

To cite this article: Muhammad Alwi, Ansar and Sitti Roskina Mas (2026). EXAMINING THE MEDIATING ROLE OF WORK MOTIVATION IN THE LEADERSHIP–COMMUNICATION–PERFORMANCE NEXUS: EVIDENCE FROM REMOTE ISLAND SCHOOLS, International Journal of Education and Social Science Research (IJESSR) 9 (1): 230-237 Article No. 1196, Sub Id 1853

EXAMINING THE MEDIATING ROLE OF WORK MOTIVATION IN THE LEADERSHIP–COMMUNICATION–PERFORMANCE NEXUS: EVIDENCE FROM REMOTE ISLAND SCHOOLS

Muhammad Alwi¹, Ansar² and Sitti Roskina Mas³

¹Postgraduate Studies, Gorontalo State University,
Jend. Sudirman Road, Gorontalo 96128, Indonesia
707524014@mahasiswa.ung.ac.id

²Postgraduate Studies, Gorontalo State University,
Jend. Sudirman Road, Gorontalo 96128, Indonesia
ansar@ung.ac.id

³Postgraduate Studies, Gorontalo State University,
Jend. Sudirman Road, Gorontalo 96128, Indonesia
sittiroskina@ung.ac.id

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.37500/IJESSR.2026.9117>

ABSTRACT

Educational inequality continues to shape learning outcomes in geographically isolated regions, especially in remote island schools where institutional and professional resources are limited. Although previous studies have established the direct influence of principal leadership and internal communication on teacher performance, fewer studies have examined the psychological processes through which these organizational factors operate. This research conceptualizes the leadership–communication–performance relationship as a system in which work motivation functions as an intervening mechanism under structural constraints. A cross-sectional survey was conducted involving 90 teachers (63% of the population) from four junior high schools in Banggai District, Indonesia. Structural path analysis revealed that work motivation exerted the strongest direct influence on teacher performance ($\beta = .425$, $p < .001$). Principal leadership ($\beta = .348$, $p < .001$) and internal communication ($\beta = .276$, $p = .001$) demonstrated both direct and indirect effects through motivational processes. The indirect pathways contributed meaningfully to the total effects of leadership (.566) and communication (.440). These findings indicate that, within resource-limited educational contexts, leadership and communication shape performance primarily by fostering motivational engagement. The study offers a context-sensitive mediation framework for understanding teacher performance in geographically dispersed school environments.

KEYWORDS: principal leadership, internal communication, work motivation; teacher performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Educational quality remains a central pillar of sustainable development, as articulated in Sustainable Development Goal 4. Among the various determinants of educational effectiveness, teacher performance has consistently been identified as a primary driver of student achievement. Comparative international assessments demonstrate that differences in teacher quality significantly explain variations in learning outcomes across countries. Despite ongoing reform efforts, improving teacher performance continues to pose challenges, particularly in geographically isolated and resource-constrained environments.

In Southeast Asia, teachers in remote and island regions consistently demonstrate lower performance indicators compared to their urban counterparts. Geographic isolation restricts access to professional development, weakens institutional support structures, and intensifies professional isolation. In Indonesia—an archipelagic nation consisting of more than 17,000 islands—educational disparities are especially pronounced in frontier and underdeveloped regions. National competency assessments reveal persistent gaps between teachers in urban centers and those in archipelagic districts, reflecting structural inequalities that extend beyond individual capacity.

Organizational factors within schools, particularly principal leadership and internal communication, have been widely recognized as influential determinants of teacher performance. Transformational leadership theory posits that principals influence performance by shaping teachers' motivation, commitment, and professional engagement. Similarly, organizational communication theory emphasizes the role of effective information flow, feedback mechanisms, and participatory dialogue in fostering coordination and psychological safety. Empirical studies have generally confirmed that both leadership and communication exert positive effects on teacher performance.

However, existing research has largely examined these variables as independent predictors, often within relatively resource-adequate or urban contexts. Such an approach risks oversimplifying the dynamics of school organizations operating under structural constraints. In geographically isolated regions, where material resources are limited and external incentives are weak, psychological and relational factors may assume greater significance. This raises a critical question: through what mechanisms do leadership and communication translate into performance outcomes in structurally constrained environments?

Work motivation provides a theoretically robust explanatory mechanism. Drawing from transformational leadership theory and self-determination perspectives, leadership practices and communication climates can shape intrinsic and extrinsic motivational states, which subsequently influence performance behavior. Motivation thus functions not merely as an outcome of organizational processes but as an intermediary psychological system that channels structural and relational influences into observable performance outcomes. Although several studies have acknowledged the

importance of motivation, relatively few have explicitly modeled it as a mediating mechanism linking leadership and communication to teacher performance, particularly in remote or non-urban settings. Banggai Laut Regency presents a compelling empirical context for examining these dynamics. As an island district characterized by geographic dispersion, transportation limitations, and restricted professional networks, schools in this region operate under pronounced structural constraints. These conditions provide a natural laboratory for testing whether leadership and communication function as interdependent drivers of motivational energy and whether motivation mediates their influence on performance outcomes.

This study reconceptualizes the leadership–communication–performance relationship as a mediated motivational system operating within structurally constrained educational environments. Rather than treating leadership and communication as parallel predictors, the study positions them as interconnected organizational drivers whose effectiveness depends on their capacity to generate and sustain teacher work motivation. By employing path analysis to disentangle direct and indirect effects, the study contributes to a more integrated understanding of how organizational processes shape teacher performance in geographically isolated contexts.

Specifically, this research aims to: (1) examine the direct effects of principal leadership and internal communication on teacher performance; (2) analyze the direct influence of these organizational factors on teacher work motivation; and (3) test the mediating role of work motivation in the leadership–communication–performance nexus. Through this integrative approach, the study seeks to advance a contextualized motivational mediation framework that extends existing leadership and communication theories to resource-constrained island school environments.

2. METHOD

This research adopted a quantitative design utilizing a cross-sectional survey strategy to investigate the structural relationships among principal leadership, internal communication, work motivation, and teacher performance. The study was carried out in Banggai District, Banggai Laut Regency, Indonesia—an island-based region characterized by geographic dispersion and restricted professional infrastructure. The study population consisted of 143 teachers employed across four public junior high schools. Through proportionate random sampling at a 95% confidence level, 90 teachers were selected as respondents, representing 63% of the total population.

Data collection was conducted using a structured instrument encompassing four constructs, each measured through 25 Likert-scale items ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Preliminary testing confirmed acceptable psychometric properties. All items met minimum validity thresholds, and reliability coefficients demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's α ranging from .826 to .896).

Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 25. Prior to estimating the structural model, assumption tests for normality and linearity were conducted and yielded satisfactory results. Path analysis was then applied to estimate both direct and indirect effects among variables. Statistical significance was evaluated at the .05 level. Participation was voluntary, confidentiality was maintained, and formal authorization for data collection was obtained from the respective school authorities.

3. RESULTS

Descriptive analysis indicated that overall teacher performance was at a moderate level ($M = 115.50$). Perceptions of principal leadership ($M = 86.74$), internal communication ($M = 74.53$), and work motivation ($M = 78.36$) were likewise categorized within the moderate range.

The structural model accounted for 63.1% of the variance in work motivation ($R^2 = .631$) and 75.5% of the variance in teacher performance ($R^2 = .755$), suggesting substantial explanatory power. Principal leadership showed a strong positive association with work motivation ($\beta = .512$, $p < .001$), as did internal communication ($\beta = .386$, $p < .001$).

In predicting teacher performance, work motivation emerged as the most influential direct factor ($\beta = .425$, $p < .001$), followed by principal leadership ($\beta = .348$, $p < .001$) and internal communication ($\beta = .276$, $p = .001$). Indirect effect analysis confirmed that both leadership and communication influenced performance through motivational pathways, reinforcing the mediating function of work motivation within the proposed structural model.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Direct Organizational Effects on Teacher Performance

The present findings demonstrate that principal leadership and internal communication both exert significant direct effects on teacher performance. From a transformational leadership standpoint, leaders influence instructional outcomes not merely through formal authority but by shaping teachers' professional engagement and sense of responsibility (Bass & Avolio, 1994). In the Indonesian educational context, similar patterns have been documented by Alhabsyi et al. (2022) and Gazali et al. (2023), who reported that effective school leadership contributes meaningfully to teacher performance improvement.

Nevertheless, the magnitude of the leadership effect observed in this study appears more moderate compared to findings reported in resource-adequate or urban settings (Ichsan & Nasution, 2020). This variation may reflect contextual constraints inherent in geographically isolated schools, where limited infrastructure and professional networks restrict the full translation of leadership initiatives into performance gains. As noted by Aslam et al. (2022), instructional leadership tends to yield stronger outcomes when supported by systemic professional development structures—conditions that may be less robust in remote island environments.

Internal communication similarly showed a significant direct relationship with teacher performance. Organizational communication theory emphasizes that clarity of information flow, feedback mechanisms, and participatory interaction foster coordination and reduce role ambiguity (Pace & Faules, 2013). Empirical evidence from Djazilan and Darmawan (2022) as well as Irdhina and Puspasari (2025) supports the view that communication climate positively influences teacher effectiveness. In this study, transparent communication practices appear to enhance institutional alignment and collaborative engagement, thereby strengthening instructional performance.

4.2 Work Motivation as a Mediating Mechanism

Beyond direct organizational effects, the results highlight the pivotal role of work motivation as an intervening mechanism linking leadership and communication to teacher performance. Transformational leadership theory posits that leaders shape outcomes largely by influencing followers' motivational states (Bass & Avolio, 1994). The current findings reinforce this proposition, indicating that leadership behaviors contribute to performance indirectly by enhancing motivational engagement.

Herzberg's two-factor theory (1959) provides additional explanatory insight into this process. Leadership practices that offer recognition, responsibility, and developmental support may strengthen intrinsic motivational drivers, while supportive communication systems may mitigate dissatisfaction associated with organizational uncertainty. Consistent with this reasoning, Arman and Tahwin (2025) and Saputra et al. (2025) demonstrate that work motivation significantly predicts teacher performance across educational settings. Furthermore, Efendi et al. (2023) identified a similar indirect pathway in which transformational leadership influences performance through psychological commitment.

The mediating pattern observed in this study suggests that leadership and communication should not be conceptualized solely as parallel structural determinants. Rather, their effectiveness depends substantially on their capacity to cultivate motivational energy, which subsequently translates into observable instructional performance. By explicitly modeling this mediational pathway, the study provides a more integrated explanation of organizational influence in structurally constrained school systems.

4.3 Contextualizing the Nexus in Remote Island Schools

The remote island context of Banggai Laut Regency offers critical insight into the dynamics identified in this research. Educational institutions operating in geographically dispersed regions frequently encounter limited professional development access and restricted external support. Under such circumstances, relational and psychological processes may assume greater importance in sustaining performance outcomes.

The comparatively strong effect of work motivation observed in this study suggests that intrinsic engagement may function as a compensatory mechanism within resource-constrained environments.

Previous research conducted in more resource-adequate contexts has reported stronger direct leadership effects (Qomusuddin et al., 2020; Ichsan & Nasution, 2020). In contrast, the present findings indicate that in geographically isolated schools, organizational influence operates more prominently through motivational channels.

Theoretically, these findings extend transformational leadership and organizational communication perspectives by demonstrating that their effectiveness in geographically isolated educational systems is conditioned by motivational mediation. Leadership–communication–performance relationships appear to operate as interconnected processes rather than independent causal chains. This mediated systems perspective contributes to a more context-sensitive understanding of organizational dynamics within island-based school environments.

5. CONCLUSION

This study reexamined the relationship among leadership, communication, and teacher performance by positioning work motivation as a central mediating mechanism within remote island schools. The findings indicate that motivational engagement plays a pivotal role in transforming organizational inputs into instructional effectiveness. Leadership and communication appear to influence performance most strongly when they enhance teachers' internal commitment and professional engagement. These results highlight the importance of strengthening motivational climates in geographically isolated educational contexts. Although the cross-sectional design and single-district focus limit broader generalization, the study provides a theoretically grounded framework that future research can test across diverse structural environments.

REFERENCES

- [1] Alhabsyi, F., Pettalongi, S. S., & Wandu, W. (2022). Peran Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah dalam Meningkatkan Kinerja Guru. *Jurnal Integrasi Manajemen Pendidikan (JIPME)*, 1(1), 11-19.
- [2] Ambarita, H., Purba, S., & Rosnelly, R. (2025). Kinerja guru terhadap motivasi, disiplin kerja, dan kepemimpinan transformasional. *Innovative: Journal of Social Science Research*, 5(2), 2830–2841. <https://doi.org/10.31004/innovative.v5i2>
- [3] Azahra, A. D. & Putri, D. N. (2023). Pengaruh motivasi dan disiplin kerja terhadap kinerja guru. *JISMA: Journal of Information Systems and Management*, 2(4), 34–42. <https://doi.org/10.4444/jisma.v2i4.334>
- [4] Bass, B. M., & Avolio, B. J (Eds.). (1994). *Improving organizational effectiveness through transformational leadership*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- [5] Djazilan, M. S. & Darmawan, D. (2022). Komunikasi kerja dan gaya kepemimpinan kepala sekolah untuk mengembangkan motivasi dan kinerja guru. *Jurnal Obsesi: Journal on Teacher Education*, 4(2), 1065–1077. <https://doi.org/10.31004/jote.v4i2.9297>
- [6] Efendi, F., Sunaryo, H., & Harijanto, D. (2023). Efektivitas kepemimpinan transformasional kepala sekolah melalui komitmen kerja terhadap kinerja guru merdeka belajar. *Jurnal*

- Akuntabilitas Manajemen Pendidikan*, 11(2), 19–32.
<https://journal.uny.ac.id/index.php/jamp/article/view/60605>
- [7] Gazali, H., Ridho, M., & Gistituati, N. (2023). Pengaruh Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah dengan Kinerja Guru di SMK Negeri 1 Singkarak. *Journal of Education Research*, 4(3), 1193–1201. <https://doi.org/10.37985/jer.v4i3.354>
- [8] Herzberg, F. (1959). *The motivation to work*. John Wiley & Sons.
- [9] Hidayat, D., Kusuma, N. H., Umurohmi, U., & Zainuri, A. (2025). Peran Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah dalam Meningkatkan Kinerja Guru di MTs Yasmida Ambarawa. *Innovative: Journal Of Social Science Research*, 5(2), 719–731.
<https://doi.org/10.31004/innovative.v5i2.18165>.
- [10] Ichsan, R. N., & Nasution, L. (2020). The effect of organizational culture and job promotion on employee performance at PT Taspen Kantor Cabang Utama Medan. *Journal of Education, Humaniora and Social Sciences (JEHSS)*, 3 (2), 459–466.
<https://doi.org/10.34007/jehss.v3i2.340>
- [11] Irdhina, D. H., & Puspasari, A. (2025). Pengaruh Komunikasi Internal dan Work Culture Terhadap Optimalisasi Kinerja Tenaga Pendidik di SD Islam Teratai Putih Global. *Socius: Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial*, 3(2), 642–650. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17207859>
- [12] Lein, P., Wahyu, W., & Metroyadi, M. (2025). Pengaruh kepemimpinan instruksional kepala sekolah, motivasi berprestasi, kinerja guru terhadap peningkatan mutu pembelajaran di SMA Negeri Banjarmasin. *JAMP: Jurnal Administrasi dan Manajemen Pendidikan*, 8(2), 366–375.
- [13] Lestiawati, N. (2019). Pengaruh Komunikasi Organisasi dan Kepuasan Kerja Terhadap Kinerja Guru di SMA Negeri 2 Kota Singkawang. *Equator Journal of Management and Entrepreneurship (EJME)*, 7(2). <https://doi.org/10.26418/ejme.v7i2.31408>
- [14] Maslow, A. (1954). *Motivation and Personality*. New York: Harper & Row.
- [15] Nurhayati & Kusyani, D. (2022). Implementasi Komunikasi Organisasi dalam Meningkatkan Mutu Pembelajaran. *Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Profesi Guru*, 5(1), 108–116.
<https://doi.org/10.23887/jippg.v5i1.48519>
- [16] Oktarina, E., Makhdalena, M., & Caska, C. (2020). Pengaruh komunikasi interpersonal dan motivasi kerja terhadap kinerja guru SMA Negeri se Kota Pekanbaru. *Jurnal JUMPED (Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan)*, 8(1), 84–94. <https://doi.org/10.31258/jmp.8.1.p.84-94>
- [17] Pace, R. W., & Faules, D. F. (2013). *Komunikasi Organisasi: Strategi Meningkatkan Kinerja Perusahaan*. Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya.
- [18] Purnomo, A., & Mulianingsih, F. (2025). Philosophical cognition of social studies teachers on sustainable development and social values transmission. In *International Joint Conference on Arts and Humanities 2024 (IJCAH 2024)*, 557–567. Atlantis Press. https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-317-7_57
- [19] Rambe, K. F., & Wijaya, C. (2025). Keterampilan Komunikasi Interpersonal Kepala Sekolah Dalam Menyelesaikan Konflik Di Sma Swasta Budysatrya Medan. *Research and Development Journal of Education*, 11(1), 551–560. <https://doi.org/10.30998/rdje.v11i1.28867>
- [20] Robbins & Judge. 2015. *Perilaku Organisasi Edisi 16*. Jakarta. Salemba Empat.

- [21] Saputra, M. R., Putri, S. R., Santi, S., & Andria, Y. (2025). Pengaruh motivasi kerja dan lingkungan kerja terhadap kinerja guru Sekolah Menengah Atas Negeri 1 Basa Ampek Balai. *Edu Research*, 6(1), 424-435. <https://doi.org/10.47827/jer.v6i1.544>