Participatory leadership to improve teacher performance motivation in junior high schools

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Abstract. Teacher motivation is a common problem found in all schools. This must be addressed in order to achieve the best possible educational outcomes. Therefore, the role of the head teacher is key in creating a conducive educational environment. This study aims to analyse the impact of the implementation of participatory leadership by school principals on performance motivation at SMPN 1 Krueng Sabee and SMP Unggul Calang. This study uses a qualitative approach, including in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentary analysis, with two school principals, two deputy principals, and eight teachers. The study's results show a positive and significant relationship between participatory leadership and teacher motivation. Teacher participation in decision-making, clear delegation of authority, discipline, two-way communication, and competency development can substantially increase teachers' dedication, sense of belonging, and enthusiasm in their work. It was concluded that the participatory leadership style model is effective in increasing teachers' intrinsic motivation and performance. The practical implications of this study emphasise the importance of school principals adopting a more collaborative approach in school management.

Introduction

Teacher motivation in several schools remains suboptimal, thereby affecting the quality of education. To successfully implement the educational process, principals will always share their enthusiasm and motivation. Schools will be successful if they are supported by the quality and leadership skills of professional principals who are motivated to work well (Neni Siti Mariam & Kun Nurachadijat, 2023). The application of participatory leadership styles will create an inclusive educational environment and foster harmonious relationships with all elements, including teachers, staff, students, parents, and the community. Because they are involved in decision-making and the implementation of educational quality programmes, participants feel a sense of ownership, maximise their motivation, and strengthen their commitment to improving quality (Mubarok et al., 2024). A phenomenon that has developed in the field is that teachers seem to carry out their duties only when teaching. In fact, the principal does not practice participatory leadership effectively, which hinders crucial aspects of teacher improvement (Widya Kusumah et al., 2023). Empowerment and strong leadership motivation will lead to two-way communication (Prasetyo, 2022). Leadership style and human resource competencies often influence civil servants'

performance, with motivation as a significant moderating factor. Therefore, it can be concluded that a participatory leadership style can be implemented appropriately through several planning, implementation, and evaluation sessions (Mularto, 2024; Hanafiah et al., 2023).

This study is based on the idea that teachers' involvement in the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages of the principal's work significantly contributes to the success of performance improvement through the principal's use of motivational methods. The selection of motivational stimulation methods is targeted and conditional, tailored to each teacher's circumstances and problems. An important factor in all of this is the principal's leadership in adopting a participatory approach to motivating performance by involving all teachers to create a more democratic space, working together, absorbing their aspirations as they develop, and then monitoring and evaluating to find the best solutions.

Participative Leadership Style
Participative leadership is a leadership approach in which leaders involve team members or subordinates in decision-making. In this leadership style, leaders do not simply give instructions or make unilateral decisions; instead, they encourage team members to contribute ideas and opinions before making a final decision. This style can also create a more collaborative and harmonious work environment. Leadership style is the entirety of a leader's patterns of action, both visible and invisible to their followers (Rivai, 2013). Leadership style is one factor influencing employee performance (Khaddafi et al., 2024; Angela et al., 2025). The leadership style implemented by the principal can influence the realization and achievement of the school's goals (Purwanta et al., 2023). Participative leadership is necessary in today's organizational climate, which demands openness, innovation, and collaboration (Luqqy Muzakky et al., 2025).

One leadership style suitable for an agency's work environment is participatory leadership, a model in which leaders seek ideas and suggestions from their subordinates and involve them directly in every decision. Leadership is not merely a one-way instruction from superiors to their followers, but rather a two-way, participatory, and dynamic communication (Tarmizi & Hutasuhut, 2022; Subhaktiyasa, 2024). The closeness of leaders in their interactions significantly influences the group or organization they lead (Nurhayati & Suwandi, 2024). The principal plays an important role in creating an environment that supports educational success and in using the right leadership style (Azis et al., 2024).

Increased Motivation
Increased motivation refers to efforts to encourage individuals or groups to be more enthusiastic, productive, and committed to performing tasks or achieving goals. In the context of leadership, increasing motivation means creating a supportive environment for team members so they can perform optimally and feel connected to the organization's or team's goals. Teacher motivation is defined as a variable that influences the quality of learning, which in turn affects the quality of school graduates (Kwartarani, 2022). The causes of low teacher motivation in education include excessive workloads, inadequate work equipment, and heavy work schedules (Sudiarthi, 2022).

Motivation is a tremendous force. It can spur people on through encouragement and rewards to achieve challenging goals (Robbins, 2024). The communication skills of school principals in motivating teachers are considered important for fostering a positive work environment and improving the quality of learning. School principals are expected to understand each teacher individually, including their preferences, strengths, and obstacles. Strong interaction between school principals and teachers is also very important and affects teachers' motivation. By building mutual trust, communicating openly, and sharing common goals, principals can appropriately motivate teachers. Support, guidance, and feedback from principals also help increase teacher

motivation. Teachers' motivation to perform optimally will positively impact the educational process at school and maximize teachers' competitiveness (Darsiah, 2023). Principals should conduct ongoing evaluations to ensure that educational activities, combined with additional tasks, increase teachers' work motivation and professionalism (Soro et al., 2024).

Teacher Performance
Teacher performance refers to the extent to which a teacher can carry out their duties, responsibilities, and functions in educating and developing students. Teacher performance significantly affects the quality of education and directly influences the learning process in schools. This performance covers various aspects, including planning and implementing learning, interacting with students, and managing educational administration. One factor in a school's reputation for success is the improvement in the quality of education driven by teacher performance (Widuri, 2022). Teachers' performance in carrying out their duties as educators, instructors, and coaches for their students is expected to contribute significantly to achieving the desired educational goals (Setiana, 2022; Yasa et al., 2023).

Teachers' performance will be reflected in their sense of responsibility in carrying out their duties, their professional responsibilities, and their moral responsibilities. All of this will be reflected in their obedience and loyalty in carrying out their teaching and educational duties in and outside the classroom (Saiful Basri & Ashari Ashari, 2023). Various methods are implemented to improve teacher performance, such as through the Subject Teacher Consultation Forum (MGMP), Teacher Working Groups (KKG), creating a harmonious environment, a conducive working atmosphere, discipline, effective rewards and punishments, and providing various learning resources and other training in their respective fields of study or other matters so that teachers can improve their performance professionally (Musnani et al., 2024; Widana et al., 2023).

The purpose of this paper is to explain the impact of headteacher participation in efforts to improve teacher motivation. In practice, this emphasises collaboration between headteachers and teachers to improve school performance through two-way communication, discipline, and enhanced teacher competence. It then improves teacher performance through guidance, direction, and training to improve teacher competence. Headteachers do not make decisions or policies based solely on their own thinking. Improving teacher performance cannot be achieved effectively when the principal is inactive, simply waiting and hoping that motivation will grow on its own. Based on the phenomenon observed, this raises the question of how the principal and teachers affect the implementation of the principal's participatory leadership style at State Junior High School 1 Krueng Sabee (SMP Negeri 1 Krueng Sabee) and Calang Excellent Junior High School (SMP Unggul Calang). This study is based on the idea of teacher involvement or participation during the implementation stage, so that performance improvement through the head teacher's motivation of teachers was significantly successful. This motivation has appropriate, conditional targets tailored to each teacher's circumstances and the problems they face. An important factor in participatory leadership styles for motivating performance is creating a more democratic space, working together, incorporating all developing aspirations, and conducting evaluations to identify the best solutions.

Method

Teacher motivation remains low in several schools, with consequences for educational progress in the Krueng Sabee Subdistrict. This phenomenon is evident in the fact that school performance in the area has not improved. There are several factors causing this, both internal to the school and external. Within the school, the issue concerns human resources, specifically teaching staff, which must be addressed to ensure high-quality education. Schools must provide a good, comfortable

environment for students to learn. The most important ability of teachers is to transfer knowledge and shape educated individuals with good character. External constraints include the need for schools to receive support from the government and the community, especially parents or guardians. The focus of this study is based on two reasons. First, participation is an important tool for improving teacher motivation and supporting the quality of education. Second, analyzing participation in relation to the strengthening or weakening of school programs offers a new perspective on how schools can build synergy to deliver more inclusive, meaningful, and sustainable education.

Based on field observations and quotes from the headmaster, deputy headmaster, and teachers, the findings can be categorised into three aspects. First, educational programme planning involves the headmaster, deputy headmaster, and teachers. Second, the headmaster, deputy headmaster, and teachers are involved in implementing school programmes, with an emphasis on transparency and accountability. Third, evaluation, including decision-making on funding sources, development, and the teaching and learning process, is decided by the principal after hearing the aspirations of the teachers at the school. This categorisation of data helps this study to show the reality of the involvement of the principal, deputy principal, and teachers.

The primary data in this study were obtained from indicators of teacher performance at the semester and yearly levels, as well as from the availability of school facilities and infrastructure. Digital media became another source due to the ease of accessing the necessary data and information. The barometer for measuring teacher performance can be seen in the daily activities carried out during duty hours. In addition, this study uses secondary data, including readings and available literature, especially on the concept of the principal's participatory leadership style in improving teacher performance motivation, the main object of the study, obtained through a search of journal articles published by previous researchers.

This research was conducted to obtain data through observation and interviews. According to Miles and Huberman (1984), as cited in Sugiyono (2024), qualitative data analysis is carried out interactively and continuously until saturation is reached. Data analysis activities include data reduction, data display, drawing conclusions, and verifying them. Data reduction involves summarizing and organizing subjective information about school principals' participatory leadership styles to improve teacher motivation. Data display in qualitative research is presented as brief descriptions, category relationships, flowcharts, and similar materials. Conclusion drawing/verification is the process of verifying the authenticity of research data. The initial conclusion is temporary, but if it is supported by valid, consistent evidence, it will be credible when the researcher returns to the field to collect data.

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, a form of research grounded in field observations. Due to its descriptive nature, the findings of this study have been informed by theory, prior research, and generalizations. The process of selecting key informants was carried out as a preliminary step to obtain more complex information from both primary and secondary sources. The key informants in this study were educators, who served as primary sources. Secondary sources were obtained from documents. The research was conducted in three stages, namely (1) programme planning, (2) implementation or realisation, and (3) evaluation. The three stages of the research were designed and conducted to increase teacher motivation. The research was conducted at SMPN 1 Krueng Sabee and SMP Unggul Calang in the odd semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. The research period was three months, with the research subjects being one principal, one vice principal, and four teachers from SMPN 1 Krueng Sabee, as well as one principal, one vice principal, and four teachers from SMP Unggul Calang. Thus, the validity of the qualitative research was enhanced through triangulation of sources and member checking.

In conducting this research, the processes of data collection, data reduction, data display, and verification or conclusion drawing were carried out. Data was collected using observation sheets and questionnaires. The collected data were analysed descriptively. Thus, data analysis aimed to inventory the data. All collected data, whether from participatory observation, in-depth interviews, images, or teacher performance report documents, were read and studied in depth. It was then organised, compiled, grouped, and coded. After that, the data was studied and reviewed again. The data was sorted individually, and irrelevant entries were discarded. Categorisation involves recording data to determine whether the hypothesis aligns with the sequence of learning activities. Meanwhile, the basic unit of description is the data-processing activity aimed at proving the hypothesis and drawing a conclusion. To ensure validity and reliability, data were validated through member checks, triangulation, extended observation, and increased diligence.

Results and Discussion

Participative Leadership Style
Explaining participatory leadership activities The principal provides direction and motivation, listens to all aspirations, and involves teachers in programs planned for the school.

Image 1. The principal motivates teachers and listens to their opinions
(Source: Research Data 2025)

Image 2. The principal and teachers drafted the Violence Prevention and Handling Team Decree. (Source: Research Data 2025)

Image 3. The principal, together with the committee and teachers, collaborated to ensure effective learning in the school. (Source: Research Data 2025)

Based on the data in Image 1, a picture of a meeting at school, it shows the principal and teachers planning future programs to advance educational quality by providing motivation (Image 2). The principal and teachers developed the Violence Prevention and Handling Team Decree, Image 3. The principal, together with the committee and teachers, collaborated to ensure effective learning in the school. In this case, it aligns with the school's main objective of shaping a generation that is not only academically intelligent but also has faith, noble character, culture, and concern for the environment. This aligns with the principal's participatory leadership style, as achieving it requires cooperation from the entire school community, including teachers, students, and educational staff. A participatory principal will invite all parties to work together to achieve these goals, so that teachers are motivated to improve the quality of learning and students are encouraged to excel and have good character.

Through participatory leadership, principals involve teachers in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of educational programs. This encourages teachers to be more enthusiastic and responsible in their duties because they feel trusted and valued. In addition, focusing on character building, environmental awareness, and entrepreneurship will be easier to achieve.

The role of the principal in motivating students
The principal's participatory leadership style motivates and improves teacher performance in junior high schools. Principals and teachers play an important role in increasing student motivation through participatory leadership. By being directly involved in school activities, providing guidance, and listening to students' aspirations, principals can create a conducive and enthusiastic learning environment and develop students' talents. The principal's presence will always be an example of discipline, hard work, and responsibility, thereby motivating students to excel. In addition, the principal's appreciation of students' efforts and achievements, both academic and non-academic, encourages them to continue striving to meet their expectations.

Some examples of programmes initiated by the principal to motivate students at SMPN 1 Krueng Sabee include providing positive role models grounded in religious values. It is hoped that these values can be practised in everyday life. Then, the principal of SMP Unggul Calang proposed creating a 1-day English programme. This programme motivates students to become more fluent in English. During the week, the school allocates one day for the school environment to speak and learn about English, so that students' English skills improve.

Image 4. The principal instructs students that the knowledge they learn at school can be applied in real life. (Source: Research Data 2025)

Image 5. The principal motivates students to participatein the 1-day English program at school once a week. (Source: Research Data 2025)

Image 6. The principal motivates students to apply religious teachings in their daily lives.
(Source: Research Data 2025)

Based on the data in Image of the principal motivating students, the image depicts the school atmosphere and leadership style, as shown in Image 4. The principal is directing students to apply what they learn at school in real life (Image 5). The principal is motivating students to apply 1 day of English at school once a week, Image 6. The principal motivates students to apply religious values in their daily lives. This type of participatory leadership style can influence teacher motivation and performance. Seeing the principal actively guiding students makes teachers feel enthusiastic, supported, and appreciated for their role in the educational environment. This encourages teachers to be more enthusiastic about teaching and to innovate in the learning process. In addition, participatory leadership fosters a culture of togetherness, openness, and shared responsibility, ultimately improving the quality of education in schools.

Principal Motivation for Teachers at School
The principal plays an important role in increasing teacher motivation by applying a participatory leadership style. By involving teachers in every decision-making process, teachers feel valued and trusted, thereby motivating them to work optimally. The principal also provides moral support and the necessary facilities for teachers to develop their creativity in teaching. In addition, appreciation for teachers' achievements, whether through awards or expressions of gratitude, can foster a stronger work ethic. Principals who are open to suggestions and input from teachers create a harmonious and collaborative work environment. Good relationships between principals and teachers make the work environment more comfortable and enjoyable.

Image 7. The principal is providing reinforcement to teachers about learning at school.

Image 8. The principal and teachers are evaluating learning at school.
(Source: Research Data 2025)

Image 9. To improve teacher performance, the principal provides training in teaching competencies. (Source: Research Data 2025)

Based on the data in 3. Image of the principal with teachers during school activities, the principal sits with teachers at a table to discuss school programs and activities, as shown in Image 7. The principal is reinforcing learning at school to teachers in Image 8. The principal and teachers evaluate learning, as shown in Image 9. To improve teacher performance, the principal provides training to improve teachers' teaching competencies, thereby demonstrating that all parties are involved in the decision-making process. The participatory leadership style is reflected in the principal's openness to listening to teachers' input, ideas, and suggestions. Thus, teachers feel valued and help determine the direction of school policy. This atmosphere of togetherness also creates effective communication and strengthens relationships among school members.

Reward for achievement received
The application of participatory leadership has a positive effect on increasing teacher motivation. This has led to increased creativity among teachers in developing outstanding activities for their schools. This is evident in the achievements of SMPN 1 Krueng in its innovation programme and Sabee and SMP Unggul Calang in their learning community programme (Kombel). The awards or recognition for achievements received at *SMPN 1 Krueng Sabee* and *SMP Unggul Calang* are a tangible manifestation of the principal's participatory leadership style. The principal expresses appreciation to teachers and students who have achieved excellence in academic, non-academic, and daily discipline. These awards can take the form of praise, certificates, trophies, gifts, or special awards given at official school forums. With these awards, teachers feel that their discipline and hard work

are appreciated, motivating them to improve their performance. On the other hand, students are also encouraged to excel because their efforts are recognized by the school. These awards not only increase motivation but also foster a spirit of healthy competition within the school environment.

Image 10. Teachers at SMP Unggul Calang won third place in Aceh in the KOMBEL implementation program at schools. (Source: Research Data 2025)

Image 11. SMP Unggul Calang received an award for innovation in Aceh Jaya district. (Source: Research Data 2025)

Image 12. SMPN 1 Krueng Sabee is receiving an award for innovation in Aceh Jaya district. (Source: Research Data 2025)

Based on the data in Image of rewards received to motivate teachers, it can be seen that the moment when awards were given to teachers who had achieved outstanding results in official events is shown in Image 10. *Calang Unggul* Junior High School won 3rd place in *Aceh* in the implementation of *KOMBEL* (Komunitas Belajar) its a community learning group in schools, while Image 11. shows *SMP Unggul Calang* receiving an award for innovation in *Aceh Jaya* district and Image 12. shows *SMPN 1 Krueng Sabee* receiving an award for innovation in *Aceh Jaya* district. The principal or representative of the relevant institution presented the award certificate as a token of appreciation for their achievements. This award reflects the innovation held in *Aceh Jaya* district. *SMPN 1 Krueng Sabee* received an award for innovation held in *Aceh Jaya* district. The principal or representative of the relevant institution presented the award certificate as a token of appreciation for their achievements. This award reflects participatory leadership that values the struggle and dedication of teachers in carrying out their duties.

In addition, the awards given not only impact individuals, but also inspire other teachers collectively to be enthusiastic in their work. Principals who implement participatory leadership always involve all teachers in the process of improving their capacity, including in determining the program and seeing the outputs achieved. This creates a sense of togetherness and increases teachers' loyalty to the school. As a result, teachers feel more confident to innovate school activities.

The participatory leadership style of school principals in improving teacher performance motivation is very effective because teachers are at a crucial stage in shaping students' character and competence. In the planning phase, participatory leadership aims to direct leadership that seeks to gather teachers' aspirations to adjust the programs designed in line with interests related to individual situations and the local environment, which are the main priorities in line with the school's vision and mission for progress. In the implementation phase, participatory leadership focuses on maximizing the potential of teachers and support from students and parents in the form of enthusiasm, positive ideas, energy, and other resources that enable the formation of a desire to build and have dedication to the school. Furthermore, in the evaluation phase, participatory leadership interacts to measure the effectiveness of the programs and serves as the foundation for continuous improvement.

There are findings in the process of school management in the field by principals and teachers, in which there are shortcomings because they have not been handled optimally. There are three factors. First, based on various studies, participatory leadership strategies can be seen as an approach that empowers educators and educational staff to be actively involved in the policy-making process, policy design, and teaching management. In participatory leadership, the principal acts as a facilitator who determines open communication, collaboration, and the process of empowering learning and educational staff to develop their skills and competencies (Mufidah et al., 2024). There are still some teachers who need to be involved in developing school programmes and improving their competencies through motivational methods in order to achieve maximum overall results at SMPN 1 Krueng Sabee and SMP Unggul. Second, in implementation, teacher performance declines as a consequence of a less participatory leadership style (Triana, 2024). From the observations, it can be seen that the head teachers have an unstable intensity in applying participatory leadership styles, which affects the teaching performance of teachers in the teaching process of students at school. Continuous and consistent application is the solution that must be taken at both schools. Third, in the evaluation, it appears that there are teachers who lack work motivation due to the influence of the principal's leadership and lack of work motivation, as there are still teachers who are not disciplined in their duties (Mamuli et al., 2023). The evaluation results indicate that discipline is one example of a lack of intrinsic motivation among teachers at both schools.

Strengthening participatory leadership requires developing appropriate stages, such as the planning stage, empowering educators and educational staff to actively participate in policy-making, policy design, and teaching management. It is necessary to hold meetings such as sharing sessions, meetings, or observations according to actual conditions so that teachers' opinions and needs are heard and any problems or obstacles are addressed. The principal's motivational strategy to improve teacher performance is a strategy that meets the needs felt by teachers in the form of fulfilling their welfare in terms of salary, a sense of security when teaching, appreciation, social needs, and self-actualization; another strategy is to provide reinforcement to teachers in the form of praise; and a strategy to ensure teacher job satisfaction. The implementation process requires the creation of activities for teachers and their expectations to increase their work motivation so that there is no performance gap, such as training, providing courses, rewards for outstanding teachers, and other activities that support their careers (Thesia et al., 2025).

Generally, this study focuses on teacher participation in improving performance motivation limited only to resources (such as financial contributions, manpower, and infrastructure), discussing more about teacher involvement as a complement to school programs. On the other hand, the core of this study is how program planning, implementation, and evaluation affect teacher performance in junior high schools that use a participatory leadership style. When communication is carried out properly, staff collaboration, inter-teacher collaboration, and student-parent involvement in education also increase dramatically. Thus, this study not only compares the level of teacher involvement but also reveals how efforts to continuously improve teacher motivation can be made to achieve optimal educational outcomes and high-quality schools.

Conclusion

The participatory leadership style of school principals in improving teacher motivation in schools has significant benefits for the quality of education. It turns out that actively empowering teachers through motivational methods can maximize their duties and professionalism. This improves individual conditions and the school environment. The visible impact is that teachers are more enthusiastic about their work and more innovative in developing learning activities, resulting in improved achievements for teachers, students, and schools. The visible impact is that teachers become more enthusiastic in their duties, so that student and school achievement naturally improve. Principals and teachers have a sense of responsibility and ownership of the school. School management is carried out effectively, and the school's common goals are achieved.

Research on the participatory leadership style of school principals in improving teacher performance motivation has strong implementation in the field. Collaboration between principals and teachers to implement jointly designed programs can provide new enthusiasm and energy for a school's quality education. This study emphasises a clear delegation of authority, discipline, two-way communication, and competency development, which can substantially increase teachers' dedication, sense of belonging, and enthusiasm in their work. In science, it contributes to case-study comparisons and serves as a basis for further research. This research emphasizes a two-way communication approach, educational management, teacher psychology, and the social aspects of the school environment. It is concluded that the participatory leadership style model is effective in increasing intrinsic motivation and teacher performance. The practical implications of this study emphasise the importance of headteachers adopting a more collaborative approach to school management. From a scientific perspective, it contributes new concepts, theories, and ideas, adds to the body of knowledge, and provides a foundation for further research. This research also shows the principal's governance in empowering human resources and school management in a proactive manner.

Finally, this study has limitations. The study was conducted at only a few schools, which affected the completeness of the data obtained. The limited time allocated to the study hindered the collection of as much data as possible in the field. An obstacle to increasing teacher motivation was the initial communication between the principal and teachers, who were not proactive in reconciling their differing views. Other obstacles included a need for improvement in human resources, inadequate supporting infrastructure, and limited budget availability.

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