

The Influence of Principal Leadership, Teacher Competence, and School Culture on Teacher Performance at Cerdas Bangsa Elementary School Makassar

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Abstract

Introduction/Main Objectives: Teacher performance is the main determinant of educational success in the era of disruption. This study aims to analyze the influence of principal leadership, teacher competence, and school culture on teacher performance at Cerdas Bangsa Elementary School Makassar, a private institution with a vision of global excellence.

Background Problems: Preliminary studies indicated a gap between the school's vision and the reality of teacher performance, marked by stagnation in students' problem-solving and technology competencies, as well as a high teacher turnover rate (15% per year). This study was designed to answer what dominant factors influence teacher performance in that school.

Research Methods: This research uses a quantitative causal-associative approach with a survey method. The sample consisted of the entire teacher population of 35 people (saturated sampling). Data were collected through a questionnaire and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

Finding/Results: The results showed that (1) school culture has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance; (2) principal leadership has a positive but insignificant effect; (3) teacher competence has a positive but insignificant effect; and (4) simultaneously, these three variables influence teacher performance with a contribution of 51.3%.

Conclusion: School culture is proven to be the main foundation driving teacher performance. Principal leadership needs to transform from an administrative focus to a stronger instructional role, while high teacher competence requires innovative policy stimulation to be converted into superior performance.

Keywords: Principal Leadership; Teacher Competence; School Culture; Teacher Performance; PLS-SEM



Introduction

Rapid global development, marked by technological disruption, has shifted the educational paradigm and given rise to new qualification demands known as 21st Century Competencies, namely the ability to think critically, creatively, communicate, and collaborate (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2015). The quality of education in this era is no longer just a domestic affair but the foundation of a nation's competitiveness. The elementary education level plays a crucial role as the foundation for forming students' initial competencies and character. Failure to build a strong foundation at this level will have implications for competency gaps that are difficult to correct at subsequent levels.

The Indonesian government has responded to these challenges with various policy reforms. However, data from the National Education Report indicates that the main problems still lie in three pillars: uneven teacher quality, not yet fully effective school management, and principal leadership that often focuses on administrative tasks rather than being an instructional leader (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). Teachers often experience difficulties in transforming formal knowledge into innovative teaching practices, while principals have not optimally played their role as agents of change (Fitriani & Suherman, 2023). At the core of every reform effort is teacher performance, which is the key variable determining the success of educational output (Hasan, 2021). Within the framework of Contextual Performance Theory, superior performance includes not only task performance but also contextual performance, such as building a supportive learning environment and instilling character (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993).

This study focuses on Cerdas Bangsa Elementary School Makassar, a private educational institution with the vision of "Realizing an excellent education system in producing a generation of achievers, noble character, and globally competitive." This vision demands multi-dimensional teacher performance. However, initial observations indicated a gap between the ideal vision and the reality on the ground. Internal data showed stagnation and a declining trend in performance on crucial aspects such as students' problem-solving competencies and teachers' technology competencies. Furthermore, the teacher turnover rate reached 15% per year, double the average for similar schools, indicating potential dysfunction in the school culture (Robbins & Judge, 2018). This condition is exacerbated by the transition period of a new principal who has served for less than two years.

Previous studies have proven the positive relationship between leadership, competence, and culture variables on teacher performance in general (Qomusuddin & Bunyamin, 2020; Nurwiyanto et al., 2022; Arrazi et al., 2025). However, the research gap of this study is the absence of a comprehensive study examining the simultaneous influence of these three variables in the specific context of a high-standard private school with unique internal dynamics, such as those occurring at Cerdas Bangsa Elementary School Makassar. The urgency of this research lies in the need to identify the bottleneck or main obstacle among these three strategic factors. Based on this background, this study was designed to answer the questions: (1) Does principal leadership have a significant effect on teacher performance? (2) Does teacher competence have a significant effect on teacher performance? (3) Does school culture have a significant effect on teacher performance? (4) Do these three variables simultaneously have a significant effect on teacher performance?

Research Methods

This research uses a quantitative approach with a causal-associative research type aimed at analyzing cause-and-effect relationships between variables. The method used was a survey with a questionnaire instrument. The research was conducted at Cerdas Bangsa Elementary School Makassar from August to November 2025.

The research population was all teachers at Cerdas Bangsa Elementary School Makassar, totaling 35 people. Given the relatively small population size, the sampling technique used was saturated sampling or census, where all members of the population were used as respondents (Sugiyono, 2017). Data were collected through a questionnaire containing 24 statement items (6 items per variable) measured using a 5-point Likert Scale.

The operational definitions of variables refer to trusted sources. Principal Leadership (X1) was measured through indicators of vision & motivation, development support, decision making, communication & feedback, ethical role model, and resource allocation (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Teacher Competence (X2) was measured through indicators of pedagogical, professional, personality, social, digital competence, and evaluation & reflection (Law No. 14/2005; Spencer & Spencer, 1993). School Culture (X3) was measured through indicators of collaboration, accountability & discipline, innovation, openness & criticism, ethical norms & rewards, and focus on quality (Schein, 2010; Chang & Lin, 2007). Teacher Performance (Y) was measured through indicators of task performance, contextual performance, adaptive performance, student results orientation, administrative speed, and ethical compliance (Koopmans et al., 2011; Bernardin & Russell, 2013).

The data analysis technique used was Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with the help of SmartPLS 4 software. The choice of PLS-SEM was based on the small sample size (N=35) and the research's focus on testing predictive models (Hair et al., 2022). Model evaluation was carried out in two stages: evaluation of the outer model (measurement model) which includes convergent validity tests (loading factor ≥ 0.70 , AVE ≥ 0.50), discriminant validity (HTMT < 0.90), and construct reliability (composite reliability ≥ 0.70); and evaluation of the inner model (structural model) which includes the coefficient of determination (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and hypothesis testing (t-statistic value > 1.96 and p-value < 0.05).

Result

Respondent Characteristics

Of the 35 questionnaires distributed, all were returned and suitable for processing (100% response rate). The majority of respondents were female (63%), aged 25-30 years (63%), with a working period of 1-3 years (51%). All teachers have met the minimum academic qualification of a Bachelor's degree (80%) and even a Master's degree (20%).

Descriptive Analysis of Variables

In general, respondents' perceptions of all research variables were in the "Very Good" or "Strongly Agree" category. The Teacher Performance variable had the highest average value (mean = 4.71), followed by Principal Leadership (mean = 4.61), School Culture (mean = 4.61), and Teacher Competence (mean = 4.55).

Outer Model Test Results (Measurement Model)

The convergent validity test showed that all indicators had loading factor values above 0.70 (range 0.690 to 0.915). The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs were above 0.50, meeting the convergent validity criteria. The discriminant validity test with the HTMT criterion showed all values were below 0.90. The construct reliability test showed Composite Reliability (CR) values for all variables above 0.70 (range 0.895 to 0.953). Thus, the research instrument was declared valid and reliable.

Inner Model Test Results (Structural Model)

The coefficient of determination (R^2 adjusted) for the Teacher Performance variable was 0.513. This indicates that 51.3% of the variance in Teacher Performance is explained by the independent variables, and the rest is explained by other factors outside the model. This R^2 value is in the moderate category. The results of the direct hypothesis testing are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Direct hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Variable Relationship	Path Coefficient	t-statistic	p-value	Description
H1	School Culture (X3) -> Teacher Performance (Y)	0.537	2.122	0.034	Significant
H2	Principal Leadership (X1) -> Teacher Performance (Y)	0.091	0.418	0.676	Not Significant
H3	Teacher Competence (X2) -> Teacher Performance (Y)	0.188	0.827	0.408	Not Significant

Source: Primary data processed, 2025

Based on Table 1, the first hypothesis (H1) is accepted because the t-statistic value (2.122) > 1.96 and p-value (0.034) < 0.05. The second hypothesis (H2) and third hypothesis (H3) are rejected because the t-statistic value < 1.96 and p-value > 0.05.

Discussion

The Influence of School Culture on Teacher Performance

The research results prove that school culture has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance. This finding confirms that a strong school culture, reflected in the values of collaboration, accountability, discipline, innovation, and a focus on quality, has been well internalized and has become the main driving force for teacher performance. A positive culture creates a supportive normative environment where high performance is no longer just a formal demand but a habit and collectively expected norm (Schein, 2010). The practice of strong collaboration between teachers and the focus on the quality of student learning outcomes (mean 4.62) has become the school's identity capable of driving real performance. This result aligns with research finding that a supportive work environment through a positive organizational culture can sustain work consistency and teachers' intrinsic motivation (Nurwiyanto et al., 2022; Ferdinan, 2022).

The Influence of Principal Leadership on Teacher Performance

The research results show that principal leadership has a positive but insignificant effect on teacher performance. Although descriptively, teachers rated the principal's leadership as very good (mean 4.61), its influence was not strong enough to boost performance statistically. This indicates that the principal's role is currently still dominant in the realm of "exploitation," namely strengthening efficiency, consistency, and optimizing standard operating procedures (SOP) for stability of results (March, 1991). Its influence is felt more in administrative aspects and system compliance, not yet touching the realm of "exploration" involving deeper instructional mentoring. This finding differs from research that found a significant influence of leadership through coaching mechanisms (Romadhon & MS, 2021). This insignificance might be influenced by the relatively new leadership transition period and the high level of teacher independence, dominated by productive age teachers.

The Influence of Teacher Competence on Teacher Performance

The research results show that teacher competence has a positive but insignificant effect on teacher performance. This finding is interesting because it contradicts the common assumption that competence is an absolute prerequisite for performance. Although all teachers have met the minimum academic qualifications and have a very high self-perception of their competence (mean 4.55), this has not automatically translated into actual superior performance. Performance is a function of ability, motivation, and opportunity (Mathis & Jackson, 2011). In this context, there are indications that high formal competence is a latent potential that requires a "catalyst" in the form of strong work motivation, a balanced workload, or innovative policy stimulation to be actualized. This result does not align with research affirming the direct influence of pedagogical competence on performance (Purwoko, 2018) but indicates situational factors moderating this relationship (Isnawati et al., 2024).

The Simultaneous Influence on Teacher Performance

Although only school culture was significant partially, the simultaneous test shows that the three variables together can explain 51.3% of the variance in teacher performance. This validates the "Three Pillars of Performance" theory stating that performance is the result of integrating ability (competence), willingness (influenced by leadership), and opportunity (provided by organizational culture) (Mathis & Jackson, 2011). At Cerdas Bangsa Elementary School Makassar, school culture is proven to be the strongest pillar, capable of compensating for the suboptimal direct influence of leadership and competence.

Conclusion

This study concludes that school culture is the dominant factor significantly influencing teacher performance at Cerdas Bangsa Elementary School Makassar. The internalization of collaborative values, accountability, and a focus on quality has become the main foundation driving performance. Conversely, principal leadership and teacher competence, although descriptively rated very highly, do not show a significant direct effect. This indicates that leadership still needs to transform from an administrative role to a stronger instructional leadership role, while high teacher competence requires innovative policy stimulation and environment to be optimally converted. The practical implication is that the school needs to maintain and strengthen its existing positive culture and develop a reward system and broader exploration space for teachers. The limitation of this study lies in the small sample size and the use of self-perception as a measure of performance. Future research is suggested to explore mediating variables such as work motivation or organizational commitment and to use mixed methods to delve deeper into these findings.

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