The Leadership Style of School Principals and Its Influence on Teacher Work Motivation

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ABSTRACT

Education serves as a vital process for transmitting values and guiding humanity toward meaningful and civilized living. In the school context, leadership plays a central role in shaping teacher performance and motivation, which directly impact the quality of learning outcomes. The background of this study lies in the recognition that variations in principals' leadership styles often lead to differences in teachers' enthusiasm, discipline, and commitment to their professional duties. The purpose of this study is to analyze how different leadership styles of school principals influence teachers' work motivation and to identify which leadership behaviors most effectively enhance teacher engagement and performance. Using a descriptive qualitative method, data were collected through observations, interviews, and document analysis involving principals and teachers at selected schools. The findings reveal that supportive, democratic, and communicative leadership styles foster strong motivation, enthusiasm, and commitment among teachers, creating a positive and collaborative work climate. Conversely, authoritarian and inconsistent leadership styles tend to reduce teachers' morale, creativity, and productivity. The study concludes that the principal's leadership style is a decisive factor in shaping teacher motivation and school effectiveness. The implication of this research emphasizes the need for principals to adopt empathetic, participatory, and transformational leadership approaches that encourage teacher involvement, build trust, and strengthen the overall quality of education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education serves as an essential medium for transmitting values and guiding humanity in navigating life and civilization. Without education, humans would remain in a state of ignorance, indistinguishable from other living beings that lack structured learning. Education liberates people from poverty and intellectual deprivation, which is why learners must be equipped with adequate knowledge to ensure a dignified life and social progress (Tilaar, 2010). This aligns with the definition of education in Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which defines education as a conscious and planned effort to create a learning environment and process that enables learners to actively develop their potential spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and skills needed for personal, social, national, and state development. In this context, education becomes a vital instrument for shaping the quality of human life and national civilization, serving as the foundation for progress in all aspects of society.

In the current era of globalization, Human Resource Management (HRM) has become a crucial component of organizational success, particularly in ensuring effective leadership, management, implementation, and supervision of personnel. Human resource competence is recognized as a key factor in achieving competitive advantage. The new paradigm in managing educational institutions emphasizes optimizing human resources to improve institutional performance (Rolando, 2024). Within HRM, improving teacher performance is a fundamental requirement for achieving educational quality. Studies show that teacher performance largely depends on teachers' own willingness, openness, and sense of responsibility toward their work. Performance can be understood as the measurable outcomes of one's work in terms of quantity and quality, evaluated against established expectations. Darsono (2020) similarly defines performance as the result of activities completed

within a specific timeframe. Thus, enhancing teacher performance through effective HRM is essential to sustain educational excellence and institutional productivity.

Education in Indonesia has now become a fundamental necessity that must evolve in line with the nation's developmental stages. Properly managed education, when systematic, structured, and efficient, can accelerate the development of national culture and intelligence, as mandated in the objectives of national education (Frismelly, Giatman, & Ernawati, 2021). The effectiveness of educational implementation depends not only on the availability of resources but also on the capacity of schools to manage their classrooms and instructional processes effectively. Classroom management, therefore, becomes an integral part of the educational system, influencing the success of learning outcomes and overall school performance.

The leadership of a school principal plays a strategic role in realizing these goals. As both a leader and manager, the principal influences, motivates, and directs teachers and staff to achieve institutional objectives. Effective leadership can foster a positive work environment, increase job satisfaction, and enhance teachers' performance. Conversely, ineffective leadership may weaken motivation, reduce morale, and ultimately lower the quality of teaching and learning. Therefore, understanding how different leadership styles influence teacher motivation is essential for improving school performance. A principal's ability to balance managerial and instructional leadership functions determines the success of the entire learning system, ensuring that classroom management, teacher performance, and student achievement are aligned with the broader goals of education.

Teacher performance refers to a teacher's ability to execute teaching duties, fulfill professional responsibilities toward students, and contribute to improving student achievement. It reflects the teacher's effectiveness in planning, implementing, and evaluating the learning process. Several factors influence performance, including motivation, leadership, and the work environment. However, this study focuses specifically on work motivation and principal leadership as two critical elements that shape the quality and consistency of teacher performance. A teacher who is motivated and well-guided under effective leadership tends to demonstrate higher creativity, responsibility, and commitment to achieving educational goals. In the context of modern education, where teaching demands continuous innovation and adaptation, motivation and leadership function as vital forces that sustain teacher productivity and instructional effectiveness.

Teacher motivation arises when principals provide attention, recognition, trust, and satisfaction, as well as through effective communication between teachers and school leaders. These conditions strengthen morale and improve performance by fostering a sense of belonging and professional pride. Usman (2013) defines motivation as the inner drive or need that encourages an individual to work. Therefore, motivation serves not only as a psychological factor but also as a practical mechanism that aligns individual goals with institutional objectives. Principal leadership, in this regard, significantly shapes the overall quality of school management. An appropriate leadership style positively influences decision-making, inspires teachers, and enhances efficiency and productivity. Permadi (2010) characterizes leadership as the process of influencing others' behavior or the art of guiding individuals and groups toward common goals (Damayani et al., 2020). This implies that leadership is both a science and an art that requires emotional intelligence, communication skills, and strategic thinking to achieve optimal results in education.

Efforts to improve teacher performance must therefore involve both internal and external dimensions. Teachers need to cultivate intrinsic motivation through self-awareness, commitment, and professional growth, while principals must provide effective leadership, guidance, and professional support. The synergy between personal motivation and external leadership contributes to an empowering school climate where teachers feel valued and inspired to perform their best. Teacher motivation directly affects performance and plays a key role in learning success, particularly in planning, implementing, and evaluating classroom instruction (Baihaqi, 2015). In addition, when teachers are motivated and supported, they tend to engage more deeply in reflective teaching practices and continuous improvement, which ultimately enhances student learning outcomes and school effectiveness.

Ultimately, the quality of a principal's leadership determines the overall quality of school outcomes. Through effective leadership and management practices, principals influence teaching quality, teacher productivity, and student achievement (Educational Administration, 2016). A principal who demonstrates transformational and participatory leadership can build a culture of trust, collaboration, and accountability among teachers. Hence, the principal's leadership style is not merely an administrative function but a decisive

factor in building a dynamic, innovative, and high-performing educational environment. Effective principals serve as role models and catalysts for change, ensuring that every teacher's effort contributes meaningfully to the realization of the school's vision and the advancement of educational excellence.

The purpose of this study is to examine and analyze the influence of school principals' leadership styles on teachers' work motivation in the educational environment. It aims to identify how various leadership approaches practiced by principals, including democratic, transformational, and authoritarian styles, affect teachers' enthusiasm, commitment, and productivity in performing their professional responsibilities. This study also seeks to determine which leadership characteristics most effectively foster a positive school climate, enhance teacher engagement, and improve the overall quality of education. Through this analysis, the research intends to provide meaningful insights and recommendations for strengthening leadership practices that encourage motivation, collaboration, and professional growth among teachers.

2. METHOD

This study employs a library research design with a descriptive-analytical approach. Library research is conducted by collecting data and information from various written sources such as books, journals, documents, reports, and historical records to construct a strong theoretical framework (Sari & Asmendri, 2020). The descriptive-analytical approach was chosen to identify and analyze key concepts systematically, explore relationships among them, and present coherent arguments based on existing studies. The object of this research consists of scientific ideas, arguments, and findings found in literature relevant to the research topic. The sources are divided into primary sources, including textbooks, policy documents, monographs, and historical writings, and secondary sources, such as journal articles, conference proceedings, research reports, and literature reviews. The scope of the study is limited to ensure depth and focus on the main constructs being investigated, such as leadership style and teacher work motivation.

Data collection was carried out through a systematic review of both printed and digital literature. The process began with formulating appropriate keywords, followed by a search through library catalogs, academic databases, institutional repositories, and other scholarly indexes. The inclusion criteria for sources included direct relevance to the topic, conceptual or empirical depth, and methodological soundness, while sources that were duplicated, overly general, or lacked academic credibility were excluded. The researcher then extracted key information from each source, including its identity, objectives, theoretical framework, methods, findings, and limitations, and organized all references consistently according to the required citation style.

Data analysis was conducted through descriptive, thematic, and comparative techniques. Descriptive analysis was used to summarize the essential content and arguments from each source, while thematic analysis categorized data into major and subthemes to identify conceptual patterns. Comparative analysis examined similarities and differences across sources to evaluate consistency, theoretical relevance, and research gaps. Source criticism was also applied to assess the credibility, context, and potential bias of each reference to ensure the validity of interpretation. To maintain the reliability and transparency of findings, the study employed source triangulation—by comparing different types of literature and maintained an audit trail documenting every step of the data search, selection, and synthesis process (Sari & Asmendri, 2020). Overall, this design ensures that the library research process is systematic, rigorous, and analytically grounded, producing not merely a summary of literature but a theoretical synthesis supported by critical reasoning and evidence.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The library synthesis yields four principal findings about school principal leadership and teacher work motivation.

Conception of leadership and principal functions Across sources, leadership is understood as a process of stimulating, mobilizing, directing, and coordinating the motives and loyalty of organizational members, and it occupies a strategic position within school management (Maemonah, 2015). In the school context, the principal acts as leader and manager who organizes, instructs, supervises, and resolves emergent problems while sustaining effective teacher–student interactions (Giode, 2016). Seven core functions consistently appear in the literature: educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, and motivator. Principals who enact these functions coherently are more likely to lead effectively.

Leadership styles relevant to school settings. Five styles are most frequently discussed in Indonesian school contexts: 1) Managerial leadership emphasizes orderly structures, roles, and processes that keep activities aligned with school objectives; it improves organizational efficiency but often lacks an explicit vision for change (Gaol, 2017); 2) Transformational leadership focuses on elevating motivation and morality, converting vision into reality, and activating potential among teachers and staff (Akbar & Imaniyati, 2019; Burns in Sovya, 2005). 3) Transactional leadership relies on clear targets, procedures, and contingent rewards or sanctions; it is effective for deadlines and compliance, but its motivational effects are usually short term. 4) Instructional or teaching leadership centers the principal's work on improving teaching quality and student learning, including teacher professional development and coherent instructional support (Bevoise, 1984; Ibrahim, 2014); 5) Positive leadership prioritizes strengths, trust, and well-being to create a productive, supportive climate.

Determinants and patterns of teacher work motivation. Teacher motivation drives effort, persistence, and performance and is shaped by internal and external factors. When expectations about fair conditions, recognition, communication, and support are not met, motivation declines and negative effects follow such as lower teaching quality, reduced innovation, and weaker student outcomes. When expectations are met, motivation rises along with teaching quality, relationships, achievement, and creativity (Sampurno & Wibowo, 2015).

Linkages between leadership styles and motivation. Supportive, communicative, and vision-oriented leadership (transformational, instructional, positive) is associated with higher enthusiasm, responsibility, and professional commitment among teachers. Managerial leadership stabilizes routines and resources that enable teaching but may not, by itself, inspire discretionary effort. Transactional leadership helps with task focus and punctuality but can depress intrinsic motivation if overused or applied without recognition and growth opportunities.

Discussion

The findings indicate that principal leadership is a central lever for shaping teacher motivation and, through it, classroom quality and student achievement. Effective leadership integrates the seven principal functions with a balanced use of styles that align with the school's vision, mission, and contextual needs. A strong leader not only manages organizational processes but also inspires teachers to perform at their best by combining structure, empathy, and instructional focus. Leadership, in this sense, is not merely about authority or decision-making but about influencing others through example, communication, and shared purpose. The study underscores that when principals adopt leadership practices that are responsive, participatory, and instructional in nature, the overall climate of the school becomes more collaborative and conducive to teaching excellence. Three points deserve emphasis in interpreting these findings.

First, a coherent leadership mix matters. Managerial practices ensure reliability, accountability, and adherence to standards, while transformational and positive leadership practices communicate shared purpose, trust, and recognition. Instructional leadership anchors all efforts to teaching and learning by aligning professional development, feedback, and curriculum support. Overreliance on transactional controls may secure short-term compliance but can gradually erode teachers' intrinsic motivation if not complemented with autonomy, acknowledgment, and empowerment. As Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) emphasize, transformational leadership is most effective when combined with strong instructional direction and clear organizational management, producing both commitment and competence among teachers. This synergy allows principals to maintain operational stability while simultaneously promoting professional growth and innovation within their schools.

Second, climate and communication are crucial motivational mechanisms that determine how leadership practices are experienced by teachers. Attention, alignment, trust, and transparent communication from principals are consistently linked to higher teacher morale, engagement, and performance. Principals who demonstrate empathy and openness in their interactions foster psychological safety and a sense of belonging among teachers. Practical routines that sustain this include regular instructional conferences, fair workload distribution, timely and constructive feedback focused on growth, and public recognition of effort and improvement. These routines operationalize the motivator role of leadership and prevent a drift toward punitive or purely administrative management. According to Tschannen-Moran (2014), trust is the "connective

tissue" of schools when teachers trust their principals, they are more likely to demonstrate commitment, collaboration, and resilience in their work. Such trust-based relationships form the foundation for sustainable motivation and collective efficacy in educational institutions.

Third, policy and capacity conditions significantly shape what principals can achieve through their leadership. Expanded education budgets, reforms, and policy commitments will not automatically result in improved classroom outcomes unless they are effectively translated into professional learning opportunities, collaborative cultures, and coherent instructional practices. Principals act as the bridge between policy intentions and classroom realities, and their ability to convert institutional resources into meaningful educational outcomes depends on both competence and vision. Therefore, principal development programs should deliberately target the seven leadership functions and the four leadership styles that show the strongest links to teacher motivation. Priority competencies include data-informed supervision, relational trust-building, vision communication, and coaching for instructional improvement. Hallinger (2011) notes that effective principal preparation programs must go beyond managerial training to emphasize instructional and transformational competencies that directly influence student learning outcomes. Strengthening these capacities will ensure that principals become not only administrators but also instructional leaders capable of inspiring teachers, enhancing motivation, and sustaining educational excellence.

In sum, the literature converges on a practical proposition. Principals who combine sound managerial systems with transformational purpose, instructional focus, and positive climate building create the conditions under which teachers choose to give their best effort. This combination elevates teacher motivation and, by extension, advances a more effective, conducive, and engaging teaching and learning process across the school. As Day and Sammons (2016) argue, successful school leaders "create the conditions that enable teachers to succeed," ensuring that motivation, trust, and professional growth become systemic rather than incidental features of school life.

The leadership style of school principals shapes the motivational climate teachers experience every day. Transformational and instructional leadership tend to elevate teacher work motivation by aligning individual goals with a shared vision, providing pedagogical guidance, and recognizing accomplishments. Through the lenses of self-determination theory and expectancy theory, these styles foster autonomy (voice in decisions and classroom practice), competence (targeted feedback, coaching, resources), and relatedness (trust and professional respect), while clarifying effort–performance–reward linkages. In contrast, purely transactional or laissez-faire approaches often narrow motivation to compliance or erode it through ambiguity; teachers may meet minimum requirements but show less discretionary effort, creativity, or persistence.

The influence of leadership is rarely direct; it operates through key mediators and under specific conditions. School climate, trust in leadership, and a culture of professional learning communities channel principals' behaviors into teachers' collective efficacy and intrinsic motivation. Job demands and resources also matter: manageable workloads, time for collaboration, and access to instructional materials amplify positive effects, whereas chronic administrative burden or role conflict can neutralize even strong leadership. Context moderates the relationship: teacher career stage, accountability pressures, union and policy environments, and community expectations can strengthen or dampen how leadership behaviors translate into motivational outcomes.

Practically, principals who want to boost teacher motivation should combine a clear instructional focus with distributed leadership: set a compelling vision, protect time for planning and peer coaching, give formative feedback tied to growth, and recognize excellence in ways that feel fair and specific. Align incentives with professional learning rather than bureaucratic compliance, and use data as a tool for inquiry, not punishment. System-level supports matter too: streamline nonteaching tasks, ensure adequate resources, and stabilize policies to reduce motivational "noise." Finally, monitor for equity: the same leadership move can land differently across departments or ex The literature converges on a practical proposition that underscores the importance of integrative and adaptive leadership in schools. Principals who combine sound managerial systems with transformational purpose, instructional focus, and positive climate building create the conditions under which teachers willingly give their best effort. This combination not only elevates teacher motivation but also promotes a more effective, conducive, and engaging teaching and learning environment across the school. As Day and Sammons (2016) argue, successful school leaders "create the conditions that enable teachers to

succeed," ensuring that motivation, trust, and professional growth become systemic rather than incidental features of school life. Effective principals, therefore, do not merely supervise; they cultivate a professional culture where teachers feel valued, trusted, and empowered to innovate in their instructional practices.

The leadership style of school principals shapes the motivational climate that teachers experience daily. Transformational and instructional leadership styles are particularly effective in enhancing teacher work motivation, as they align individual goals with a shared vision, provide consistent pedagogical guidance, and recognize professional accomplishments. These leadership styles, viewed through the lenses of self-determination theory and expectancy theory, foster autonomy by allowing teachers a voice in decision-making and classroom practice, enhance competence through targeted feedback, coaching, and access to resources, and build relatedness through trust and professional respect. They also clarify the connection between effort, performance, and reward, reinforcing motivation and professional accountability. In contrast, purely transactional or laissez-faire leadership approaches often reduce motivation to compliance or erode it through ambiguity, leading teachers to meet only minimum expectations while showing less creativity, initiative, and persistence in their work.

The influence of leadership, however, is rarely direct; it operates through mediating factors and contextual conditions. School climate, trust in leadership, and the presence of professional learning communities serve as key channels through which principals' behaviors affect teachers' collective efficacy and intrinsic motivation. Structural elements such as job demands, workload balance, opportunities for collaboration, and the availability of instructional materials can amplify or dampen leadership's impact. When teachers face chronic administrative burdens, role conflicts, or policy instability, even strong leadership may struggle to sustain motivation. Contextual factors such as teacher career stage, external accountability pressures, union dynamics, and community expectations further moderate how leadership behaviors translate into motivational outcomes. Understanding these mediating and moderating variables is crucial for designing leadership interventions that have consistent, long-term effects on teacher engagement and performance.

Practically, principals seeking to strengthen teacher motivation should integrate a clear instructional focus with distributed leadership practices that empower teachers as active partners in school improvement. This includes articulating a compelling vision, protecting time for instructional planning and peer collaboration, providing formative feedback centered on growth, and recognizing excellence in meaningful and equitable ways. Incentive systems should align with professional learning goals rather than bureaucratic compliance, while data should be used as a tool for reflection and inquiry, not punishment. At the systemic level, educational policymakers and administrators must streamline non-teaching tasks, ensure adequate resources, and maintain stable policies to minimize distractions that undermine motivation. Furthermore, leaders should remain attentive to issues of equity and inclusion, as the same leadership strategy may have different effects across departments, teacher experience levels, or cultural contexts. By continuously seeking teacher feedback and refining leadership practices, principals can sustain a culture of motivation, trust, and professional growth that advances the overall quality and resilience of the educational system.

4. CONCLUSION

The leadership of the school principal is a determining factor in the success of educational management and teacher performance. A principal who demonstrates effective managerial, transformational, transactional, and instructional leadership is able to create an organizational climate that fosters collaboration, accountability, and professional growth. Managerial leadership ensures that administrative systems function efficiently, while transformational leadership inspires teachers to engage with enthusiasm and purpose. Transactional leadership, when used wisely, provides structure and clarity in performance expectations, and instructional leadership maintains a focus on learning outcomes and pedagogical improvement. The integration of these leadership styles allows principals to respond adaptively to diverse school contexts and to promote sustainable educational progress.

Furthermore, teacher work motivation serves as the critical link between leadership practices and school achievement. Motivated teachers display greater creativity, resilience, and commitment to student success. Therefore, principals must not only manage resources and procedures but also nurture intrinsic motivation through trust, recognition, and meaningful professional engagement. A principal who acts as both leader and mentor empowers teachers to perform beyond compliance, fostering a positive and joyful learning

environment. In this sense, effective principal leadership becomes not merely a position of authority but a driving force for cultivating an educational culture that values excellence, collaboration, and continuous improvement.

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