

# Leadership Competence and Teacher Job Satisfaction: Evidence from Structural Path Analysis in Indonesian Public Senior High Schools

Eri Deka Gustiar<sup>1</sup>, Mukhtar Latif<sup>2</sup>, Zawaqi Afdal Jamil<sup>3</sup>  
<sup>1,2,3</sup> UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, Indonesia



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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study aims to analyze the influence of principal skills on teacher job satisfaction in public senior high schools in Jambi Province, focusing on improving teacher psychological well-being, which is determined by leadership patterns and a conducive work environment. **Method:** The research uses a quantitative approach with path analysis. The sample includes 106 teachers from three public schools, with data collected through a standardized questionnaire. SPSS 27 was used to test direct and indirect effects. **Results:** The results showed that leadership skills have a positive and significant direct effect on teacher job satisfaction, with a path coefficient of  $\beta = 0.689$  and a  $t$ -value of 9.704 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Leadership skills, social support, and outcome orientation contributed 47.5% to teacher job satisfaction ( $R^2 = 0.475$ ). However, outcome orientation was not a significant mediator between leadership and job satisfaction ( $t = 0.58 < 1.660$ ). **Novelty:** This study highlights that teacher job satisfaction is more influenced by the principal's direct interactions and relational qualities than by performance target achievement orientation. It recommends leadership development that emphasizes supportive communication, appreciation for teacher performance, and creating an inclusive work climate, alongside transformational leadership training for principals to enhance motivation and psychological well-being.

## INTRODUCTION

Teacher job satisfaction is a crucial element in improving the quality of education, as satisfied teachers typically demonstrate higher commitment, consistent work motivation, and optimal teaching performance. In the context of public schools in Indonesia, teacher job satisfaction is significantly influenced by the principal's leadership style, the quality of social support within the school community, and how results-oriented the educational organization's culture is. These three factors significantly contribute to creating a conducive and productive work environment.

Previous research shows that leadership has a significant influence on job satisfaction, for example research on the influence of leadership style and organizational culture on teacher performance [1], and that social support has an important contribution in reducing work stress and improving teacher well-being [2]. In addition, research by Hardianto et al found that transformational leadership consistently increases job satisfaction by strengthening intrinsic motivation, while research by Setiawan confirmed that perceptions of fairness and the quality of relationships with superiors are the main determinants of employee job satisfaction. However, there is a research gap, particularly regarding whether outcome orientation can mediate the relationship between leadership and job satisfaction. Some studies have found that outcome orientation strengthens work

motivation, but not all studies have shown that outcome orientation directly increases job satisfaction.

Based on this gap, this study asks two core questions:

1. Do principals' leadership skills have a direct effect on teacher job satisfaction?
2. Does outcome orientation mediate the relationship between leadership and teacher job satisfaction?

The purpose of this study is to examine the direct and indirect effects of leadership on teacher job satisfaction, while also assessing the role of outcome orientation as a mediating variable in this relationship. This study not only maps the structural relationships between variables but also makes an important contribution to enriching our understanding of how psychosocial factors operate in the context of public schools in Indonesia.

Specifically, this study's contributions are theoretical, methodological, and practical. First, the theoretical contribution lies in examining the mediating role of outcome orientation in teacher job satisfaction models – an area rarely discussed in the Indonesian educational management literature. The finding that outcome orientation does not function as a mediator provides new insights that teacher job satisfaction is more influenced by the relational dimension of leadership than by performance orientation. Second, methodologically, this study uses path analysis to examine direct and indirect effects, thus providing more comprehensive empirical evidence than traditional correlational studies. Third, the practical contribution of this study provides a foundation for developing school leadership training programs, particularly by emphasizing the importance of supportive communication, emotional reinforcement, and performance appreciation as strategies for enhancing teacher job satisfaction. Thus, this study provides clear direction for improving school management policies and the professional development of principals in Indonesia.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative method with an explanatory research design based on path analysis. Participants were 106 teachers from three public high schools in Jambi Province, selected using a proportional random sampling technique. Data were collected using a standardized questionnaire measuring leadership skills (X1), social support (X2), results orientation (X3), and teacher job satisfaction (X4).

The instrument was tested for validity and reliability, indicating that the Cronbach's Alpha value met the reliability criteria. A classical assumption analysis was conducted, including tests for normality, homogeneity, multicollinearity, and autocorrelation to ensure the feasibility of the regression model.

Data were analyzed using SPSS 27, in two stages:

1. Testing the direct effect through linear regression,
2. Testing the indirect effect through path analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Result*

#### 1. The Influence of Principal Leadership Skills on Teacher Job Satisfaction

The results show that leadership skills have a direct, positive and significant effect on teacher job satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.689$ ;  $t = 9.704$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ).

Teachers experience job satisfaction primarily through direct interactions with the principal, such as clear directions, recognition, and fair distribution of tasks. Strong leadership skills directly increase teachers' sense of appreciation and comfort in the work environment.

#### 2. Outcome Orientation Mediates the Relationship Between Leadership and Teacher Job Satisfaction

Outcome orientation was not a significant mediator in the leadership  $\rightarrow$  job satisfaction relationship ( $t = 0.58 < 1.660$ ).

Although leadership increases teacher outcome orientation, achieving goals is not the primary source of satisfaction. Teachers are more satisfied when they feel personally appreciated, not just for achieving work results.

### *Discussion*

Research findings indicate that principal leadership skills have a strong direct influence on teacher job satisfaction, while outcome orientation does not act as a mediator in this relationship. This confirms that the quality of interpersonal interactions between principals and teachers is a key foundation in shaping teacher job satisfaction [5], [6]. Principals who provide clear direction, demonstrate empathy, appreciate teacher performance, and build supportive working relationships tend to create a more psychologically conducive work environment [7], [8]. Thus, teachers' psychological well-being is determined more by their daily relational experiences at school than by the pressure of achieving functional targets. These findings also indicate that in the context of educational work culture in Indonesia, human interaction and social context have a more significant influence on teachers' work experiences than the demands of outcome orientation [10], [11].

The empirical findings of this study are consistent with several previous studies highlighting the importance of leadership in enhancing job satisfaction. For example, Schoch et al study showed that a transformational leadership style significantly contributes to teacher satisfaction. Similar findings were also reported by Firmansyah et al, who highlighted that transformational leadership strengthens teachers' organizational commitment, motivation, and job satisfaction [14]. Furthermore, studies on social support confirm that positive interpersonal relationships, both with colleagues and leaders, play a crucial role in improving teacher well-being and reducing job stress levels. Research on a culture of appreciation also shows that recognizing teacher performance has a greater impact on job satisfaction than setting outcome targets that overemphasize academic achievement. Thus, the results of this study strengthen the evidence that relational variables—leadership, social support, and appreciation—are more dominant than instrumental variables such as performance targets.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings align with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which states that motivating factors such as recognition, achievement, and professional growth are key factors shaping job satisfaction [18], [19]. In this context, leadership behaviors that provide recognition, emotional support, and encourage teacher professional development are motivating factors that directly increase job satisfaction. Conversely, outcome orientation is more closely associated with hygiene factors, which do not directly increase job satisfaction [20], but can only prevent dissatisfaction. Cohen and Wills' Social Support Theory also provides an important explanation: interpersonal support acts as a buffer against stress [21], [22], so teachers who feel supported are better able to cope with professional pressures. When leadership provides emotional support, role clarity, and positive reinforcement, teachers experience higher job satisfaction without needing to rely on outcome orientation as a source of satisfaction [23], [24].

Practically, this research offers several important contributions to the development of school management. Principals need to strengthen relationship-based leadership through supportive communication, authentic recognition of teacher performance, and teacher involvement in decision-making processes. Transformational leadership training should also be a focus of principals' professional development, given that this approach has been proven to increase teacher motivation and commitment. Furthermore, schools need to build a culture of ongoing recognition and appreciation so that teachers feel valued both emotionally and professionally. Academic supervision should also be directed toward supporting competency development, not just monitoring. Thus, this research not only strengthens theoretical understanding of the relationship between leadership and job satisfaction but also provides concrete recommendations that can be implemented in school management practices in Indonesia.

## CONCLUSION

**Fundamental Finding:** Leadership skills are a highly significant factor in increasing teacher job satisfaction. The quality of direct interactions between principals and teachers, such as support, appreciation, and effective communication, plays a greater role in shaping teacher satisfaction than achieving performance targets. Results orientation did not function as a mediator, indicating that teacher job satisfaction is more determined by interpersonal relationships and leadership climate than by results-oriented motivation. **Implication:** These findings emphasize the importance of focusing on the interpersonal dynamics between principals and teachers rather than solely on performance outcomes. Improving communication, providing support, and recognizing teacher efforts can enhance teacher job satisfaction and contribute to a positive work environment. **Limitation:** The study was conducted in only three public schools in one province, limiting the generalizability of the findings. The questionnaire used may also have subjective bias. Additionally, only one mediation model was tested, which does not provide a comprehensive picture of the relationships between the variables. **Future Research:** Future studies should involve a more diverse group of participants and explore additional variables such as school culture, moral leadership, or organizational

climate to enrich the analysis and provide a broader understanding of the factors influencing teacher job satisfaction.

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**\*Eri Deka Gustiar (Corresponding Author)**

UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, Indonesia

E-mail: [eridekagustiar@gmail.com](mailto:eridekagustiar@gmail.com)

**Mukhtar Latif**

UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, Indonesia

E-mail: [proflatif261@gmail.com](mailto:proflatif261@gmail.com)

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**Zawaqi Afdal Jamil**

UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, Indonesia

E-mail: [zawaqi.ajdosen@uinjambi.ac.id](mailto:zawaqi.ajdosen@uinjambi.ac.id)

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