

Examining the Mediating Role of Work Motivation in the Relationship between Principals' Leadership, Work Climate, and Kindergarten Teachers' Performance

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A B S T R A C T

This study investigates the influence of principals' leadership and the work climate on teachers' performance, with work motivation positioned as a mediating factor. A quantitative research design was applied through a survey approach. The study involved kindergarten teachers in the North Bekasi District, with 77 respondents selected using purposive sampling. Data collection was carried out using a Likert-scale questionnaire, and the data were analyzed through Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings reveal that the work climate has a positive and significant impact on teachers' performance, whereas principals' leadership does not show a significant effect on teachers' performance or work motivation. In addition, the work climate does not significantly affect work motivation. Work motivation, however, has a positive and significant influence on teachers' performance, although it does not function as a mediator in the relationship between principals' leadership and teachers' performance, nor between the work climate and teachers' performance. Overall, the results indicate that teachers' performance is more strongly shaped by a supportive work environment and the level of teachers' motivation. Consequently, efforts to improve teachers' performance and enhance educational quality should prioritize the creation of a positive work climate and the strengthening of teachers' work motivation.

Keywords: Principals' Leadership, Work Climate, Work Motivation, Teachers' Performance

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INTRODUCTION

Education has a very important position in encouraging the progress of a nation, because through the education process the quality of human resources can be improved continuously (Tiara et al., 2023). Quality education not only focuses on mastering knowledge and skills, but also plays a role in shaping individual character, moral values, and the ability to adapt to technological developments and global dynamics (Junaidi et al., 2023; Melisawati & Jamilus, 2024). Therefore, the quality of education is a strategic factor in increasing community productivity, encouraging economic growth, and reducing social and economic disparities (Mashuri et al., 2024; Edo & Yasin, 2024).

In an effort to develop human resources, educational institutions are required to be managed professionally, including in the management of educators. Good human resource management is one of the keys to the success of educational organizations, especially through strengthening the role of teachers as the main implementers of the learning process. Professional teachers have a great contribution to the quality of learning and learning outcomes of students, where their performance is influenced by various factors, both from within the teacher and from the work environment (Ningsih & Muhroji, 2023).

One of the external factors that has a significant influence on teacher performance is the leadership of the principal. School principals play a strategic role as educational leaders, decision-makers, motivators, and resource managers in the school environment (Ellianis et al., 2022; Mulyati, 2024). Effective leadership is able to create a supportive work atmosphere,

encourage innovation in learning, and increase teachers' motivation and commitment in carrying out their professional duties (Purwanto, 2021; Agustina et al., 2024; Ambawani et al., 2024).

In addition to the principal's leadership, the work climate is also an important factor that also determines teacher performance. The work climate describes the shared perception of organizational policies, work practices, patterns of relationships between individuals, and psychological conditions felt in the work environment (Schneider et al., 2013). A positive work climate, characterized by open communication, harmonious working relationships, and appreciation for performance, can increase job satisfaction, reduce stress levels, and encourage teachers to work more productively and professionally (Robbins & Judge, 2017; Wirawan, 2013).

However, the influence of the principal's leadership and work climate on teacher performance does not always occur directly. Work motivation is a psychological factor that plays an important role in strengthening or weakening these relationships (Luthans, 2011). Work motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, is influenced by the principal's leadership style, organizational support, and the conditions of the work environment felt by teachers (Supawi, 2024). Teachers with a high level of work motivation tend to show greater dedication, creativity, and commitment in carrying out learning tasks (Zain, 2022).

In the context of early childhood education, especially in kindergarten, the role of school principals is becoming increasingly important. Kindergarten is an initial level that serves as the basis for the formation of students' character, attitudes, and basic skills (Rohmah & Azizah, 2023). However, preliminary observations in a number of kindergartens in Bekasi District show that there are several problems in the leadership practice of school principals, such as low teacher involvement in the decision-making process, lack of consistency in policy implementation, and the emergence of perceptions of injustice that have an impact on teacher motivation and performance.

This condition emphasizes the need for a more in-depth empirical study of the relationship between the principal's leadership, work climate, work motivation, and teacher performance. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the influence of principal leadership and work climate on teacher performance with work motivation as a mediating variable in kindergarten in Bekasi District.

METHODS

This study employs a quantitative approach with a survey method. The quantitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to objectively test the relationships between variables using numerical data, while the survey method was applied to collect empirical data directly from respondents through questionnaires (Sugiyono, 2017). The study involves four main variables: principal leadership (X_1) and work climate (X_2) as independent variables, work motivation (Z) as a mediating variable, and teacher performance (Y) as the dependent variable. Collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to describe the conditions of each variable and inferential statistics to examine both direct and indirect relationships among the research variables.

The population in this study includes all kindergarten teachers in North Bekasi District, totaling 337 teachers across 108 kindergartens, based on 2025 Dapodikdasmen data. The sample size was determined using Slovin's formula with a 10% margin of error, resulting in 77 kindergarten teachers. Purposive sampling was employed to select respondents based on specific criteria, including teachers from kindergartens with active students, schools with more than one teacher to allow assessment of the work climate, and teachers willing to participate. This technique ensures that the data collected are relevant to the research objectives and accurately represent the study conditions (Sugiyono, 2017).

The study variables were measured using specific indicators. Principal leadership was assessed through leadership vision, communication skills, role modeling, and teacher empowerment, while work climate was measured through internal communication, peer



support, role clarity, and organizational structure. Work motivation, as a mediating variable, included effort intensity, perseverance, goal orientation, and job satisfaction, whereas teacher performance was evaluated through teaching effectiveness, discipline, innovation, participation in school activities, and performance evaluations. Data were collected via questionnaires using a five-point Likert scale (Suliyanto, 2018). Data analysis involved validity and reliability tests, descriptive statistics, and hypothesis testing using Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to examine causal relationships among variables (Hamid, 2019; Sugiyono, 2017).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

Based on the data processing that has been carried out, the results of the analysis are used to answer the research hypothesis by paying attention to the *t-statistical* and *p-value* values. A hypothesis is declared acceptable if the *p-value* is less than 0.05. In this study, seven hypotheses were proposed. Hypothesis testing was carried out using the *bootstrapping* technique to determine the significance of the influence between variables. The *t-statistic* value is used to see if there is a significant influence between independent variables and dependent variables. If the *t-statistical* value is greater than 1.984 (the *t-table* value at a significance level of 5% or = TINV (0.05,100)), then the influence between these variables is declared significant [19]. In addition, decision-making is also based on *p-values*, where a *p-value* of less than 0.05 indicates that an alternative hypothesis (Ha) is accepted and a null (Ho) hypothesis is rejected, while a *p-value* greater than 0.05 indicates the opposite. The results of the hypothesis test in this study were obtained through the SmartPLS program using *path coefficient* analysis through the *bootstrapping* technique, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Hypothesis Testing Results

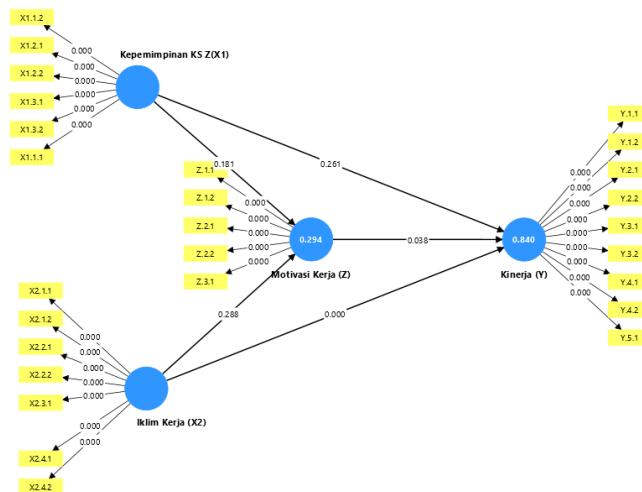
Hipoteis	Relationships between variables	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
H1	Iklim Kerja (X2) -> Kinerja (Y)	0.920	0.915	0.137	6.709	0.000
H2	Iklim Kerja (X2) -> Motivasi Kerja (Z)	0.294	0.322	0.277	1.063	0.288
H3	Kepemimpinan KS (X1) -> Kinerja (Y)	-0.128	-0.139	0.114	1.125	0.261
H4	Kepemimpinan KS (X1) -> Motivasi Kerja (Z)	0.269	0.243	0.201	1.338	0.181
H5	Motivasi Kerja (Z) -> Kinerja (Y)	0.177	0.180	0.085	2.081	0.038
H6	Iklim Kerja (X2) -> Motivasi Kerja (Z) -> Kinerja (Y)	0.052	0.063	0.068	0.761	0.447
H7	Kepemimpinan KS (X1) -> Motivasi Kerja (Z) -> Kinerja (Y)	0.048	0.043	0.041	1.155	0.248

Figure 1 Hypothesis Test graph output

Source : data obtained with SmartPLS 4.1.0.0, (2025)

The findings of this study reveal that the work climate exerts a very strong and statistically significant influence on teacher performance. This relationship is quantitatively reflected in the path coefficient value of 0.920, accompanied by a t-statistic of 6.709 and a p-value of 0.000, which is well below the conventional threshold of significance set at 0.05. Consequently, the first hypothesis of this study, which posits that the work climate positively affects teacher performance, is fully supported. These results underscore the crucial role of a conducive and supportive work environment in enhancing teacher performance. A positive work climate is characterized by multiple interrelated factors, including robust organizational support, clear and effective channels of communication, collaborative relationships among colleagues, and a general sense of harmony and cohesion within the school environment. When such conditions are present, teachers are more likely to experience psychological comfort, feel valued within their professional context, and are motivated to optimize their teaching efforts. As a result, their overall effectiveness and productivity in carrying out their professional duties tend to increase. These findings align with existing literature on organizational behavior, which emphasizes that the quality of the work environment significantly shapes employee performance by creating conditions that facilitate focus, engagement, and sustained professional effort.

In contrast, the effect of the work climate on teachers' work motivation was found to be statistically insignificant. The analysis yielded a path coefficient value of 0.294, with a t-statistic of 1.063 and a p-value of 0.288, suggesting that the observed relationship between these variables does not reach the threshold of statistical significance. This indicates that while teachers may operate within a generally favorable work environment, this factor alone is insufficient to substantially enhance their intrinsic motivation to work. It is possible that other elements exert a stronger influence on work motivation. For example, teachers' motivation



could be more directly shaped by the structure and fairness of the reward system, opportunities for career advancement, the availability of professional development programs, or levels of personal job satisfaction. In essence, while a supportive work climate provides a foundation for teacher performance, it does not automatically translate into heightened motivation. Motivation, as a psychological construct, may require additional stimuli and recognition to be effectively activated, indicating that extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors need to be carefully managed to produce optimal outcomes.

The analysis also examined the role of school principals' leadership in influencing teacher performance. Interestingly, the results showed a negative but statistically non-significant relationship, with a path coefficient of -0.128, a t-statistic of 1.125, and a p-value of 0.261. These findings suggest that in the context of this study, the leadership practices of principals have

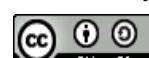
not made a measurable contribution to improving teacher performance. Several interpretations could be drawn from this result. First, it may imply that teacher performance is less sensitive to leadership behaviors in isolation and more dependent on other factors such as individual teacher competence, accumulated teaching experience, and peer support networks. Second, it may reflect a situation in which principals' leadership styles are not optimally aligned with the specific needs or expectations of their teaching staff, thereby limiting their effectiveness in promoting performance improvements. These insights highlight the complex nature of leadership influence in educational settings, where the interaction between leaders and subordinates is mediated by multiple contextual and individual variables.

Regarding the relationship between principal leadership and teachers' work motivation, the analysis revealed a positive but again statistically non-significant effect. The path coefficient was 0.269, with a t-statistic of 1.338 and a p-value of 0.181. This indicates that while there may be a slight tendency for effective leadership to enhance teacher motivation, the impact is not strong enough to be considered statistically meaningful. Factors such as the intensity and quality of interaction between principals and teachers, the leadership style employed (whether participative, transformational, or transactional), and the alignment of leadership strategies with teachers' personal and professional expectations could influence the effectiveness of leadership in motivating teachers. The findings suggest that simply occupying a leadership position or demonstrating general leadership behaviors may not be sufficient to directly stimulate motivation unless these behaviors are targeted and responsive to teacher needs.

In contrast to the previous variables, work motivation itself was demonstrated to have a direct, positive, and statistically significant impact on teacher performance. The path coefficient for this relationship was 0.177, accompanied by a t-statistic of 2.081 and a p-value of 0.038. This result highlights the importance of motivation as a key driver of teacher performance. Even though the magnitude of this effect can be considered moderate, it underscores that teachers who exhibit high levels of motivation are more likely to demonstrate discipline, initiative, commitment, and a proactive approach in fulfilling their professional responsibilities. Motivated teachers tend to engage more deeply in instructional activities, seek continuous improvement in their teaching practices, and contribute positively to the overall school environment. This finding aligns with motivational theories in educational psychology, which posit that intrinsic motivation enhances persistence, effort, and performance outcomes across diverse professional contexts.

Despite its importance, the study found that work motivation does not act as a mediating variable between principal leadership and teacher performance. The path coefficient of the indirect effect was 0.048, with a p-value of 0.248, indicating that this mediating relationship is not statistically significant. In practical terms, this means that the leadership of school principals does not substantially affect teacher performance either directly or indirectly through its influence on work motivation. Similarly, work motivation was also not found to mediate the relationship between work climate and teacher performance. The indirect effect in this case had a path coefficient of 0.052 and a p-value of 0.447, further confirming that the contribution of work climate to teacher performance operates directly, rather than being channeled through variations in teacher motivation levels. These findings reinforce the understanding that while work motivation positively influences performance, it does not serve as a significant conduit for amplifying the effects of leadership or work climate in this specific context.

Overall, of the seven hypotheses tested in this study, only two were found to be statistically significant. These were the direct influence of the work climate on teacher performance and the impact of work motivation on teacher performance. The remaining hypotheses, including the influence of principal leadership on teacher motivation and performance, as well as the potential mediating role of motivation, did not show significant results. This pattern suggests that, within the studied educational context, the work climate is a dominant factor that directly



shapes teacher performance, whereas work motivation acts as a supplementary factor that enhances performance when present. Leadership, while theoretically important, may require more targeted strategies or alignment with teacher expectations to yield tangible improvements in performance or motivation.

The implications of these findings are multifaceted. First, improving teacher performance should not rely solely on enhancing leadership effectiveness, but must also focus on creating and maintaining a supportive work environment. Schools could consider implementing policies and practices that strengthen organizational support, foster collaboration among teachers, and improve communication channels to ensure that teachers feel valued and supported in their professional roles. Second, although work motivation alone does not fully mediate the effects of leadership or work climate, it remains an important factor that contributes to performance. Consequently, educational administrators should prioritize strategies that sustain and enhance teacher motivation, including recognition programs, professional development opportunities, and mechanisms that facilitate career growth and personal satisfaction. Third, the non-significant effect of leadership on teacher performance highlights the need for principals to critically assess their leadership approaches, ensuring they are aligned with teacher needs, responsive to feedback, and adaptable to varying situational demands within the school.

Furthermore, these findings suggest that other factors beyond leadership and work climate may significantly influence teacher performance. For instance, the acquisition of professional competencies through training, mentoring programs, access to adequate teaching resources, and the implementation of a fair and transparent reward system are likely to play pivotal roles. In addition, school culture, teacher collaboration, and peer support networks could serve as additional determinants that strengthen or moderate the relationship between work environment conditions and performance outcomes. By understanding the interplay of these factors, educational policymakers and administrators can develop a more holistic approach to improving teacher performance, which is essential for advancing educational quality and student outcomes.

In conclusion, the results of this study emphasize that a supportive work climate and individual work motivation are key determinants of teacher performance, with work climate emerging as the dominant factor. While principal leadership did not show a statistically significant direct or indirect effect, its potential impact should not be overlooked, particularly if leadership strategies are adapted to better meet teacher expectations and needs. Future interventions aimed at enhancing teacher performance should therefore adopt a comprehensive strategy that simultaneously fosters a positive work environment, strengthens teacher motivation, and addresses additional factors such as training, resources, and recognition systems. This integrated approach will likely yield sustainable improvements in teacher performance, ultimately contributing to better educational outcomes for students.

Discussion

The study's findings reveal that the work climate positively and significantly affects teacher performance. An environment that supports teachers—through clear communication, administrative backing, collaboration among colleagues, and well-defined organizational structures—can motivate educators to perform their duties more efficiently and professionally. These results align with previous studies indicating that a favorable work climate enhances psychological comfort, which directly contributes to better performance (Robbins & Judge, 2017), and corroborate research highlighting that a supportive workplace significantly boosts teacher productivity (Suliyanto, 2018).

On the other hand, the work climate was not found to significantly influence teachers' work motivation. This suggests that even when the environment is generally supportive, it does not automatically enhance intrinsic motivation. This outcome supports Herzberg's two-factor theory, which argues that environmental factors function as hygiene elements that prevent dissatisfaction but do not actively increase motivation (Robbins & Judge, 2017). Teacher

motivation is therefore more likely shaped by internal factors, such as personal accomplishment, recognition, and job satisfaction.

Moreover, principal leadership did not demonstrate a significant impact on teacher performance. This indicates that performance is not solely determined by leadership style, but is also affected by other aspects such as teaching experience, professional competence, and intrinsic drive. This finding aligns with previous research stating that leadership does not always directly influence performance, especially in educational contexts where high levels of professionalism and autonomy are required (Hamid, 2019). Similarly, principal leadership did not show a significant effect on work motivation, although the relationship was positive. This suggests that the leadership style implemented has not fully addressed teachers' psychological needs or optimally boosted morale. Effective leadership depends on the alignment of style with the characteristics and needs of those being led, making participatory and communicative approaches essential to enhance motivation (Sugiyono, 2017).

Meanwhile, work motivation was found to have a positive and significant effect on teacher performance. Teachers with higher motivation tend to demonstrate greater discipline, commitment, and responsibility in fulfilling their professional duties. This aligns with motivational theory, which identifies motivation as a key driver of individual work behavior and a direct contributor to performance outcomes (Robbins & Judge, 2017), and supports prior studies emphasizing the critical role of motivation in improving educator performance (Suliyanto, 2018).

Mediation analysis revealed that work motivation did not serve as a mediator between principal leadership and teacher performance. This indicates that leadership affects performance more through structural and administrative channels rather than by enhancing motivation, limiting its ability to simultaneously influence both motivation and outcomes (Hamid, 2019). Likewise, work motivation did not mediate the effect of the work climate on teacher performance, suggesting that the work climate influences performance directly through operational mechanisms, such as smooth coordination and task efficiency, rather than through motivational factors (Suliyanto, 2018).

Overall, the study confirms that both work climate and work motivation are essential determinants of teacher performance, whereas principal leadership has a more contextual and indirect role. Accordingly, strategies to enhance teacher performance should prioritize fostering a supportive work environment and strengthening motivation, while also developing principal leadership that is adaptive, participatory, and responsive to the needs of teachers and the school context (Sugiyono, 2017; Robbins & Judge, 2017).

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that the work climate has a positive and significant influence on teacher performance. A supportive work environment, with effective communication, collaboration between teachers, management support, and adequate facilities, has been proven to be able to improve teacher performance directly. Meanwhile, the work climate does not significantly affect work motivation, and the leadership of the principal also does not show any direct or indirect influence on teacher performance or motivation. These findings suggest that teachers' motivational factors are more influenced by individual needs, job satisfaction, and internal drive, while leadership roles are contextual and depend on the suitability of styles with the conditions of teachers and schools.

In addition, work motivation has been shown to play a positive and significant role in supporting teacher performance, even though the effect is moderate. The mediation test showed that work motivation did not mediate the influence of leadership or work climate on teacher performance, so that performance improvement was more directly influenced by the work climate. Therefore, it is recommended that schools focus on creating a conducive work climate through communication, cooperation, and adequate facilities, while increasing teacher motivation through rewards, professional development, and well-being. Principals are expected to develop leadership that is adaptive, participatory, and empowering teachers,



while further research can explore other variables that have the potential to influence teacher performance with a more diverse methodological approach.

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