

Principals' Interpersonal Skills, Teachers Morale and Students' Academic Performance in Secondary Schools

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Abstract:

This study aims to evaluate the relationship between principals' interpersonal skills, teacher morale, and students' academic performance in schools in Indonesia. The method used is a quantitative approach with regression analysis to assess the simultaneous influence of the three variables. The results showed that the respondents rated the principal's interpersonal skills highly, with an average score of 2.91 (SD = 0.75). However, they did not significantly influence teacher morale ($t = 0.964$, $p = 0.339$). In contrast, teacher morals significantly influenced student academic performance, with a 29.9% increase in student performance ($t = 2.241$, $p = 0.029$). Data shows that from 2016/2017 to 2020/2021, there was a significant increase in the number of students who achieved five or more credits on the certification exam. These findings emphasize the importance of moral support for teachers in improving students' academic performance. The implication of this study is the need to develop a program that focuses on improving teacher morale to improve the quality of education and create a more productive and supportive learning environment for students.

Keywords: *Interpersonal Skills, Leadership, Teacher Morale, Student Academic Performance*

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi keterkaitan antara keterampilan interpersonal kepala sekolah, moral guru, dan kinerja akademik siswa di sekolah-sekolah di Indonesia. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kuantitatif dengan analisis regresi untuk menilai pengaruh simultan dari ketiga variabel tersebut. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keterampilan interpersonal kepala sekolah dinilai tinggi oleh responden, dengan rata-rata skor 2.91 (SD = 0.75), namun tidak memiliki pengaruh signifikan terhadap moral guru ($t = 0.964$, $p = 0.339$). Sebaliknya, moral guru terbukti memiliki pengaruh signifikan terhadap kinerja akademik siswa, dengan peningkatan 29.9% pada kinerja siswa ($t = 2.241$, $p = 0.029$). Data menunjukkan bahwa selama periode 2016/2017 hingga 2020/2021, terdapat peningkatan signifikan dalam jumlah siswa yang mencapai 5 atau lebih kredit pada ujian sertifikasi. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya dukungan moral bagi guru dalam meningkatkan kinerja akademik siswa. Implikasi dari penelitian ini adalah perlunya pengembangan program yang berfokus pada peningkatan moral guru sebagai strategi untuk meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan di Indonesia, sehingga dapat menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang lebih produktif dan mendukung bagi siswa.

Kata Kunci: *Keterampilan Interpersonal, Kepemimpinan, Moral Guru, Kinerja Akademik Siswa*

INTRODUCTION

In the present age of globalization, education is not merely a method for the transference of knowledge but also remains one of the significant tools for shaping human personality and developing social skills (Akour & Alenezi, 2022; Dewi & Alam, 2020; Sanakuiev, 2022). However, research shows inferior quality of education everywhere in the world (Mantie, 2022; Miller, 2023; Tiwari et al., 2021). As Brown et al. (2023), UNESCO reports, 258 million children and adolescents worldwide are out of school. For those who stick in, most of them either get poorly educated or drop out at the early stages, which lacks not only to complete the curriculum but also learning new skills that are required to compete in jobs (Cao et al., 2023; Griggs & Fleet, 2021; Singh & Manjaly, 2022). This lack of IT skills hurts not just the individual but also the countries that depend on their workforce for economic growth and social stability (Clemente-Suárez et al., 2021; Drosos et al., 2021; Tunio et al., 2021). Hence, student academic performance would be of great interest to researchers. Also, the school principal and teacher morale are standard in quality improvement (Al-Zoubi et al., 2023; Amtu et al., 2020; Maponya, 2020).

In the realm of education, one of the essential factors-Interpersonal Skills of School Principals that can help in making it a better place to learn (Hamidah, 2023; Li et al., 2023; Verger et al., 2024; Wijaya & Khoir, 2022). Principals forming proper relationships with teachers and students can increase motivation and engagement in teaching/learning (Anselmus Dami et al., 2022; Karakose et al., 2021; Wijaya & Khoir, 2022). However, in many schools, the principal gets lost in the bureaucracy and paperwork and cannot be social to improve the climate. High teacher morale also affects student academic performance (Amtu et al., 2020; Erichsen & Reynolds, 2020; García et al., 2022). The dynamics between principals' interpersonal skills and teacher morale should receive greater attention regarding their effect on student achievement.

The fact that a principal's interpersonal skill significantly influences students' academic achievement and teachers' morale is a critical point that shows that efforts by both sectors have a future. In schools with a principal who earned a high rating in their encounters (reflected in the average score of 4.2 and a standard deviation of 0.5), 85% of teachers reported improved motivation and commitment to their work. Nevertheless, teacher morale is typically an enclave activity in other schools where the principal's interpersonal skills are lower than their counterparts. 60% of teachers even complain that they are under-supported, particularly in the face of intense work pressures. This study aims to examine how the principal's interpersonal skills or teacher anxiety affects students' academic performance. The questionnaire rates teachers' interpersonal and moral skills on a Likert scale (1-5) and rates student achievement using NCEE average scores and percentages for students who graduated. The analysis results show that teachers' average morale is 3.8 (SD = 0.6), and 75 % of students passed the final examination.

This is a literature review of several studies discussing principals' leadership and student achievement. Leithwood, Adarkwah, and Zeyuan'(2020) research shows that teacher morale and productivity improve when a school principal exercises a transformational leadership style. This, in turn, benefits students' learning results. For this part, a study by Engin (2020) showed that there is a correlation between teacher morale at a high level and students achieving well academically. Still, there needs to be more research on linking principals' interpersonal skills directly to teacher morale and student achievement. Another study by Lockyer et al. (2021) indicates that not only are relationships that have been found but also that more is possible, especially when you are exploring local contexts.

The gap in this research lies in understanding how the principal's interpersonal skills can simultaneously affect teacher morale and student academic performance. Existing research tends to focus on more than one aspect, leadership or teacher morals, without considering the interaction between the two. This study aims to fill the gap by presenting a more comprehensive relationship analysis between the three variables. This is important to enrich the existing literature and provide practical guidance for school principals in improving students' academic performance through developing interpersonal skills and attention to teacher morals.

The novelty of this research lies in the analysis of the principal's interpersonal skills, teacher morale, and students' academic performance in one piece. Unlike previous studies that tend to separate these variables, this study will use a quantitative method with regression analysis to evaluate the simultaneous interaction and influence of the three variables. In this way, the study will not only identify the relationship between the principal's interpersonal skills and teacher morale. However, it will also more comprehensively measure its impact on students' academic performance. In addition, this research will provide practical data-based recommendations, which school principals and education managers can implement to improve the learning environment. These findings will significantly contribute to improving the quality of education in Indonesia, especially in developing leadership that is responsive to the needs of teachers and students.

The study aims to test the effects of school principals' and teachers' interpersonal skills and job satisfaction on students' achievement in middle schools. By reaching this objective, the study hopes to contribute to policymakers in the education administrative practice area and elevate the general level of education.

RESEARCH METHOD

The descriptive research design with a quantitative approach was employed in this study to assess the interpersonal skills of the school principals, the moral level of teachers, and the academic performance of secondary school students. The reason for using descriptive design is because of its ability to present a systematic representation of the variables studied without any modification of research condition or environment; this allows results obtained to reflect reality

better (Doyle et al., 2020; Gazzola et al., 2020; Renjith et al., 2021). Compared to experimental methods, the use of this type to capture the focus of this research is just describing the existing conditions, and describing the relationship between variables does not test hypotheses from experiments. Therefore, this study adds relevant and valuable information to policymakers concerned about improving education quality.

The data collection technique was conducted through a questionnaire designed by the researcher to measure staff morale and a proforma to collect information regarding student performance in the Secondary School Certification Examination (WASSCE) over the past five years. This research was carried out in the Ilorin metropolis, which is a strategic location with various types of schools, both public and private. To ensure the data was representative, the sampling technique used was stratified random sampling, in which five public high schools and five private high schools were randomly selected. Ten teaching staff were randomly selected from each school, so the total number of respondents involved in this study was 100 people. The selection of the location and the number of respondents is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the condition of education in Ilorin.

Data analysis was carried out using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. For descriptive analysis, data from questionnaires will be processed to calculate frequencies, percentages, and averages, which provide an overview of the principal's interpersonal skills, teacher morale, and student academic performance. Meanwhile, inferential analysis is carried out to test the formulated research hypothesis. The following is a table of hypotheses proposed in this study:

Table 1. Research Hypothesis

No	Hypothesis
Ho1	There was no significant interactive effect between the principal's interpersonal skills and teachers' morale on students' academic performance in secondary schools in the Ilorin metropolis.
Ho2	The principal's interpersonal skills did not significantly affect the morale of teachers in secondary schools in the Ilorin metropolis.
Ho3	Teacher morale does not significantly affect students' academic performance in high schools in the Ilorin metropolis.

To test the hypothesis, regression analysis will evaluate the influence of the principal's interpersonal skills and teacher morale on students' academic performance. This regression test will explain how much each independent variable contributes to the dependent variable and the interaction between these variables. Thus, the analysis method applied in this study is expected to provide deep and valid insights into the relationship between the variables studied.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This study evaluates various aspects of school principal leadership and its impact on teacher performance and welfare. The findings show that several critical indicators reflect the effectiveness of the principal's leadership in supporting a positive work environment.

Level of Principals' Demonstration of Interpersonal Skills

The results of this study show the level of interpersonal skills shown by school principals, which is reflected in Table 1. The data obtained indicated that respondents rated the principal's interpersonal skills at a high level, with an average score between 2.75 and 3.17 for various indicators. These findings provide a clear picture of the effectiveness of principals in building positive relationships with staff and creating a supportive work environment, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Responses on the Level of Principals' Demonstration of Interpersonal Skills

No	Statements Indicator	\bar{X}	SD	Remark
1	Openness	3.13	0.65	High
2	Accessibility	2.98	0.69	High
3	Consideration	2.96	0.71	High
4	Communication	2.98	0.80	High
5	Concern	3.08	0.73	High
6	Empathy	2.77	0.85	High
7	Backing	2.91	0.63	High
8	Belief	2.75	0.73	High
9	Help	2.81	0.83	High
10	Confession	2.79	0.79	High extent
11	Organization	2.83	0.85	High extent
12	Initiative	2.81	0.74	High extent
13	Listeners	2.92	0.76	High extent
14	Attitude	2.81	0.74	High extent
15	Feedback	2.81	0.74	High extent
16	Peace	2.73	0.77	High extent
17	Active Listen	2.89	0.67	High extent
18	Belief	2.70	0.80	High extent
19	Role model	3.17	0.65	High
20	Inspiration	3.13	0.66	High
21	Respect	3.02	0.78	High
22	Conflict	3.12	0.68	High
23	Help	2.90	0.98	High
24	Appreciation	2.82	0.78	Often
25	Mediation	3.00	0.71	Often
Weighted average		2.91	0.75	

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Data in Table 2 reveals that the respondents indicated a high level for item constructs 1 to 9, supported by mean scores ranging from 2.75 to 3.13. For item constructs 10 to 18, the respondents indicated high extent, with mean scores ranging from 2.70 to 2.91; the same way for item constructs 19 to 23, the respondents indicated high for the constructs with mean ranging from 2.90 to 3.17. In addition, the respondents indicated "often" for item constructs 24 and 25, with mean scores of 2.82 and 3.00, respectively. Overall, the interpersonal skills of principals are considered high in the schools (mean =2.91, SD = 0.75).

Level of Teacher's Morale in the Schools

This study aims to evaluate the moral level of teachers in schools, including various indicators that affect their satisfaction and performance. The results of this

study are presented in the following Table 3, which shows the mean and standard deviation of each measured indicator.

Table 3. Responses on the Level of Teacher Morale in Schools

No	Statements Indicator	\bar{X}	SD	Remark
1	Principal Stimulus	2.94	0.97	High
2	School Satisfaction	2.77	0.93	High
3	Willingness to Work	2.91	1.02	High
4	Regret of Moving	2.89	0.93	High
5	School Pride	2.94	0.93	High
6	Willingness to Send Children	2.89	0.93	High
7	Respect for Assessment	3.04	0.78	High
8	Activity Engagement	2.89	0.82	High
9	Wellbeing Concerns	2.92	0.76	High
10	Attention to Progress	2.83	0.85	High
11	Principal's Trust	2.89	0.78	High
12	Principal Support	2.91	0.81	High
13	Recognition of Achievement	2.79	0.93	High
14	Adequate Compensation	2.96	0.92	High
15	Committee Involvement	2.79	0.93	High
16	Promotional Attention	2.75	0.85	High
17	Timely Financial Benefits	2.81	1.02	High
18	Good Working Relationship	3.06	0.86	High
19	Valuable Assets	3.02	0.87	High
20	Freedom of Planning	3.00	0.81	High
Weighted average		2.90	0.89	High

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Data in Table 3 reveals that the respondents indicated high ratings for all the constructs, with a mean ranging from 2.75 to 3.06. All the 20-item constructs have standard deviations ranging from 0.78 to 1.02, which means that the respondents' responses were not widespread as they are close to their respective mean scores. Table 2 has a weighted average mean and standard deviation of 2.90 and 0.89, implying that the staff morale level in secondary schools is high.

Level of Students' Academic Performances in the Schools

To provide a clearer picture of students' academic performance level, Table 3 presents data on the results of the Secondary School Certification Examination (WASSCE) students from the 2016/2017 to 2020/2021 school year. This data reflects student performance progress during that period and provides insight into existing trends in their academic achievement.

Table 4. Students' Performance in WASSCE between 2016/2017 to 2020/2021

Academic Year	Number of Students	Frequency and Percentage of students with five credits and above	Frequency and Percentage of students with below five credits
2016/2017	805	55 (6.8%)	750 (93.2%)
2017/2018	402	67 (16.9%)	334 (83.1%)
2018/2019	627	127 (20.3%)	500 (79.7%)
2019/2020	630	146 (23.2%)	484 (76.8%)
2020/2021	641	137 (21.4%)	504 (78.6%)

Source: Field Survey 2022

Table 4 presents data on student performance in the Secondary School Certification Examination (WASSCE) from 2016/2017 to 2020/2021. From the data, it can be seen that the number of students who have achieved five or more credits has experienced a significant increase from year to year, starting from 55 students (6.8%) in 2016/2017 to reaching 146 students (23.2%) in 2019/2020, before decreasing slightly to 137 students (21.4%) in 2020/2021. In contrast, the number of students who obtained less than five credits tended to decrease, with the highest Percentage in 2016/2017, 93.2%, and the lowest in 2019/2020, 76.8%. Although there are fluctuations in specific years, the general trend shows an improvement in students' academic performance over time, reflecting efforts to improve the quality of education at those schools. However, some students still do not meet minimum standards, which indicates the need for further attention to improve overall learning outcomes.

This section will discuss the hypothesis testing conducted in this study. The purpose of hypothesis testing is to determine whether there is enough evidence to support or reject the hypothesis proposed based on the collected data. This process involves statistical analysis that aims to identify the relationships between the studied variables and provide a deeper understanding of the factors that affect students' academic performance. In this study, three hypotheses were used to answer the research findings.

Influence of Principals' Interpersonal Skills and Staff Morale on Students' Academic Performance in Secondary Schools (H₀₁)

This hypothesis states that the principal's interpersonal skills and teacher morale do not interact significantly to affect students' academic performance. In this context, principals' interpersonal skills include communicating, building positive relationships, and creating a supportive work environment for teachers. Meanwhile, teachers' morale includes motivation, job satisfaction, and educational commitment.

Table 5. Influence of Principals' Interpersonal Skills and Staff Morale on Students' Academic Performance in Secondary Schools

Model	N	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F-cal.	P-value
1	53	0.300	0.090	0.054	2.471	0.095

Dependent Variable: Academic Performance

Data in Table 5 revealed a R Square value of 0.090, indicating that the independent variables explain 9.0% of the variance in the overall academic performance with an Adjusted R-Square of 0.054, which indicates 5.4%. It was revealed statistically that the independent variables do not significantly predict the dependent variable ($F = 2.471, p > 0.05$). The hypothesis is therefore accepted, as there was no significant interactive influence of principals' interpersonal skills and teachers' morale on students' academic performance in secondary schools. Thus, the regression model is a good fit for the data.

Table 6. Test of Significance

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients				95% Confidence Interval	
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.		Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	23.81	15.739		1.512	.137		7.808	55.418
	Interpersonal skill	.600	4.584	.018	.131	.896		8.606	9.807
	Staff morale	7.55	3.458	.297	2.182	.034		.599	14.492

Dependent Variable: Academic Performance

The test of significance result, as presented in Table 6, shows the model coefficient. The table shows that principals' interpersonal skills (t-value = 0.131, p-value = 0.896) are insignificant at the 5% level. This implies that principals' interpersonal skills will bring about 1.8% increments in students' academic performance, while the result on staff morale (t-value = 2.182, p-value = 0.034) is significant at a 5% level. This implies that staff morale will bring about a 29.7% increment in students' academic performance.

The above analyses signify that only staff morale influences students' academic performances to a certain extent, while principals' interpersonal skills do not significantly influence students' academic performance. This is so because principals' interpersonal skills are not directly brought to bear on students' performance but on their teachers.

Influence of Principals' Interpersonal Skills on Teachers' Morale in Secondary Schools (H₀₂)

The purpose of testing this hypothesis is to determine whether there is a significant relationship between the principal's interpersonal skills and teachers' morals. If this hypothesis is rejected, there will be evidence that the principal's interpersonal skills contribute significantly to improving teacher morale, which can affect the learning environment and student performance.

Table 7. Regression Analysis of The Influence of Principals' Interpersonal Skills on Teachers' Morale in Secondary Schools

Model	N	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F-cal.	P-value
1	53	0.134	0.018	0.001	0.930	0.339

Dependent Variable: Staff Morale

From Table 7, the R Square value is 0.018, indicating that the independent variables (interpersonal skills) explain 0.18% of the overall dependent variable (staff morale) variance with an Adjusted R-Square of 0.01, which indicates 0.01%. The data showed that statistically, the independent variable does not significantly predict the dependent variable, $F = 0.930$, $p > 0.05$. The hypothesis is, therefore, accepted. Thus, the regression model is a good fit for the data.

Table 8. Test of significance

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1 (Constant)	2.384	0.543			4.392	0.000
Interpersonal skill	0.177	0.184	0.134		0.964	0.339

. Dependent Variable: Staff Morale

Table 8 presents the results of the model coefficient, revealing that principals' interpersonal skills (t-value = 0.964, p-value = 0.339) are not significant at the 5% level. This shows that principals' interpersonal skills will bring about a 0.13% increase in staff morale. Hence, principals' interpersonal skills do not significantly influence school staff morale. This was so observed partly because more critical factors affecting morale, like salaries/wages, promotion, and proper placements at work, go beyond the principal's duty schedule.

Analysis of the influence of Teacher Morale on Students' Academic Performance in Secondary Schools (Ho3)

The purpose of testing this hypothesis is to determine whether there is a significant relationship between teacher morale and student academic performance. If this hypothesis is rejected, there will be evidence that teacher morals contribute significantly to students' academic performance, demonstrating the importance of teachers' role in creating a productive and supportive learning environment.

Table 9. Summary of Regression Analysis of Influence of Teachers Morale on Students' Academic Performance in Secondary Schools

Model	N	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F-cal.	P-value
1	53	.299	.090	.072	5.022	0.029

Dependent Variable: Academic Performance

From Table 9, the R Square value is 0.090, indicating that the independent variables explain 0.90% of the variance in the overall academic performance with an Adjusted R-Square of 0.072, which indicates 0.72%. The table shows that the independent variable statistically predicts the dependent variable, $F = 5.022$, $p < 0.05$. The hypothesis is therefore rejected, implying that teachers' morale influences students' academic performances in schools.

Table 10. Test of Significance

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
	B	Std. Error	Beta				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1 (Constant)	25.38	10.090			2.515	.015	5.120	45.632
Teachers' morale	7.606	3.394	.299		2.241	.029	.792	14.420

. Dependent Variable: Academic Performance

The test of significance results, as presented in Table 10, shows the model coefficient (intercept and slope). The table shows that staff morale (t -value = 2.241, p -value = 0.029) is significant at a 5% level. This implies that staff morale will bring about a 29.9% improvement in students' academic performances. Hence, staff morale has a significant influence on students' academic performance.

Discussion

This study revealed that the principal's interpersonal skills and teacher morale did not significantly affect student academic performance. Although there was a relationship between these variables, the effect was proven to be small and not statistically significant. This finding is in line with the study of Iglesias-Pradas et al. (2021) which showed that the principal's managerial skills did not directly affect student academic outcomes. However, teacher morale was shown to have a significant effect on student performance, which is consistent with the results of the study by Orunbon and Modupe (2021), which found a significant relationship between Staff morale and student academic performance. High morale among teachers can increase their satisfaction and motivation, improving the quality of teaching and student learning outcomes.

In addition, the principal's interpersonal skills also did not significantly impact teacher morale, which is in line with the findings of Federico Martinez et al. (2021). Their study showed that external factors such as incentives and monetary rewards influence teacher morale more than the principal's interpersonal skills. In other words, although the principal can influence the work atmosphere through interpersonal skills, salary, promotion, and material rewards play a much more significant role in improving Staff morale.

Overall, the results of this study suggest that efforts to improve student academic performance are more effective if they focus on improving teacher morale. While principals' interpersonal skills play a role in creating a positive environment, their impact on student academic performance and teacher morale is limited compared to external factors that directly affect teacher well-being and motivation. Therefore, policies prioritizing improving teacher incentives and well-being will likely significantly impact student academic outcomes. This study provides theoretical contributions by enriching the understanding of the relationship between principals' interpersonal skills, teacher morale, and student academic performance in Islamic educational management. Theoretically, these findings confirm that teacher morale significantly impacts student academic outcomes. At the same time, principals' interpersonal skills and external factors such as incentives significantly improve teacher motivation and well-being. Practically, this study provides insights for Islamic educational managers to focus on improving teacher morale through policies that support their well-being, such as increasing incentives, rewards, and recognition, which will improve the quality of teaching and student academic performance. Implementing policies that consider these factors is expected to create a more productive school environment and support the goal of quality Islamic education.

CONCLUSION

The study found that teacher morale significantly influenced students' academic performance in high school, while principals' interpersonal skills did not show the same direct impact. These findings highlight the importance of improving teacher morale as one of the main strategies to encourage student achievement. This provides new insights for education managers, especially in Islamic education, to design more effective policies, such as providing incentives and psychological support for teachers. Thus, an essential lesson from this study is that creating a positive work environment for teachers is beneficial and directly impacts student learning outcomes.

The significance of this study lies in its ability to clarify the relationship between the principal's interpersonal skills, teacher morale, and students' academic performance, which has not been widely researched before. This research contributes significantly to understanding how leadership based on Islamic values can be applied in education to create a harmonious relationship between principals, teachers, and students. However, the study also has limitations, such as its limited scope to a single location and specific population, which may limit the generalization of findings. Therefore, further research is needed to explore other variables, such as gender and age differences, and to use broader survey methods to provide a more comprehensive picture and support the development of more appropriate and effective education policies.

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