

The Effect of Work-Related Stress and Motivation on Teacher Performance Through Psychological Empowerment and Principal Leadership in Public Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT:

Teacher performance in public elementary schools remains a persistent concern in Indonesia, particularly in Temanggung Regency, where declining learning-quality scores signal suboptimal professional practice. This study analyzes the effect of work-related stress and motivation on teacher performance, positioning psychological empowerment as an intervening variable and principal leadership as a moderating variable. A quantitative survey design was employed, integrating Robbins' work-stress theory, Alderfer's ERG motivation theory, Miner's teacher-performance model, the EMASLIM principal-leadership model, and Spreitzer's psychological-empowerment framework. Data were collected from 340 civil-servant and contract elementary-school teachers across 20 sub-districts using proportional random sampling and analyzed with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results show that work-related stress had a positive and significant effect on teacher performance and on psychological empowerment; motivation significantly influenced both psychological empowerment and performance. Psychological empowerment significantly affected performance and mediated the effects of stress and motivation, emerging as the strongest predictor in the model. Principal leadership significantly influenced performance directly and indirectly through psychological empowerment. Simultaneously, stress and motivation affected performance through empowerment as an intervening variable and leadership as a moderator. The novelty lies in demonstrating that, within a supportive empowerment-and-leadership climate, work stress can act as constructive eustress rather than a purely destructive force, reframing the stress–performance relationship in primary-education settings.

Keywords: work-related stress, motivation, teacher performance, psychological empowerment, principal leadership.

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1. Introduction

Education is a strategic pillar for developing high-quality human resources, and the teacher stands at the centre of this process as the primary determinant of instructional quality (Rodríguez-Horna, 2023). Globally, however, the profession is under mounting strain: more than half of teachers report rising occupational stress driven by administrative burdens and the accelerating shift toward digital pedagogy (Gómez, 2022). Teacher performance is therefore not an isolated attribute but an outcome embedded within organizational, psychological, and leadership-related conditions that shape how effectively teachers discharge their duties (Nina-Cuchillo et al., 2024).

At the national level, Indonesian basic education continues to display uneven professional quality. International assessments place Indonesian pupils among the lower-performing groups in mathematics, science, and reading, signalling that classroom-level teacher performance has not yet met expected standards (Holliday & Hilt, 2024). National surveys likewise indicate that a substantial share of elementary-school teachers experience high work pressure while a comparable proportion report weak teaching motivation, a combination that erodes the planning, delivery, and evaluation of learning (Orjuela et al., 2021). These patterns suggest that stress and motivation operate together, rather than in isolation, in conditioning performance (López et al., 2023).

The local context sharpens this concern. In Temanggung Regency, learning-quality indicators for the elementary level declined across successive years, and the regency recorded the lowest education-report index among neighbouring jurisdictions (Nina-Cuchillo et al., 2024). Field supervision revealed that many schools failed to submit teacher-performance reports on schedule, that a majority of teachers struggled to design curriculum-aligned teaching modules, and that problems of punctuality and collaboration persisted (Aguilar et al., 2024). Such evidence points to performance deficits in the four domains of quality, quantity, time use, and

cooperation that frame the present study (Miner, 2008).

Work-related stress is among the most immediate pressures on elementary teachers, arising when job demands exceed available coping resources (Becerra-Zurita & Aguirre, 2024). Chronic and unmanaged stress is associated with burnout, impaired concentration, and diminished instructional quality (Borja et al., 2024). The Job Demands–Resources framework clarifies this dynamic by distinguishing demands that deplete energy from resources that restore it, positioning stress as a demand and motivation as a resource within the same system (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Motivation, in turn, functions as a powerful driver of engagement and instructional effectiveness, especially when framed through Alderfer's existence, relatedness, and growth needs (Yang et al., 2023).

Recent scholarship has turned to psychological empowerment as an intervening mechanism linking these antecedents to performance, since empowered teachers perceive their work as meaningful, feel competent, exercise autonomy, and believe they exert influence (Spreitzer, 1995). Empirical work confirms a positive association between empowerment and performance and shows that empowerment can buffer the adverse effects of stress while amplifying the gains from motivation (Gerónimo et al., 2021). Principal leadership is a further conditioning factor, widely identified as the most significant predictor of school improvement and a shaper of the organizational climate in which empowerment develops (Garcia et al., 2023).

Despite this progress, prior findings remain inconsistent. Several studies report that principal leadership, motivation, and stress significantly affect teacher performance, whereas others find negligible or contrary effects (Malbran, 2022). Much of the existing evidence, moreover, concentrates on secondary or higher-education settings and on direct relationships, leaving the indirect pathway through psychological empowerment and the moderating role of leadership underexplored in Indonesian elementary schools (Wahyudi et al., 2024). This

constitutes a clear research gap, both empirical and contextual, given Temanggung's distinctive social and professional characteristics (Song et al., 2023).

Accordingly, this study examines the effect of work-related stress and motivation on the performance of public elementary-school teachers in Temanggung Regency, with psychological empowerment as an intervening variable and principal leadership as a moderating variable. It addresses whether stress and motivation influence performance directly and indirectly through empowerment, and whether leadership strengthens these relationships. The contribution is twofold: theoretically, it integrates five established frameworks into a single model for primary education; practically, it offers evidence to guide human-resource management, leadership development, and empowerment strategies aimed at improving teaching quality (Ortiz et al., 2024).

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach with an explanatory correlational design, using a survey method and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the hypothesized relationships among variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2019). The correlational design was appropriate because the study sought to measure the direction and strength of relationships among work-related stress, motivation, psychological empowerment, principal leadership, and teacher performance simultaneously and systematically (Hair et al., 2021). PLS-SEM was selected because the analysis is predictive and exploratory in orientation, accommodates complex structural models with several latent constructs, and does not require the assumption of multivariate normality.

2.2 Population and Sample

The population comprised 2,248 public elementary-school classroom teachers with civil-servant (PNS) and government-contract (PPPK) status across 20 sub-districts in Temanggung

Regency. The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula at a five-percent margin of error, yielding 340 teachers. Respondents were selected through proportional random sampling so that every member of the population had an equal chance of inclusion and each sub-district was represented in proportion to its size, producing a balanced distribution across the region.

2.3 Data Collection and Instruments

Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire distributed as a Google Form via school principals. Items used a five-point Likert scale ranging from "never" to "very often." The instrument was constructed from theory-based indicators for each variable and organized through a blueprint to ensure content coverage. Teacher performance was measured through quality, quantity, time use, and cooperation (Miner, 2008); work-related stress through psychological, physical, and behavioural indicators (Robbins & Judge, 2019); motivation through existence, relatedness, and growth needs; psychological empowerment through meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Spreitzer, 1995); and principal leadership through the EMASLIM roles of educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, and motivator.

Instrument quality was verified through a pilot test with 24 teachers who were not part of the main sample. Construct validity was assessed via Pearson correlation, and reliability via Cronbach's alpha. All five constructs exceeded the 0.70 alpha threshold, with values ranging from 0.849 for psychological empowerment to 0.954 for teacher performance, confirming strong internal consistency prior to full-scale data collection.

2.4 Data Analysis and Hypotheses

Analysis proceeded in SmartPLS 4 through three stages: evaluation of the reflective measurement model (outer loadings, composite reliability, average variance extracted, and discriminant validity via the HTMT ratio), evaluation of the structural model (collinearity, path significance through bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples, and effect sizes), and assessment of overall model

quality (R-square, Q-square, goodness-of-fit, and SRMR). Hypotheses were considered supported when the t-statistic exceeded 1.96 or the p-value fell below 0.05.

The research model integrates the five theoretical frameworks and specifies work-related stress and

motivation as exogenous variables, psychological empowerment as an intervening variable, principal leadership as a moderating variable, and teacher performance as the endogenous variable. The conceptual model is presented in Figure 1, followed by the ten hypotheses tested.

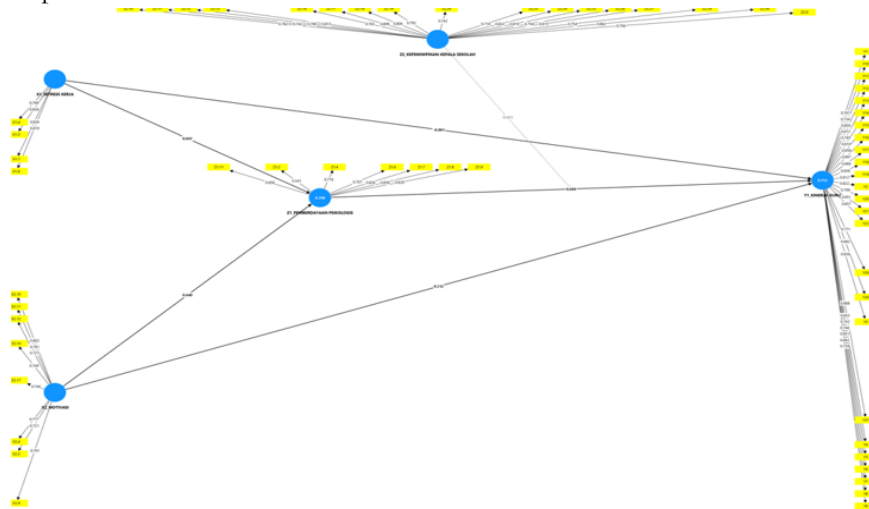


Figure 1. Structural model of work-related stress, motivation, psychological empowerment, principal leadership, and teacher performance

H1: Work-related stress has a positive effect on teacher performance.

H2: Work-related stress has a positive effect on psychological empowerment.

H3: Motivation has a positive effect on psychological empowerment.

H4: Motivation has a positive effect on teacher performance.

H5: Psychological empowerment, as an intervening variable, has a positive effect on teacher performance.

H6: Principal leadership has a positive effect on teacher performance.

H7: Principal leadership has a positive indirect effect on teacher performance through psychological empowerment.

H8: Work-related stress has a positive indirect effect on teacher performance through psychological empowerment.

H9: Motivation has a positive indirect effect on teacher performance through psychological empowerment.

H10: Work-related stress and motivation jointly affect teacher performance through psychological empowerment as an intervening variable and principal leadership as a moderating variable.

3. Results

3.1 Respondent Characteristics

The 340 respondents were distributed relatively evenly across the 20 sub-districts, with no single area dominating the sample. By employment status, 30 percent were civil-servant teachers and 70 percent were government-contract teachers, reflecting the composition of the regency's elementary workforce. Teaching assignments spanned grades one through six, concentrated in the middle grades, and additional administrative duties were spread across scholarship administration, financial management, data operation, and library and cooperative management, indicating a balanced representation of workload profiles.

3.2 Measurement Model Evaluation

The reflective measurement model was assessed for indicator reliability, internal consistency,

convergent validity, and discriminant validity. After an initial estimation, fourteen items with outer loadings below 0.70 were removed and the model was re-estimated; all retained indicators

then loaded at or above 0.70, confirming adequate indicator reliability. Composite reliability and average variance extracted for all constructs are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Composite reliability and average variance extracted

Construct	Cronbach's α	CR (rho_c)	AVE
Work-related stress	0.836	0.890	0.669
Motivation	0.896	0.916	0.577
Teacher performance	0.979	0.980	0.668
Psychological empowerment	0.887	0.913	0.605
Principal leadership	0.960	0.964	0.613

As shown in Table 1, composite reliability values ranged from 0.890 to 0.980, well above the 0.70 threshold, while all AVE values exceeded 0.50. These results confirm that the constructs possess strong internal consistency and convergent validity, with each construct explaining more than half of the variance in its indicators.

Discriminant validity was examined through the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, reported in Table 2. All pairwise values fell below the 0.90 threshold, confirming that the constructs are empirically distinct.

Table 2. Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio

Construct	Stress	Motivation	Empowerment	Leadership
Motivation	0.769	—		
Psychological empowerment	0.648	0.871	—	
Teacher performance	0.577	0.840	0.876	0.785

Because every HTMT value in Table 2 remained under 0.90, discriminant validity was satisfied, and the model was judged sound for structural evaluation.

3.3 Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

Collinearity diagnostics returned inner VIF values below 5 for all predictor relationships, indicating no problematic multicollinearity and supporting unbiased parameter estimation. The structural paths were then tested through bootstrapping; the direct and indirect effects are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Hypothesis testing results (direct and indirect effects)

Path	O	t-stat	p	Result
H1: Stress → Performance	0.231	2.831	0.001	Supported
H2: Stress → Empowerment	0.414	7.295	0.000	Supported
H3: Motivation → Empowerment	0.625	19.694	0.000	Supported

H4: Motivation → Performance	0.310	5.612	0.000	Supported
H5: Empowerment → Performance	0.590	15.561	0.000	Supported
H6: Leadership → Performance	0.391	2.664	0.000	Supported
H7: Leadership → Empowerment → Performance	0.354	2.795	0.015	Supported
H8: Stress → Empowerment → Performance	0.318	4.504	0.013	Supported
H9: Motivation → Empowerment → Performance	0.369	11.417	0.000	Supported
H10: Stress & Motivation → Empowerment × Leadership → Performance	0.031	5.234	0.040	Supported

Table 3 shows that all ten hypotheses were supported. Work-related stress exerted a positive and significant direct effect on teacher performance ($\beta = 0.231$, $p = 0.001$) and on psychological empowerment ($\beta = 0.414$, $p < 0.001$). Motivation showed the strongest antecedent effect on empowerment ($\beta = 0.625$, $p < 0.001$) alongside a significant effect on performance ($\beta = 0.310$, $p < 0.001$). Psychological empowerment was the strongest single predictor of performance ($\beta = 0.590$, $p < 0.001$). Principal leadership significantly influenced performance both directly ($\beta = 0.391$, $p < 0.001$) and indirectly through empowerment ($\beta = 0.354$, $p = 0.015$).

The indirect pathways confirmed the intervening role of empowerment: stress reached performance through empowerment ($\beta = 0.318$, $p = 0.013$) and motivation did likewise with a stronger effect ($\beta = 0.369$, $p < 0.001$). Finally, the joint model in which stress and motivation influenced performance through empowerment as an intervening variable and leadership as a moderator was significant ($\beta = 0.031$, $t = 5.234$, $p = 0.040$), supporting the integrated framework.

3.4 Effect Size and Model Quality

Effect-size analysis indicated that psychological empowerment produced the strongest impact on teacher performance ($f^2 = 0.781$), followed by principal leadership ($f^2 = 0.210$) and motivation ($f^2 = 0.156$), while motivation had a large effect

on empowerment ($f^2 = 0.588$). The coefficient of determination showed strong explanatory power, with the model accounting for 75.0 percent of the variance in teacher performance and 77.3 percent in psychological empowerment. Predictive relevance was confirmed by Q^2 values of 0.512 and 0.366 for the two endogenous constructs, both above zero.

Overall model fit was satisfactory: the SRMR of 0.064 fell below the 0.08 criterion, and the goodness-of-fit index of 0.577 fell in the high category, indicating that the model adequately represents the empirical data. Linearity testing through quadratic-effect analysis returned non-significant results, confirming that the assumed linear relationships were appropriate.

4. Discussion

4.1 Direct Effect of Work-Related Stress on Teacher Performance

The finding that work-related stress positively and significantly affected teacher performance suggests that, within a supportive environment, moderate stress can operate as a functional stimulus rather than a purely disruptive force (Robbins & Judge, 2019). This aligns with evidence that better management of work stress corresponds to stronger performance and that stress may exert positive effects when balanced by adequate resources (Song et al., 2023). It qualifies studies reporting a strictly negative

stress–performance link (Malbran, 2022), indicating that the direction of the effect depends on how teachers appraise and manage pressure. In the Temanggung context, where collegial cooperation functions as a form of social support, teachers appear able to convert task demands into productive effort (Miner, 2008).

4.2 Effect of Work-Related Stress on Psychological Empowerment

Work-related stress significantly strengthened psychological empowerment, reinforcing the view that stress is not uniformly destructive to teachers' psychological states (Becerra-Zurita & Aguirre, 2024). Consistent with the distinction between eustress and distress, teachers with adaptive capacity can translate pressure into greater meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Spreitzer, 1995). This extends prior work that emphasized the corrosive effects of administrative pressure and role conflict on autonomy and self-efficacy (Orjuela et al., 2021), showing instead that, given organizational support, stress can catalyse rather than inhibit empowerment (García, 2022).

4.3 Direct Effect of Motivation on Teacher Performance

Motivation exerted a positive and significant effect on performance, supporting Alderfer's ERG framework in which the fulfilment of existence, relatedness, and growth needs drives professional effort (Yang et al., 2023). Teachers whose basic needs are met, who enjoy sound social relationships, and who access development opportunities demonstrate stronger planning, delivery, and evaluation of learning (Rodríguez-Horna, 2023). The result is consistent with research linking motivation to engagement and instructional quality (Asencios-Trujillo et al., 2022) and underscores the value of recognition and professional-development strategies in raising performance (Ortiz et al., 2024).

4.4 Effect of Motivation on Psychological Empowerment

Motivation was the strongest antecedent of psychological empowerment, indicating that motivated teachers more readily perceive their

work as meaningful and exercise autonomy (Spreitzer, 1995). This corroborates the conceptualization of empowerment as an intrinsic motivational state and shows a stronger association than several earlier studies reported, suggesting that in this setting motivation translates especially efficiently into a sense of empowerment (Gerónimo et al., 2021). The pattern is coherent with findings that favourable work conditions and recognition reinforce both motivation and empowerment (Asencios-Trujillo et al., 2022).

4.5 Psychological Empowerment as an Intervening Variable

Psychological empowerment significantly influenced performance and emerged as the strongest predictor in the model, confirming its role as the mechanism that converts motivation into concrete performance (Gerónimo et al., 2021). Empowered teachers display greater confidence, pedagogical initiative, and responsibility for learning outcomes (Saavedra, 2022). The relatively high effect observed here extends Spreitzer's (1995) model to Indonesian primary education and supports the ERG proposition that growth and relatedness needs are realized through a strong sense of empowerment (Yang et al., 2023).

4.6 Effect of Principal Leadership on Teacher Performance

Principal leadership significantly influenced teacher performance, confirming its strategic role in elementary schools (Holliday & Hilt, 2024). Effective principals motivate, direct, and inspire teachers while cultivating a collaborative climate (Garcia et al., 2023). The effect, though substantial, was more moderate than that of motivation or empowerment, suggesting that in contexts of strong intrinsic motivation the principal functions primarily as an enabler that provides direction and support for teachers' potential to develop (Nina-Cuchillo et al., 2024).

4.7 Indirect Effect of Principal Leadership Through Psychological Empowerment

Leadership also affected performance indirectly through empowerment, revealing the

psychological mechanism behind the leadership–performance link (Tsang et al., 2022). Principals who cultivate meaning, competence, autonomy, and impact foster empowerment, which in turn raises performance (Spreitzer, 1995). This confirms that participatory and transformational leadership styles create conditions conducive to empowerment (Campó, 2021) and extends prior evidence by quantifying the mediated pathway in a primary-education setting (Yactayo & Carbonell-García, 2023).

4.8 Indirect Effect of Work-Related Stress Through Psychological Empowerment

Empowerment mediated the relationship between stress and performance, functioning as a buffer that reframes pressure as a manageable challenge (Song et al., 2023). Teachers high in empowerment convert stress into motivating challenge rather than emotional exhaustion, whereas those lacking empowerment are more vulnerable to performance decline (García, 2022). This indicates that educational interventions should strengthen empowerment rather than merely reduce stress, a conclusion consistent with systematic evidence linking empowerment to teacher well-being (Oliva et al., 2023).

4.9 Indirect Effect of Motivation Through Psychological Empowerment

Motivation influenced performance indirectly through empowerment with a strong mediated effect, clarifying the internal process by which motivation yields performance (Gerónimo et al., 2021). Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation become fully productive only when teachers feel empowered and in control of their work (Spreitzer, 1995). This finding reinforces the ERG proposition that satisfying growth needs enables motivation to translate into concrete behaviour and highlights the practical importance of pairing motivational strategies with empowerment (Rodríguez-Horna, 2023).

4.10 The Integrated Moderated-Mediation Model

Finally, stress and motivation jointly affected performance through empowerment as an intervening variable and leadership as a

moderator, supporting the integrated framework and constituting the study's principal novelty (Wahyudi et al., 2024). Well-managed stress and strong motivation improve performance when reinforced by robust empowerment and effective leadership, so that empowerment and leadership together act as dual transformers converting pressure into productive energy (Holliday & Hilt, 2024). Contextual factors collegial culture, participatory leadership, and the strong sense of vocation among teachers help explain why stress operated constructively here (Briones, 2022).

4.11 Implications and Limitations

Theoretically, the study extends work-stress theory by demonstrating that stress can act as eustress within a supportive climate, and it strengthens the position of psychological empowerment as a cognitive–affective bridge from antecedents to performance (Spreitzer, 1995). Practically, it implies that principals should develop participatory leadership, that districts should design empowerment-based professional development and adaptive stress-management programmes, and that recognition systems should sustain motivation (Ortiz et al., 2024). The study is nevertheless limited by its cross-sectional, single-regency design and its reliance on self-report, which constrain causal and generalizing claims (Creswell & Creswell, 2019).

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the performance of public elementary-school teachers in Temanggung Regency is shaped by the interplay of work-related stress, motivation, psychological empowerment, and principal leadership. Stress and motivation act as driving factors, psychological empowerment functions as the internal mediating mechanism, and principal leadership serves as a reinforcing moderator. The central contribution is the evidence that, within a supportive empowerment-and-leadership climate, work-related stress can operate as constructive eustress that strengthens both empowerment and performance—reframing a relationship long assumed to be uniformly negative and integrating five theoretical

frameworks into a single moderated-mediation model for primary education.

Improving teaching quality therefore requires cultivating an empowering, supportive, and meaningful school climate rather than focusing on stress reduction alone. Future research should test the model in other regions and educational

levels, adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to establish causality, and incorporate additional constructs such as well-being, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment to enrich understanding of how stress, motivation, and empowerment jointly shape teacher performance.

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