstrated
Work Motivation → Teacher Performance	Significant	A positive effect has been demonstrated
Leadership → Motivation → Performance	Significant	Mediation has proven to be effective
Work Environment → Motivation → Performance	Not significant	Mediation was unsuccessful

Source: Results of PLS-SEM data analysis, 2024.

The structural model assessment revealed several important findings regarding the relationships among leadership, work environment, work motivation, and teacher performance in State Islamic Junior High Schools (*Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri*) in Pelaihari District, Tanah Laut Regency. The results indicate that leadership and work environment do not exert a

significant direct influence on teacher performance. In contrast, leadership significantly influences work motivation, work motivation significantly affects teacher performance, and work motivation mediates the relationship between leadership and teacher performance. However, work motivation does not significantly mediate the relationship between work environment and teacher performance.

The finding that leadership does not directly influence teacher performance suggests that the relationship between leadership and performance outcomes is not always linear. Contemporary leadership theory argues that leaders often influence organisational outcomes indirectly through psychological mechanisms, including commitment, engagement, and motivation (Yukl, 2023). In educational settings, principals may create favourable conditions for professional growth and organisational effectiveness, yet these conditions do not automatically translate into higher performance without corresponding internal motivation among teachers. This finding is consistent with the empirical conditions observed in the studied madrasahs, where perceptions of leadership quality were generally high, but such perceptions alone were insufficient to generate measurable improvements in teacher performance.

Similarly, the results indicate that the work environment does not have a significant direct effect on teacher performance. Although a supportive work environment is generally regarded as an important organisational resource, its impact may not be immediately reflected in performance outcomes. According to the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Theory, organisational resources contribute to employee performance when they are perceived as meaningful and capable of supporting work–related needs. In the context of the studied madrasahs, variations in employment status, welfare conditions, and the availability of facilities may have reduced the effectiveness of environmental factors in directly influencing teacher performance. Consequently, improvements in the work environment alone may not necessarily lead to enhanced performance unless accompanied by stronger psychological engagement among teachers.

Conversely, leadership was found to have a significant positive effect on work motivation. This finding supports the assumptions of Self-Determination Theory, which posits that individuals are more motivated when their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fulfilled. Principals who provide clear direction, maintain open communication, offer recognition, and encourage participation create conditions that strengthen teachers' sense of value and professional commitment. As a result, leadership functions as an external organisational stimulus that enhances teachers' intrinsic motivation to perform their duties effectively.

Work motivation was also found to significantly influence teacher performance. This finding is consistent with organisational motivation theory, which emphasises motivation as a determinant of the intensity,

direction, and persistence of individual effort (Robbins & Judge, 2023). Teachers with higher levels of motivation are more likely to demonstrate commitment in lesson planning, classroom instruction, student assessment, and professional responsibilities. Therefore, motivation can be regarded as a proximal determinant of performance because it directly influences work-related behaviour and productivity.

One of the most important findings of this study is the significant mediating role of work motivation in the relationship between leadership and teacher performance. The results indicate that effective leadership does not improve performance directly; rather, it enhances teacher motivation, which subsequently contributes to improved performance. This finding supports integrative organisational behaviour models that position psychological variables as mechanisms linking organisational conditions with performance outcomes. The result also reinforces previous studies suggesting that leadership effectiveness should be evaluated not only through direct organisational outcomes but also through its capacity to strengthen employee motivation and engagement.

In contrast, work motivation did not significantly mediate the relationship between work environment and teacher performance. This finding suggests that the existing work environment, although important, has not been sufficiently influential in generating strong intrinsic motivation among teachers. It is possible that environmental factors such as facilities and working conditions are perceived as basic organisational requirements rather than motivational drivers. Consequently, improvements in the work environment may contribute to employee comfort and satisfaction, but they may not necessarily stimulate the level of motivation required to produce substantial improvements in performance.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that teacher performance in State Islamic Junior High Schools in Tanah Laut Regency is influenced more strongly by internal psychological factors than by structural organisational factors alone. Leadership functions primarily as a catalyst for motivation, while motivation serves as the principal driver of performance behaviour. These findings imply that educational quality improvement strategies should extend beyond administrative reforms and physical resource enhancement. Greater attention should be directed towards strengthening leadership practices that foster teacher motivation, professional commitment, and engagement. By creating a motivational work climate, school leaders can contribute more effectively to sustainable improvements in teacher performance and educational quality.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that leadership and work environment do not have a direct effect on teacher performance at State Islamic Junior High Schools (*Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri*) in Pelaihari District, Tanah Laut Regency.

Although teachers generally perceived leadership practices positively, such leadership was not sufficient to directly enhance performance outcomes. Similarly, the work environment did not demonstrate a significant direct influence on teacher performance. These findings indicate that structural organisational factors alone are insufficient to automatically improve teacher performance without the presence of stronger internal motivational mechanisms.

The study further reveals that leadership has a significant positive effect on work motivation, whilst work motivation significantly influences teacher performance. Moreover, work motivation was found to mediate the relationship between leadership and teacher performance, indicating that effective leadership contributes to improved teacher performance primarily through the enhancement of teachers' internal motivation. In this regard, work motivation functions as a proximal determinant that bridges organisational factors and performance behaviour. These findings support contemporary leadership theory and Self-Determination Theory, which emphasise the critical role of psychological factors in shaping employee performance within educational organisations.

Based on these findings, school leaders should focus on strengthening teachers' work motivation rather than relying solely on administrative and structural approaches. Leadership practices that support teacher autonomy, recognise professional competence, and foster positive working relationships are likely to be more effective in improving performance sustainably. Furthermore, efforts to improve the work environment should continue, particularly through enhancing educational facilities and promoting organisational fairness. Future studies are encouraged to incorporate additional variables such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment, or employee engagement, as well as expand the geographical scope of investigation to provide a broader understanding of teacher performance within the context of Islamic education in Indonesia.

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