

School Principal's Strategy in Improving Teacher Motivation, Competence, and Performance

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ABSTRACT

The quality of education in education units is highly determined by the performance of teachers which is influenced by their motivation and competence. The principal has a strategic role to create conditions that allow the improvement of these three aspects simultaneously and integrated. This study aims to examine strategies that can be applied by school principals to improve teacher motivation, competence, and performance, as well as analyze how to implement these strategies effectively. The method used in this study is a literature study that collects and analyzes various sources of information relevant to the topic of the study. The results of the study show that strategies that can be implemented include giving recognition and awards, providing opportunities to participate in decision-making, preparing professional development programs, assigning appropriate tasks, creating a conducive work environment, and implementing an objective performance appraisal system. The implementation of this strategy in an integrated and sustainable manner will provide optimal results to improve the quality of human resources in schools. The implication of this study is the need to develop the leadership skills of school principals that focus on developing human resources to achieve the expected educational goals.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The quality of education in educational units is highly determined by the performance of teachers as the main implementers of the learning process. High-performing teachers are able to perform their duties well, create meaningful learning experiences for students, and contribute to the achievement of national education goals. The success of education is indeed rooted in how all components in the institution are managed systematically (Akmal *et al.*, 2015). However, teacher performance does not appear spontaneously, but is influenced by various interrelated factors. Among these factors, motivation and competence are two aspects that have a central role. Individual ability and enthusiasm for work have a

real impact on the achievement of an educator's work achievements (Darmawan, 2014). Motivation encourages teachers to strive to achieve the expected performance standards, while competence provides the skills needed to carry out tasks professionally. These two aspects need to be managed and developed in an ongoing manner so that teacher performance can continue to improve along with the development of educational needs (Septin *et al.*, 2024).

The principal as a leader in the education unit has the main responsibility to create a work environment that supports the development of motivation, competence, and teacher performance. The principal plays the role of a human resource manager who is tasked with designing policies, developing programs, and implementing various efforts aimed at improving the quality of human resources in schools (Surbakti *et al.*, 2023). Proper leadership is indispensable to move the team to perform at its best (Gardens *et al.*, 2024). Through their roles, the principal can create conditions that allow teachers to develop, feel motivated to carry out their duties, and show optimal performance. The success of the principal in carrying out this role will determine the level of quality of education held in the school he leads, as well as have a significant impact on the development of students and the overall progress of the school.

Teacher motivation is an internal drive that makes teachers willing to try to carry out their duties as well as possible. High motivation will make teachers have a strong work ethic, are committed to the tasks undertaken, and strive to achieve maximum results in every learning activity (Rainfall *et al.*, 2024). On the other hand, low motivation will lead to laziness, a lack of attention to the quality of work, and a tendency to carry out tasks carelessly. It is important for schools to realize that the motivation to learn and the spirit of teaching are key factors in determining the success of students' studies (Darmawan, Al Madury, & Najibah, 2026). Principals need to understand the factors that can affect teacher motivation and devise appropriate strategies to foster and maintain that motivation. Efforts can be in the form of awards, opportunities to participate in decision-making, or the creation of a comfortable and supportive work environment.

Teacher competencies include the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that teachers must possess to carry out their duties as educators. This competency includes pedagogical, personality, professional, and social competencies that are interrelated and determine the quality of teacher performance (Zhou *et al.*, 2023). In fact, mastery of the material and the right teaching method is the main determinant for the achievement of maximum learning outcomes in the classroom (StuRat (talk) 20:26, 20 January 2020 (UTC)). Teachers who have high competence are able to plan learning well, carry out effective learning processes, conduct accurate assessments, and interact with students, colleagues, and the community well. In addition, the learning environment and the level of work pressure also play a role in influencing the extent to which teacher competence is reflected in student learning outcomes (Bayhaqi & Darmawan, 2025a, 2025b). School principals have an important role to improve teacher competence through various professional development programs, such as training, mentoring, or providing opportunities to participate in scientific activities. Improving teacher competence will have a direct impact on the quality of the learning process and outcomes held in schools.

The discussion of the principal's strategy to improve teacher motivation, competence, and performance in this study is based on the Transformational Theory of Leadership developed by Bass dan Riggio (2019). This theory explains that leaders who apply a transformational leadership style are able to inspire, motivate, and encourage the development of their followers' abilities to achieve performance that exceeds predetermined expectations. This style of leadership is proven to have a very close relationship with the emergence of a strong commitment from every member of the organization (Rojak, 2024a). According to this theory, effective leaders are able to create a clear vision, provide support and mentorship, and create an environment that allows for optimal development of their followers' potential. This theory also emphasizes that good leadership not only focuses on achieving the goals of the organization, but also focuses on the development of the individuals who are part of the organization. The development of a healthy academic culture is one way to increase the involvement of teachers to advance the institution (Rojak, 2023).

The Transformational Theory of Leadership described earlier provides a relevant framework for analyzing the role of principals to improve teacher motivation, competence, and performance (Amarta *et al.*, 2023). The application of this theory shows that principals can implement a variety of strategies that focus on individual development and the creation of a supportive work environment to achieve the expected goals. One of the concrete steps that is often taken is through a structured mentoring program to help develop career and professionalism (Chada, 2023; Rojak, 2024b). This theory also emphasizes that a good relationship between leaders and members of the organization is a key factor that determines success in achieving organizational goals and developing individual potential. This shows that principals who apply transformational leadership principles will be better able to create conditions that allow teachers to improve their motivation, competence, and performance in a sustainable manner.

Based on studies of various previous studies, there are still limited understanding of specific strategies that can be applied by school principals to improve teacher motivation, competence, and performance in an integrated manner. Some studies only discuss one aspect, for example, only discussing strategies to increase motivation or only discussing strategies to improve teacher competence, without examining the relationship and interaction between these three aspects. In fact, education has a broad function to shape global awareness and encourage sustainable behavior change in society (Gautama & Mardikaningsih, 2022; Hariani & Mardikaningsih, 2022). Meanwhile, some other studies discuss the role of school principals in general without providing a clear picture of the steps that can be taken in practice. This limitation makes it difficult for school principals to determine the right and effective strategies to improve the quality of human resources in the schools they lead.

Another problem that arises is the lack of understanding of how the strategies implemented by school principals can be adjusted to different school conditions and characteristics. Each school has unique characteristics, both in terms of the background of the students, environmental conditions, and the characteristics of the teachers in it. The world of education is also inseparable from social challenges, such as the existence of certain views in society that sometimes limit opportunities for certain groups (Sajjapong *et al.*, 2022). Strategies that are effective in one school are not necessarily effective in other schools that have different conditions. The lack of understanding of this makes it difficult for the principal to develop strategies that suit the needs and conditions faced in the school he leads. Moreover, education is often seen as the main way for children from disadvantaged backgrounds to improve their standard of living (Hartono & Sulisty, 2022). This has the potential to cause a mismatch between the strategy implemented and the existing needs, so that the results achieved are not in accordance with expectations.

Research on school principals' strategies to improve teacher motivation, competence, and performance was conducted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic. This research is expected to provide a clear picture of the various strategies that can be applied by school principals, as well as the relationship between the strategies applied and the increase in teacher motivation, competence, and performance. The results of this research are also expected to be a reference for school principals to develop appropriate and effective strategies in accordance with the conditions and characteristics of the school they lead. Understanding this will help school principals to carry out their roles and duties well, so that the quality of education held in schools can continue to improve.

Based on the description that has been submitted, the formulation of the problem in this study is what strategies can be applied by school principals to improve teacher motivation, competence, and performance, as well as how these strategies can be implemented effectively in the school environment. The purpose of this study is to examine various strategies that can be applied by school principals to improve teacher motivation, competence, and performance, as well as to analyze ways that can be done to implement these strategies effectively in the school environment. This research also aims to identify various factors that affect the successful implementation of the strategy and find the right solutions to overcome various obstacles that may arise. The results of this research are expected to contribute to the development of science in the field of education management and educational leadership, as well as provide practical benefits for school principals and related parties in the world of education.

2. METHODS

This research is carried out using a literature study method that functions to collect, analyze, and synthesize various relevant scientific sources, so as to obtain a comprehensive and systematic understanding of the topic being studied. The selection of this method was made because it provided an opportunity for researchers to review previous research that discussed principals' leadership, work motivation, competency development, and teacher performance. Through this approach, researchers can explore various views, findings, and concepts that are developing, especially regarding the principal's strategy to improve teacher motivation, competence, and performance. This method is considered appropriate because it is in accordance with the research objectives that focus on the preparation of summaries and analyses from previous studies, so as to be able to present a clearer picture of the phenomenon being studied (Feler, 2025).

The data used in this study is sourced from scientific literature relevant to the theme of the study. The selected literature includes textbooks that discuss educational management, educational leadership, organizational psychology, and human resource development. In addition, scientific articles published in indexed academic journals are also used as references, along with research reports from credible educational institutions as well as other scientific publications that highlight the role of principals and teacher quality development. All sources are selected based on a high level of credibility and academic quality, so that the information obtained can be scientifically accounted for and used as a basis for accurate analysis and synthesis (Miquel, 2025).

Data analysis in this study was carried out using a thematic analysis approach. Information gathered from various literature is grouped into key themes according to the focus of the research (Ciara, 2023). The analysis process begins with identifying the main idea of each source, then organizing them into relevant categories, and finally compiling them into a systematic and structured description. In this way, researchers can compare and contrast different views, as well as compile a comprehensive synthesis of principals' strategies to improve teacher motivation, competence, and performance. Braun dan Clarke (2013) emphasizing that thematic analysis helps researchers organize information logically and makes it easier to identify patterns that emerge from various literature. A similar view was put forward by Smith *et al.* (2022) which emphasizes that this technique provides an opportunity for researchers to present an in-depth and comprehensive explanation of the topic being studied. Thus, thematic analysis strengthens the validity of research results through the presentation of structured and critical descriptions.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Teachers' work motivation is the basic element that determines how far teachers are willing to exert their abilities and energy to carry out their duties. High motivation is reflected in the teacher's willingness to work beyond the set standards, strive to achieve maximum results, and maintain commitment to the tasks undertaken. (Qocayeva, 2025). In general, the drive to work and the right leadership are the main keys to developing the performance of educators in schools (Hariyani *et al.*, 2016). School principals have a strategic role to foster and maintain this motivation through various policies and actions that are tailored to the needs and characteristics of teachers in schools. The efforts made not only focus on meeting material needs, but also include meeting non-material needs related to recognition, rewards, and opportunities for growth. The strategy applied must be able to create an environment that makes teachers feel valued, trusted, and have an important role in the progress of the school.

Teacher competence is the foundation that allows teachers to carry out their duties professionally and with quality (Erkinovna, 2025). It is important to realize that teachers' abilities have a major influence on student learning achievement at various levels of school (Akmal *et al.*, 2025; Nature & Darmawan, 2025). Adequate competence will enable teachers to face various challenges that arise in the learning process, adjust to the development of science and technology, and meet various demands in the world of education. What's more, mastery of the material and a good teaching method has been

proven to significantly increase students' interest and learning outcomes (Mardikaningsih & Darmawan, 2021; Romli & Darmawan, 2025). Principals have a responsibility to create a sustainable competency development system, so that teachers can continuously improve the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to carry out their duties. The competency development carried out must be adjusted to the needs of the tasks carried out by the teacher, as well as consider the potential and interests possessed by each individual teacher.

Teacher performance is the result of the interaction between motivation and competence (Ansar *et al.*, 2025). Teachers who are highly motivated but do not have adequate competence will find it difficult to achieve optimal work results. On the other hand, teachers who have high competence but low motivation will also not be able to show performance that meets expectations. The combination of enthusiasm, ability, and professionalism is indeed the main determinant of the quality of a teacher's work (Mardikaningsih *et al.*, 2022). School principals need to understand the relationship between these three aspects and implement strategies that are able to improve all three aspects simultaneously and integrated. This is supported by the finding that mature competence and honest work assessment will create job satisfaction for teachers (Darmawan *et al.*, 2021). The strategy implemented must be able to create synergy between increased motivation, competency development, and performance improvement, so that the results achieved can have a significant impact on the quality of education held in schools.

One of the main strategies that can be applied by school principals to increase teacher motivation is to give recognition and appreciation for the performance that has been achieved (Nachshoni, 2024). Recognition and awards can be given in various forms, both formal and informal awards, which are tailored to the level of performance shown by the teacher. Practically, self-motivation and belief in personal abilities really help teachers to achieve better work performance (Pramudya & Mardikaningsih, 2021a). Giving recognition and awards will make teachers feel appreciated for their efforts and work results, so that they will increase their confidence and work ethic. This is in accordance with the view outlined by Luthans (2011) which states that recognition and rewards are effective driving factors to increase individual work motivation within the organizational environment.

The empowerment strategy through the active participation of teachers in managerial and instructional decision-making discourses is an organizational approach that significantly strengthens the sense of ownership and professional responsibility for the vision of the educational institution (Copyright © 2024 Copyright © 2024 Copyright © 2024 Copyright © 2024 Copyright © 2024 Copyright © 2024). In dynamic organizational situations, the involvement of subordinates in decision-making is a very effective application of leadership (Darmawan, 2024a). This engagement creates a collaborative space where every intellectual contribution and aspiration of teachers is recognized as a fundamental variable in school policy formulation, thereby minimizing resistance to change and increasing commitment to the implementation of work programs. In addition, a leadership style that prioritizes service has been proven to be able to encourage teacher performance to be more optimal (Darmawan, 2024b). Theoretically, such engagement constructs the perception that the individual is a crucial entity in the organizational structure, which according to the argument Robbins dan Judge (2017), empirically able to escalate intrinsic motivation through strengthening the psychological relationship between teachers' personal goals and institutional strategic goals. Thus, when teachers are given the authority to influence their work environment, a dynamic of collective accountability emerges that encourages continuous performance improvement and creates a work climate that is more conducive to the development of educational professionalism as a whole.

The preparation of a structured and sustainable professional development program is also an important strategy to improve teacher competence (Rasmitadila *et al.*, 2025). The program should include various types of development activities, such as training, mentoring, seminars, workshops, and research tailored to the needs and level of competency development possessed by teachers. Teachers' desire to continue learning and engage in professional development greatly affects the quality of teaching in the classroom (Pramudya & Mardikaningsih, 2021b). The program that is prepared must be

able to provide the knowledge and skills needed by teachers to carry out their duties, as well as provide opportunities for teachers to apply the knowledge and skills that have been acquired in learning practices. The preparation of teaching modules in accordance with the latest curriculum is also an important part of strengthening the capacity of teachers today (Arum *et al.*, 2024). This is in accordance with the opinion conveyed by Hargreaves dan O'Connor (2018) which states that a structured and continuous professional development program is a key factor in improving teacher competence and performance.

The implementation of managerial strategies by school principals through the distribution of tasks and responsibilities that are in line with the competency profile and latent potential of teachers is a strategic approach to optimize organizational effectiveness and systemic professional development (Zaeni *et al.*, 2025). The placement of assignments that are in accordance with professional expertise is very helpful for teachers to motivate students as well as form discipline in school (Darmawan & Haq, 2026). Assignments designed with optimal difficulty, i.e. in the proximal developmental zone where the task is challenging but still within the range of execution capabilities, serve as a cognitive stimulus that encourages teachers to explore and expand the boundaries of their technical and pedagogical abilities. This synchronization is essential so that every educator can carry out his or her role responsibly (Darmawan & Pernaningtik, 2026). This synchronization between workload and individual capacity provides validation of the value of teachers' professionalism within the organizational structure, thus creating a positive perception that their contribution has significance to the achievement of institutional goals. In line with the postulate put forward by Yukl (2013), these functional adjustments not only serve to mitigate the risk of demotivation due to disproportionate workloads, but also actively facilitate sustainable competency development mechanisms through meaningful practical experience. Thus, the placement of human resources based on individual strengths constructs a meritocratic work ecosystem, where the drive to achieve maximum performance arises from the integration between organizational recognition and the fulfillment of the educator's self-actualization needs.

The creation of a conducive and supportive work environment is a manifestation of the management of the education ecosystem which aims to synergize psychosocial and infrastructure aspects to optimize the professional performance of educators appropriately (Istiqomah, 2025). A positive school environment and support from leaders have proven to boost the work spirit and work results of teachers (Bashor *et al.*, 2024; Rahmawati & Darmawan, 2024). The harmonization of interpersonal relationships in the school environment, which includes collegial interaction between teachers and healthy hierarchical relations with school leadership, constructs a crucial social capital for knowledge exchange and pedagogical collaboration. A religious school atmosphere also plays a role in shaping positive character and behavior for all school residents (Darmawan & Mahbubah, 2026). In addition to the social dimension, the availability of physical facilities and adequate instructional resources are technical determinants that allow teachers to execute curricular tasks with high efficiency. The role of school principals in this context is very central through the implementation of empathetic managerial communication, conflict mediation based on a win-win solution approach, and budget allocation that is responsive to the needs of infrastructure facilities to ensure the creation of a motivating work atmosphere and minimizes counterproductive work pressure.

The development of a performance appraisal system based on the principles of objectivity and transparency is a crucial strategy to ensure organizational fairness and professional accountability in educational institutions (Naveen, 2025). Through regular supervision, school principals can monitor the extent to which teachers' performance has met the desired standards (Anam & Darmawan, 2024). Through measurable assessment parameters that include process dimensions and work outputs, schools can produce valid performance data as a fundamental basis for providing recognition, professional development planning, and other administrative policy making. In addition, servant leadership also helps create a more humane and productive work culture (Hariyani & Wardoyo, 2024). A comprehensive assessment must be able to isolate various external variables that affect teacher

performance so that the results of the evaluation reflect the real capacity of the individual concerned without any subjectivity bias. This process achieves maximum effectiveness when integrated with a formative constructive feedback mechanism, so that the assessment results are not just statistical numbers but function as a strategic reflection instrument for teachers to make continuous improvements to their learning practices in the future.

Providing opportunities for teachers to develop their careers according to their potential and performance is also an important strategy to increase teacher motivation and performance (Celik, 2017). Policies that support career advancement will strengthen teachers' commitment to the organizations in which they work (Putra & Darmawan, 2022). Teachers who have the opportunity to develop their careers will feel they have a clear purpose in their work and have the drive to continuously improve their performance. School principals need to develop a clear career path and provide equal opportunities for all teachers to develop their careers according to their abilities and performance. Providing career development opportunities must also be accompanied by the support and facilities needed by teachers to achieve the desired career path.

Optimizing the quality of interpersonal and organizational communication between school principals and teachers is a very fundamental strategic instrument to build a transparent and supportive work ecosystem in order to spur the escalation of motivation, competence, and professional performance of educators (Ardiansyah *et al.*, 2024). Good communication between superiors and subordinates is the key to creating job satisfaction in the educational environment (Putra & Sinambela, 2021). Effective communication does not only function as a transmission channel for bureaucratic information, but also as a dialectical mechanism that allows for a fluid exchange of ideas, the alignment of managerial expectations with pedagogical reality, and the articulation of solutions to various situational complexities that occur in the school environment. Plus, the current use of digital technology is very helpful to accelerate communication and innovation in schools (Rojak, 2025). Principals are required to master assertive communication skills and empathy through sincere active listening techniques, so that teachers feel that they have a safe psychological space to convey aspirations, innovations, and instructional obstacles without rigid hierarchical barriers. This relational closeness built through this pattern of open and honest interaction will ultimately foster a deep sense of mutual trust, strengthen the organization's identity, and create a sense of comfort for teachers to proactively contribute to improving the quality of learning that is in line with the strategic vision of the institution.

The implementation of structured technical assistance and guidance through mentoring and coaching mechanisms is a crucial competency acceleration strategy, especially for beginner educators or teachers who need specific reinforcement to carry out their instructional tasks to be in line with the set performance standards (Demena *et al.*, 2025). Mental readiness and adaptability are indispensable for new teachers to face the real world of work (Lizard *et al.*, 2023). This clinical supervision program can be implemented directly by the principal as an instructional leader or through the empowerment of senior teachers who have a track record of superior competence and qualified practical experience to act as professional companions. Especially in the midst of technological changes, teachers are required to have digital skills so as not to be left behind (Arifin & Darmawan, 2021). This systematic guidance process aims to demystify the complexity of the curriculum, sharpen methodological skills, and provide navigation assistance to deal with class dynamics that are often unpredictable during the learning process. The sustainability of this mentoring scheme is a determining factor that ensures that teacher capacity development does not occur sporadically, but becomes a learning continuum that leads to increasing teachers' self-efficacy and achieving educational quality collectively and comprehensively.

4. CONCLUSION

Improving teacher motivation, competence, and performance is the main responsibility that must be carried out by school principals as leaders in educational units. Various strategies that can be applied include providing recognition and rewards, providing opportunities to participate in decision-making,

preparing professional development programs, assigning appropriate assignments, creating a conducive work environment, and implementing an objective performance appraisal system. The implementation of this strategy in an integrated and sustainable manner will provide optimal results to improve the quality of human resources in schools. The successful implementation of the strategy depends heavily on the ability of the principal to understand the needs and characteristics of teachers, as well as the ability to manage the various resources available.

The results of this study provide implications for school principals to develop leadership skills that focus on human resource development. School principals need to view improving teacher motivation, competence, and performance as the top priority to carry out their duties. For higher education institutions, the results of this study provide implications for developing training and development programs that can improve the leadership ability of school principals to manage and develop human resources in schools. The implementation of the right strategy will have a positive impact on the quality of education held in schools and the overall progress of the school.

The next research can conduct empirical studies to measure the effectiveness of the implementation of various strategies that have been discussed to improve the motivation, competence, and performance of teachers in various types and different levels of education. The study can identify the most effective strategies and factors that affect the successful implementation of the strategy. Research can also develop an integrated strategy model that can be used by school principals as a reference to carry out their duties, manage and develop human resources in schools.

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