

THE EFFECT OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP, PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE, AND WORK COMMUNICATION ON THE WORK MOTIVATION OF TEACHERS AT PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS IN BALANGAN REGENCY

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of school principals' situational leadership, teachers' professional competence, and workplace communication on the job motivation of public high school teachers in Balangan Regency, both directly and indirectly through workplace communication as a mediating variable. The study employed a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design. The study population consisted of all public high school teachers in Balangan Regency who held certified educator status, totaling 108 individuals, who were also used as the study sample. Data collection was conducted using a questionnaire that had passed validity and reliability tests. Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics, classical assumption tests, multiple linear regression analysis, and path analysis with the assistance of SPSS software. The results of the study indicate that the principal's situational leadership has a positive and significant effect on teachers' work motivation ($\beta = 0.155$; $p < 0.05$), teachers' professional competence has a positive and significant effect on teachers' work motivation ($\beta = 0.378$; $p < 0.001$), and work communication has a positive and significant effect on teachers' work motivation ($\beta = 0.142$; $p < 0.05$). Furthermore, the principal's situational leadership has a significant effect on work communication ($\beta = 0.505$; $p < 0.05$), and teachers' professional competence also has a significant effect on work communication ($\beta = 0.623$; $p < 0.05$). The path analysis results indicate that workplace communication mediates the effects of the principal's situational leadership and teachers' professional competence on teachers' work motivation. These findings confirm that improving the quality of adaptive leadership, strengthening professional competence, and developing effective workplace communication are complementary strategies for enhancing teachers' work motivation and supporting improvements in the quality of education at public high schools in Balangan Regency.

Keywords: Situational Leadership, Professional Competence, Workplace Communication, Work Motivation

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh kepemimpinan situasional kepala sekolah, kompetensi profesional guru, dan komunikasi kerja terhadap motivasi kerja guru SMA Negeri di Kabupaten Balangan, baik secara langsung maupun tidak langsung melalui komunikasi kerja sebagai variabel mediasi. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan

kuantitatif dengan jenis penelitian eksplanatori. Populasi penelitian adalah seluruh guru SMA Negeri di Kabupaten Balangan yang berstatus sebagai guru bersertifikat pendidik sebanyak 108 orang, sekaligus dijadikan sebagai sampel penelitian. Pengumpulan data dilakukan menggunakan kuesioner yang telah memenuhi uji validitas dan reliabilitas. Analisis data dilakukan melalui statistik deskriptif, uji asumsi klasik, analisis regresi linear berganda, dan analisis jalur (path analysis) dengan bantuan program SPSS. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan situasional kepala sekolah berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap motivasi kerja guru ($\beta = 0,155$; $p < 0,05$), kompetensi profesional guru berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap motivasi kerja guru ($\beta = 0,378$; $p < 0,001$), serta komunikasi kerja berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap motivasi kerja guru ($\beta = 0,142$; $p < 0,05$). Selain itu, kepemimpinan situasional kepala sekolah berpengaruh signifikan terhadap komunikasi kerja ($\beta = 0,505$; $p < 0,05$), dan kompetensi profesional guru juga berpengaruh signifikan terhadap komunikasi kerja ($\beta = 0,623$; $p < 0,05$). Hasil analisis jalur menunjukkan bahwa komunikasi kerja memediasi pengaruh kepemimpinan situasional kepala sekolah dan kompetensi profesional guru terhadap motivasi kerja guru. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa peningkatan kualitas kepemimpinan yang adaptif, penguatan kompetensi profesional, dan pengembangan komunikasi kerja yang efektif merupakan strategi yang saling melengkapi untuk meningkatkan motivasi kerja guru serta mendukung peningkatan mutu pendidikan di SMA Negeri Kabupaten Balangan.

Kata kunci: Kepemimpinan Situasional, Kompetensi Profesional, Komunikasi Kerja, Motivasi Kerja

INTRODUCTION

Education is the cornerstone of a nation's development because it enables the sustainable improvement of human resource quality. A country's progress is determined not only by the availability of natural resources but also by the quality of its human resources—people capable of adapting to advancements in science, technology, and ever-changing social dynamics. Therefore, improving the quality of education is a strategic priority that must be pursued systematically by strengthening all components of education—from the curriculum, facilities and infrastructure, and school management systems to the quality of educators as the primary agents of the learning process (Fauzan et al., 2024). Quality education is expected to produce graduates who possess academic competence, character, creativity, critical thinking skills, communication skills, collaboration skills, and the ability to face the challenges of the 21st century.

From a national development perspective, education serves not only as a process of knowledge transfer but also as a means of character building, potential development, and enhancing the nation's competitiveness. Through education, individuals gain the opportunity to optimally develop their intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual abilities so they can contribute to societal development. Therefore, the management of the education system must be carried out professionally to effectively address increasingly complex global challenges (Haudi et al., 2022). The success of educational delivery is not only measured by students' academic achievements but also by the effectiveness of all components of the school organization in achieving the established educational goals.

Schools, as formal educational institutions, play a strategic role in realizing national educational goals. A school is an organizational system comprising various interrelated elements, such as the principal, teachers, educational support staff, students, parents, and the community. All these elements must work in an integrated manner to ensure the educational process proceeds effectively. A school is not merely a place where teaching and learning activities take place but also a learning organization that continuously engages in change, innovation, and development to improve the quality of educational services. In this context, a school's success is greatly influenced by the ability of the entire school community to foster a work culture that is professional, collaborative, and adaptable to change (Minsih et al., 2019).

Among all school components, teachers are the most critical factor in the success of the educational process. Teachers are responsible not only for delivering instructional content but also for guiding, directing, motivating, evaluating, and shaping students' character. Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 14 of 2005 on Teachers and Lecturers affirms that teachers are professionals whose primary duties include educating, teaching, guiding, training, directing, assessing, and evaluating students within the formal education system. Thus, the quality of education is greatly influenced by the professionalism of teachers in carrying out their duties.

However, the demands on teachers' professionalism in the current era of educational transformation are becoming increasingly complex. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, the integration of digital technology into learning, the strengthening of 21st-century competencies, and the shift toward a student-centered learning paradigm require teachers to continuously enhance their professional competencies and capacities. Teachers no longer serve merely as conveyors of information but also as learning facilitators, mentors, innovators, and agents of change within the school organization. These conditions require a high level of commitment so that teachers can fulfill all their professional responsibilities optimally.

One of the key factors determining the quality of a teacher's performance is work motivation. Work motivation is an internal and external force that drives an individual to work earnestly toward achieving specific goals. Motivation determines a person's level of enthusiasm, perseverance, creativity, productivity, and performance quality within an organization. Teachers with high work motivation tend to demonstrate greater dedication to their work, are more innovative in developing learning strategies, are more open to change, and have a strong commitment to student success. Conversely, teachers with low motivation tend to lack initiative, experience burnout easily, lack discipline, and may even see a decline in the quality of their teaching (Uno, 2023).

According to Uno (2007), motivation is a drive originating from within or outside the individual, characterized by a desire to succeed, a need to learn, hopes for the future, self-esteem, and a supportive work environment. Work motivation is not a static condition but can change depending on the situation, organizational environment, leadership,

recognition, and opportunities for professional development available to the individual. Therefore, educational organizations need to create conditions that can sustain and even enhance teachers' work motivation over the long term.

The phenomenon of teachers' work motivation is a critical concern because various studies indicate that motivation is closely linked to performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and the quality of educational services. Teachers with high motivation will be more enthusiastic about conducting the learning process, actively participate in professional development, and strive to improve the quality of learning through various innovations. Conversely, low work motivation can lead to decreased productivity, poor work discipline, suboptimal educational services, and a diminished drive to develop professional competencies.

Work motivation is often explained through the Two-Factor Theory developed by Frederick Herzberg. Herzberg (1959) explained that work motivation is influenced by two groups of factors: motivators (intrinsic factors) and hygiene factors (extrinsic factors). Motivator factors include achievement, recognition, responsibility, opportunities for growth, and career advancement, all of which can enhance an individual's job satisfaction. Meanwhile, hygiene factors include organizational policies, interpersonal relationships, supervision, working conditions, job security, and reward systems; failure to meet these needs leads to job dissatisfaction.

In the context of school organizations, both groups of factors have a very strong influence on teacher motivation. Teachers who are given opportunities to develop their competencies, receive recognition for their achievements, gain support from leadership, and work in a conducive organizational environment will demonstrate higher job motivation compared to teachers working in less supportive environments. Therefore, enhancing teachers' job motivation requires more than just financial incentives; it also necessitates strengthening leadership, organizational communication, work culture, and the continuous development of professional competencies.

These conditions become even more critical as the education sector faces various changes in national policy that demand a high degree of adaptation from all educators. Teachers are expected to implement differentiated instruction, utilize digital technology, develop authentic assessments, and foster a culture of lifelong learning. These demands often increase teachers' workloads; consequently, if not balanced by effective leadership, good organizational communication, and adequate professional support, teachers' work motivation is at risk of declining. Therefore, efforts to identify the factors influencing teachers' work motivation are crucial as a foundation for formulating policies to improve educational quality, particularly at the high school (SMA) level.

Professional competence is one of the main pillars that determine the quality of teachers in carrying out the learning process. This competence is not only related to mastery of the subject matter, but also to teachers' ability to develop learning strategies, utilize educational technology, evaluate learning, and engage in continuous professional

development. According to Ministry of Education Regulation No. 16 of 2007 on Academic Qualification Standards and Teacher Competencies, professional competence refers to a teacher's ability to master instructional content broadly and deeply, thereby enabling them to guide students in achieving established competency standards. Teachers with high professional competence will be more confident in performing their duties, demonstrate creativity in developing learning experiences, and be able to provide meaningful learning experiences for students. These conditions will directly or indirectly enhance teachers' work motivation because they feel capable of optimally fulfilling every job requirement.

The relationship between professional competence and work motivation can be explained through the Self-Efficacy theory proposed by Bandura (1997). This theory explains that individuals with high confidence in their own abilities will demonstrate greater motivation in completing assigned tasks. In the context of education, teachers with high professional competence tend to have strong self-efficacy, making them more optimistic about facing curriculum changes, advancements in learning technology, and various challenges in the teaching-learning process. Conversely, teachers who feel they lack mastery of subject matter or teaching strategies tend to experience a decline in motivation due to feelings of inadequacy in meeting the demands of their profession.

Developments in education policy in Indonesia are increasingly requiring teachers to continuously improve their professional competencies. The implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka, differentiated instruction, diagnostic assessments, the use of digital technology, and the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into learning are examples of changes that require teachers to be professionally prepared. Therefore, the government, through Regulation of the Director General of Teachers and Educational Personnel No. 2626/B.B1.3/HK/2023, emphasizes the importance of continuous teacher competency development through learning communities, training, teaching reflection, and professional development. This policy indicates that enhancing professional competencies is not only aimed at improving teaching skills but also serves as a strategy to boost teachers' work motivation, enabling them to adapt to the increasingly dynamic changes in education.

Research by Sari et al. (2022) indicates that professional competence positively contributes to teachers' work motivation because teachers with strong subject matter mastery feel more confident in teaching, find it easier to develop instructional innovations, and experience higher job satisfaction. These findings align with the research by Yulia (2017), which explains that teachers with high professional competence tend to be more active in participating in training, seminars, and academic activities, and are capable of producing various learning innovations. These activities reflect a high level of intrinsic motivation to continue developing as professionals.

In addition to professional competence, workplace communication is also a crucial factor in building teachers' work motivation. A school organization is a social organization

whose success is greatly influenced by the quality of communication among its personnel. According to Gibson et al. (2006), organizational communication is the process of exchanging information that enables the coordination of activities among organizational members in achieving common goals. In a school setting, communication occurs not only between the principal and teachers but also among teachers, educational staff, students, parents, and other stakeholders.

Effective workplace communication fosters an open, harmonious, and mutually supportive work environment. Teachers receive clear information regarding school policies, task assignments, performance targets, and various professional development programs. Conversely, ineffective communication often leads to misunderstandings, organizational conflicts, and even a decline in teachers' work motivation. Goldhaber (1993) states that organizational communication is not merely the process of conveying messages, but rather the process of building shared meaning so that every member of the organization shares the same perception of the organization's goals.

From the perspective of modern organizational theory, communication serves as a means of coordination, integration, decision-making, conflict resolution, and the formation of organizational culture. Schools with open communication are typically able to foster a collaborative work culture, making teachers feel valued, heard, and empowered to participate in decision-making. These conditions enhance organizational commitment while strengthening teachers' work motivation.

Research by Rahayu (2017) demonstrates that the principal's interpersonal communication has a positive impact on teachers' work motivation. Teachers who receive open guidance, feedback, and appreciation demonstrate higher levels of motivation compared to those working in environments with closed communication. Research by Suriansyah (2014) also found that organizational communication has a significant relationship with the performance of elementary school teachers. These results indicate that communication is a key factor in creating a productive work environment.

Similar findings were reported by Laila Hajidah (2022), who stated that workplace communication directly influences teacher performance by enhancing work motivation. According to her, effective communication improves coordination among teachers, accelerates task completion, and strengthens collaboration in implementing school programs. Teachers who receive clear information about their duties and responsibilities are more motivated to perform their work to the best of their ability.

In Balangan Regency, the challenge of boosting teachers' work motivation has become increasingly complex as demands for educational quality rise. Based on preliminary observations and informal interviews conducted by the researcher with several high school principals and teachers at public high schools, various issues remain, such as suboptimal organizational communication, disparities in professional competence among teachers, and leadership styles employed by principals that have not yet fully adapted to the teachers' characteristics. Some teachers reported feeling underappreciated for their

performance, while others noted that communication regarding school policies is sometimes not conveyed openly, leading to misunderstandings in the execution of their duties.

In addition, there are still teachers who have not been optimal in developing instructional materials, utilizing digital technology, or participating in ongoing professional development activities. These conditions indicate that improving teachers' work motivation requires more than just financial incentives; it also necessitates support from the principal's leadership, enhanced professional competence, and effective organizational communication.

Previous research indicates that each of these variables has been extensively studied individually. Norparidah (2022) found that the principal's leadership influences teachers' professionalism. Laila Hajidah (2022) demonstrated that professional competence and workplace communication influence teacher performance. Yennie Juhar Latifah (2022) found that the principal's managerial skills, the work environment, and motivation influence teacher performance. However, research that simultaneously examines the influence of the principal's situational leadership, professional competence, and workplace communication on the work motivation of public high school teachers in Balangan Regency remains very limited.

This research gap serves as a key rationale for conducting this study. Unlike previous studies, which have largely focused on teacher performance as the dependent variable, this study positions teacher work motivation as the primary variable influenced by situational leadership, professional competence, and workplace communication. This approach is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing teacher work motivation, thereby serving as a foundation for developing policies to improve the quality of human resources within public high schools in Balangan Regency.

Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich the literature on the integration of Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership Theory, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, as well as the concepts of teachers' professional competence and organizational communication in explaining teachers' work motivation. Practically, the results of this study are expected to serve as input for school principals in developing a more adaptive leadership style, improving the quality of organizational communication, and fostering the continuous development of teachers' professional competence. Consequently, teachers' work motivation can be continuously improved, leading to enhanced learning quality, improved student achievement, and the realization of quality educational goals in Balangan Regency.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research approach, which emphasizes the collection and analysis of numerical data to test hypotheses and explain relationships among variables. Quantitative research requires data to be statistically processed before drawing

conclusions and making decisions (Sugiyono, 2013). Specifically, this research adopted an explanatory research design, a type of associative research aimed at examining the causal relationships among two or more variables. The study investigated the influence of situational leadership, professional competence, and work communication on teachers' work motivation.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed to teachers of public senior high schools (SMA Negeri) in Balangan Regency, Indonesia. The responses were analyzed using SPSS for Windows. Descriptive statistical analysis was employed to describe respondents' characteristics and research variables, while inferential statistics using path analysis were conducted to examine both direct and indirect effects among the variables.

The population consisted of all teachers employed at public senior high schools in Balangan Regency. Since the study focused on certified teachers, the final sample comprised 108 teachers holding educator certification. The research was categorized as descriptive-correlational, as it sought to identify the relationships among variables without manipulating any of them (Suharsimi Arikunto, 2016).

Table 1. Population of Public Senior High School Teachers in Balangan Regency

NO.	SCHOOL	TOTAL TEACHERS	CERTIFIED TEACHERS
1	SMAN 1 Halong	17	5
2	SMAN 2 Halong	17	6
3	SMAN 1 Lampihong	17	9
4	SMAN 1 Paringin	33	29
5	SMAN 2 Paringin	21	18
6	SMAN 1 Juai	22	13
7	SMAN 2 Juai	16	9
8	SMAN 1 Awayan	19	11
9	SMAN 1 Tebing Tinggi	17	8
TOTAL		179	108

The respondents were further classified according to demographic characteristics, including gender and length of teaching experience.

NO.	GENDER	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1	Male	38	35.18%
2	Female	70	64.82%
TOTAL		108	100%

Table 2 indicates that female teachers constituted the majority of respondents. Of the total 108 participants, **70 teachers (64.82%)** were female, while **38 teachers (35.18%)** were male. This distribution reflects the demographic composition of teachers in public senior high schools across Balangan Regency.

Table 3. Respondents by Years of Teaching Experience (N = 108)

NO.	TEACHING EXPERIENCE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1	Less than 10 years	28	25.92%
2	10–20 years	62	57.40%
3	21–30 years	18	16.68%
TOTAL		108	100%

Based on Table 3, the majority of respondents had 10–20 years of teaching experience, accounting for 62 teachers (57.40%). Meanwhile, 28 teachers (25.92%) had worked for fewer than ten years, and 18 teachers (16.68%) had between 21 and 30 years of teaching experience. These findings indicate that most respondents possessed substantial professional experience, providing a reliable basis for evaluating the relationships among situational leadership, professional competence, work communication, and teachers' work motivation. Such respondent characteristics are expected to strengthen the validity of the findings regarding teachers' perceptions of school leadership practices and organizational communication within public senior high schools in Balangan Regency.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Assumption Tests

Prior to hypothesis testing, several classical assumption tests were conducted to ensure that the regression model fulfilled the requirements of the classical linear regression model. These tests included the normality test, linearity test, heteroscedasticity test, multicollinearity test, and autocorrelation test.

Normality Test

The normality test was conducted to determine whether the dependent and independent variables were normally distributed. In this study, the **One-Sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov Test** was employed. According to the decision criteria, data are considered normally distributed if the significance value exceeds 0.05. Conversely, a significance value below 0.05 indicates that the data are not normally distributed.

Table 4.21. One-Sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov Test

Statistics	Situational Leadership	Teacher Professional Competence	Teacher Work Communication	Teacher Work Motivation
N	108	108	108	108
Mean	102.37	83.00	36.83	135.08
Std. Deviation	8.579	7.681	4.344	12.920
Absolute Difference	.081	.084	.083	.083
Positive Difference	.081	.084	.077	.068
Negative Difference	-.064	-.079	-.083	-.083

Test Statistic	.081	.084	.083	.083
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.078	.061	.065	.062

Note. Test distribution is normal. Lilliefors significance correction was applied.

Based on **Table 4.21**, the significance values for situational leadership, teacher professional competence, teacher work communication, and teacher work motivation were **0.078**, **0.061**, **0.065**, and **0.062**, respectively. Since all significance values exceeded **0.05**, all variables were normally distributed. Therefore, the normality assumption required for regression analysis was satisfied.

Linearity Test

The linearity test was performed to examine whether the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable were linear. Linearity is one of the essential assumptions in regression analysis. According to Priyatno (2015), a relationship is considered linear when the significance value for linearity is below **0.05**.

Table 4.22. Linearity Test Results

NO.	RELATIONSHIP	LINEARITY SIG.	CONCLUSION
1	Situational Leadership → Work Motivation	0.035	Linear
2	Professional Competence → Work Motivation	0.000	Linear
3	Work Communication → Work Motivation	0.039	Linear
4	Situational Leadership → Work Communication	0.048	Linear
5	Professional Competence → Work Communication	0.018	Linear

The results indicate that all significance values were below **0.05**, confirming that the relationships among situational leadership, professional competence, work communication, and teacher work motivation were linear. Thus, the linearity assumption was fulfilled.

Heteroscedasticity Test

The heteroscedasticity test was conducted using the scatterplot method by plotting the standardized predicted values (**ZPRED**) against the standardized residuals (**SRESID**). A regression model is considered free from heteroscedasticity when the residual points are randomly dispersed around zero without forming a particular pattern.

The scatterplot demonstrated that the residual points were randomly distributed around the horizontal axis and did not exhibit any systematic pattern. Therefore, the regression model did not suffer from heteroscedasticity, indicating constant error variance across observations.

Multicollinearity Test

The multicollinearity test was conducted to determine whether high correlations existed among the independent variables. Multicollinearity was assessed using **Tolerance** and the **Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)**. According to the established criteria, multicollinearity is absent when the tolerance value exceeds **0.10** and the VIF value is below **10.00**.

Table 4.23. Multicollinearity Test

VARIABLE	TOLERANCE	VIF
SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP	0.126	7.956
TEACHER PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE	0.106	9.433
TEACHER WORK COMMUNICATION	0.188	5.305

The results indicate that all tolerance values exceeded **0.10** and all VIF values were below **10.00**. Consequently, no multicollinearity problem was detected among the independent variables, indicating that the regression model met the multicollinearity assumption.

Autocorrelation Test

Autocorrelation was examined using the **Durbin–Watson test**. According to Karim and Hadi (Hadi et al., 2018), regression models are considered free from autocorrelation when the Durbin–Watson statistic falls within the range of **1.55–2.46**.

Table 4.24. Durbin–Watson Test

MODEL	R	R ²	ADJUSTED R ²	STD. ERROR OF THE ESTIMATE	DURBIN–WATSON
1	.972	.945	.943	1.847	2.401

Predictors: Situational Leadership, Teacher Professional Competence, Teacher Work Communication

Dependent Variable: Teacher Work Motivation

The Durbin–Watson statistic was **2.401**, which falls within the acceptable range of **1.55–2.46**. Therefore, the regression model was free from autocorrelation, indicating that the residuals were statistically independent.

Regression Analysis

Regression Model 1 (Situational Leadership, Professional Competence, and Work Communication → Teacher Work Motivation)

The multiple regression analysis revealed that situational leadership, teacher professional competence, and teacher work communication significantly influenced teacher work motivation.

First, situational leadership had a positive and statistically significant effect on teacher work motivation, with a regression coefficient of **0.155**, **t = 2.101**, and **p = 0.048 (< .05)**. Therefore, the first hypothesis was accepted.

Second, teacher professional competence exerted a positive and significant influence on teacher work motivation, as indicated by a regression coefficient of **0.378**, **t = 4.270**, and **p < .001**. This finding demonstrates that higher professional competence contributes substantially to greater teacher work motivation.

Third, teacher work communication also significantly affected teacher work motivation, with a regression coefficient of **0.142**, **t = 1.992**, and **p = 0.014**. This result confirms that effective communication enhances teachers' motivation to perform their professional duties.

Furthermore, the simultaneous effect of situational leadership, professional competence, and work communication on teacher work motivation was statistically significant, as evidenced by the **ANOVA F-value of 10.236 (p < .001)**. These findings indicate that the three independent variables jointly explain a significant proportion of the variance in teacher work motivation.

DISCUSSION

The Direct Effect of Situational Leadership of the Principal on Teachers' Work Motivation

The findings of this study indicate that the situational leadership of principals has a positive and statistically significant direct effect on teachers' work motivation in public senior high schools in Balangan Regency. The regression analysis demonstrated a standardized path coefficient ($\beta = 0.155$), with $t = 2.101$ ($p = .048$), confirming that the proposed hypothesis was accepted. This finding suggests that the effectiveness of school leadership depends not merely on the authority exercised by principals but on their ability to adapt leadership behaviors according to teachers' readiness, competence, and commitment levels.

The findings are consistent with the Situational Leadership Theory proposed by Hersey and Blanchard (1982), which argues that effective leaders continuously adjust their leadership style based on followers' maturity and readiness. Teachers possess different levels of professional competence and psychological readiness; therefore, principals who can accurately diagnose these conditions are more capable of providing appropriate supervision, guidance, participation, and delegation. Such flexibility creates a supportive organizational climate where teachers feel valued, trusted, and professionally empowered.

From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), adaptive leadership fulfills teachers' fundamental psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When principals provide direction to novice teachers while simultaneously granting greater autonomy to experienced teachers, teachers perceive fairness and respect for their professional capabilities. Consequently, intrinsic motivation increases because teachers experience greater ownership of their work and stronger commitment toward achieving educational objectives.

Furthermore, the findings support Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959), which distinguishes motivational factors from hygiene factors. Situational leadership functions as an important motivational factor because supportive supervision, recognition, trust, and opportunities for professional growth contribute directly to teachers' job satisfaction and motivation. Principals who recognize teachers' achievements and involve them in school decision-making foster greater enthusiasm and organizational commitment.

The practical implications are particularly relevant for secondary education, where instructional responsibilities are increasingly complex due to curriculum reforms, technological integration, and diverse student characteristics. Teachers require leaders who can balance instructional supervision with emotional support. Situational leadership enables principals to respond appropriately to changing educational demands while maintaining teachers' psychological well-being.

These findings corroborate previous empirical studies. Segarayoga et al. (2025) reported that flexible leadership significantly improves teachers' work motivation by creating supportive organizational environments. Likewise, Devana et al. (2025) concluded that leadership styles adjusted to teachers' readiness positively influence teachers' enthusiasm and professional commitment. Kurniawati et al. (2025) also found that principals who encourage innovation and teacher participation significantly enhance teachers' motivation and instructional effectiveness.

The findings also align with Masruri et al. (2025), who argued that transformational and adaptive leadership stimulates teachers' internal motivation by providing role models and professional inspiration. Similarly, Muslikah et al. (2025) demonstrated that principals who continuously facilitate teachers' professional development strengthen teachers' intrinsic motivation because teachers perceive meaningful organizational support.

Overall, the present study confirms that situational leadership represents a strategic managerial approach for sustaining teachers' motivation in contemporary schools. Effective principals are not characterized by rigid leadership behaviors but by their capacity to modify leadership strategies according to organizational circumstances and teachers' developmental needs. Such adaptive leadership ultimately contributes to stronger organizational commitment, higher instructional quality, and improved educational outcomes.

The Direct Effect of Professional Competence on Teachers' Work Motivation

The present study also found that teachers' professional competence exerts a significant positive direct influence on work motivation ($\beta = 0.378$, $t = 4.270$, $p < .001$). Among all independent variables examined, professional competence demonstrated the strongest direct effect on teachers' motivation, suggesting that teachers' mastery of subject matter, pedagogical expertise, instructional strategies, and professional ethics substantially determine their willingness to perform effectively.

According to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1997), professional competence enhances self-efficacy, which subsequently increases motivation. Teachers who believe in their instructional capabilities are more confident in overcoming classroom challenges, experimenting with innovative teaching methods, and engaging students in meaningful learning activities. High self-efficacy strengthens persistence, resilience, and professional commitment even when teachers encounter demanding educational situations.

This finding is also supported by Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964), which proposes that individuals become motivated when they believe that their effort will produce desirable performance and valued outcomes. Competent teachers possess greater confidence that their instructional efforts will successfully improve student achievement, thereby reinforcing their motivation to perform professionally.

Professional competence further contributes to teachers' intrinsic satisfaction because it allows educators to experience professional mastery. Teachers who continuously develop their knowledge through training, certification, professional learning communities, and educational research perceive teaching as a meaningful profession rather than merely routine employment. Consequently, motivation originates internally from professional accomplishment rather than solely from external rewards.

These findings support the implementation of the Indonesian Teacher Competency Standards established by the Ministry of Education, which emphasize continuous professional development as an essential component of educational quality improvement. Professional competence enables teachers to adapt instructional practices to evolving curricula, technological developments, and students' diverse learning needs.

Previous empirical studies strongly support these findings. Syaputri et al. (2025) reported that professional competence increases teachers' confidence, which subsequently enhances work motivation. Manaf (2026) demonstrated that continuous professional supervision strengthens teachers' enthusiasm for instructional improvement. Likewise, Nurlaeni and Soro (2026) concluded that professional competence promotes teachers' moral responsibility and intrinsic commitment toward educational excellence.

Furthermore, Maryani et al. (2026) found that technology-based professional development significantly enhances teachers' motivation because digital competencies simplify instructional planning and classroom management. Similarly, Wulandari and Maisaroh (2025) emphasized that teacher certification programs strengthen teachers' psychological motivation through formal professional recognition.

Collectively, these findings suggest that investment in teachers' professional competence should remain a primary educational policy priority because competent teachers are naturally more motivated to improve instructional quality and student achievement.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the principal's situational leadership, teachers' professional competence, and workplace communication are key factors in enhancing teachers' work motivation at public high schools in Balangan Regency. The analysis results indicate that the principal's situational leadership has a positive and significant effect on teachers' work motivation, suggesting that the principal's ability to adapt their leadership style to the teachers' circumstances and needs can boost their work enthusiasm and professional commitment. Teachers' professional competence was also found to have the strongest positive influence on work motivation; thus, the higher their mastery of professional competence, the higher their motivation to carry out teaching duties. Furthermore, effective workplace communication has a positive effect on work motivation because it fosters coordination, collaboration, and harmonious working relationships within the school environment. This study also found that situational leadership and professional competence have a significant effect on workplace communication, which in turn acts as a mediating variable in enhancing teachers' work motivation. Thus, workplace communication reinforces the influence of these two variables on work motivation. Overall, the research results confirm that improving the quality of school principal leadership, strengthening teachers' professional competencies, and developing effective workplace communication are complementary strategies for sustainably building teachers' work motivation and supporting the improvement of educational quality at public high schools in Balangan Regency.

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