

Principal's Managerial Strategies to Enhance Teacher Motivation in Junior High Schools

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ABSTRACT

Teacher motivation is a crucial determinant of learning quality; therefore, the principal's role as an educational manager is highly significant. This study provides new insight into how principals integrate democratic and transformational leadership practices to sustain teacher motivation in regional schools. Specifically, it examines the principals' efforts to optimize school management to enhance teacher motivation at Junior High School (SMPs) in Tapaktuan District, South Aceh Regency. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with principals, vice principals, and teachers, complemented by observation and document analysis. The data were analyzed using an interactive analysis model, with source triangulation ensuring validity. Findings reveal that the optimization of principal management is achieved through three key dimensions: (1) the implementation of democratic and transformational leadership styles, (2) the development of teacher professionalism through training, mentoring, and collaborative reflection, and (3) the creation of a positive, collegial, and motivating school culture. The study's novelty lies in demonstrating how participatory, innovative, and human-centered management approaches can effectively enhance teacher motivation in regional schools, where challenges often differ from those in urban settings. These findings enrich the educational management literature and offer practical recommendations for school leaders and policymakers on designing sustainable management strategies to strengthen teacher motivation and promote continuous improvement in educational quality.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The quality of education in Indonesia is largely determined by the competence and motivation of teachers as the main actors in the learning process. However, in several

regions, including South Aceh, many teachers still show low motivation in carrying out their duties. This is reflected in their low participation in professional development, reduced enthusiasm for teaching, and limited innovation in classroom practices. Such conditions often occur due to the lack of principal support in building a positive, empowering, and motivating work environment. Principals at the junior high school (SMP) level, therefore, play a crucial role not only in managing administration but also in acting as motivators and leaders who can strengthen teacher enthusiasm and ensure continuous improvement in learning quality.

Various studies have shown that principal leadership significantly influences teacher motivation and performance. Research by Karoso and Riyanto [1] found that school principal management contributed significantly to a 68% increase in teacher work motivation, while Yuli et al. [2] confirmed that school principal leadership contributed up to 71.9% to increased teacher work motivation. In addition, Salmita et al. [3] examined the influence of principal leadership and teacher work motivation on teacher performance in South Aceh and found a positive, significant relationship between the two variables. However, most of these studies focus solely on the numerical correlation between leadership and motivation, without exploring how managerial interactions actually occur in practice. Therefore, this study offers novelty through a qualitative approach that focuses on the meaning of the managerial strategies applied by principals in accordance with the social context, work culture, and educational characteristics in Tapaktuan District.

The management style of school principals is directly related to intrinsic teacher motivation, especially when leadership emphasizes fairness, inclusivity, and shared decision-making [4]. According to Siagian [5], John F. Mee identified the core functions of management planning, organizing, motivating, and controlling as essential to achieving organizational goals effectively. The essence of this theory lies in motivating subordinates through effective leadership, in which leaders provide both moral and material incentives to encourage maximum effort and productivity. In the educational context, Mustari [6] argues that school principals must possess strong management skills to fulfill their duties. However, in practice, there are still principals who fail to perform their roles effectively due to non-compliance with appointment regulations, as outlined in Regulation of the Minister of Primary and Secondary Education of the Republic of Indonesia Number 7 of 2025 concerning the Assignment of Teachers as School Principals [7]. Furthermore, Nguyen et al. [8] emphasize that effective school leadership requires clarity of vision, professional support, and team collaboration to sustain teacher motivation and performance.

The implementation of the principal's leadership management can be described through several management functions. According to Mulyadi [9], these include planning both short-term and long-term programs; organizing by managing resources and appropriately placing teachers; motivating teachers and staff to maintain enthusiasm; innovating by encouraging creativity and new ideas; controlling activities and preparing reports; and evaluating implemented programs. These stages demonstrate that effective school management must integrate both administrative and motivational aspects to achieve educational goals.

Teacher motivation is a key factor in the success of the learning process at school. Motivated teachers are more creative, innovative, and able to create a conducive learning environment for students. As stated by Yuniawati et al. [10], work motivation is the desire or need that drives a person to work productively and achieve goals. Motivation shapes attitudes and builds determination, fostering innovation and persistence. Meanwhile, Endeshaw [11] highlights that factors such as salary, leadership quality, adequate facilities, and collegial relationships play important roles in shaping teacher motivation and optimal performance. Similarly, Ghamrawi [12] explains that the principal's support for teachers' emotional and professional well-being is crucial to maintaining enthusiasm and commitment.

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In line with this, Herawati et al. [13] emphasize that when teachers are well motivated, it directly impacts student learning outcomes and school achievement. Furthermore, Proudfoot and Boyd [14] add that while both internal and external factors influence motivation, intrinsic motivation —such as the desire to master skills and achieve meaningful goals —is the main factor sustaining long-term professional growth. Therefore, increasing teacher motivation cannot be separated from principals' leadership and managerial strategies.

Based on these theoretical and empirical foundations, this study aims to analyze and describe how principals optimize their managerial functions to improve teacher motivation in Junior High Schools (SMPs) in Tapaktuan District, South Aceh Regency. Specifically, this study examines three main aspects: (1) the leadership style of the principal, (2) the development of teacher professionalism, and (3) the creation of a positive school environment and culture. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this study seeks to uncover the meaning of the managerial strategies principals use to motivate teachers in regional schools. Theoretically, this research contributes to enriching educational management studies, while, practically, it serves as a reference for school principals and education policymakers in designing context-based management strategies to strengthen teacher motivation and achieve sustainable improvements in educational quality.

² 2. METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to explore how principals optimize their managerial functions in enhancing teacher motivation at the junior high school level. This approach enabled the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of leadership practices in their natural context without manipulating variables. The design focused on the process, meaning, and interpretation of how principals' strategies shape teacher motivation through direct experiences, social interactions, and educational policies. Thus, the research aligns with its objective of uncovering the strategies, challenges, and outcomes of principal management in South Aceh.

Research Site and Participants

The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 3 Tapaktuan and SMP Negeri 4 Tapaktuan, both located in the Tapaktuan sub-district, South Aceh Regency. These two

schools were selected because they represent distinct leadership characteristics, yet both demonstrate efforts to enhance teacher motivation. The participants consisted of ten informants, including two principals, two vice principals, and six teachers who were directly involved in school management and teacher development programs. The group included both male and female participants to ensure representativeness and diversity of perspectives. Ethical approval and research permission were obtained from the South Aceh District Education Office and the respective schools. Each informant provided informed consent after being informed about the research purpose, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of participation.

8 Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The interviews were conducted to explore the principals' leadership practices, motivation strategies, and school culture in detail. Observations captured real-time interactions between principals and teachers during school routines, meetings, and training activities. Document analysis included reviewing official school records such as annual work plans, academic supervision reports, teacher development documentation, and meeting minutes to support data triangulation. The fieldwork was conducted intensively over two months, enabling continuous observation, reflection, and follow-up interviews.

9 Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman interactive model, consisting of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During data reduction, the researcher selected, coded, and categorized relevant data based on themes such as leadership, teacher professionalism, and school culture. The data display stage involved organizing narratives and thematic connections to identify patterns and relationships. In the final stage, the researcher concluded and verified them through continuous comparison and interpretation of emerging meanings in the field.

Data Validation and Ethics

The credibility of the findings was strengthened through triangulation of sources and methods, comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and documents. Member checking was conducted to confirm the accuracy of interpretations with participants. Throughout the research process, ethical standards were upheld by maintaining participant anonymity, ensuring voluntary involvement, and securing informed consent. All data were used solely for academic purposes, with participants' identities and school information kept strictly confidential.

13 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

Teachers' work motivation is a key determinant of learning quality. Various studies have shown that principal leadership plays an important role in fostering this motivation, which can be achieved through the following three dimensions: Principal Leadership,

Teacher Professional Development, and Creating a Positive School Environment and Culture.

The principal is the driving force behind educational implementation. Each principal certainly has their own leadership style, as shown in the interview results in Table 1.

Table 1. Interviews Result on Principal's Leadership at SMP Negeri 3 Tapaktuan and SMP Negeri 4 Tapaktuan

KS 3	: From the very beginning, I have built a family-like atmosphere at this school. I believe in the concept of a pleasant, well-being school where teachers are psychologically well, which is what can build teacher motivation. So, a well-being school will make teachers, the principal, and all school members happy to come to school, because everything will feel easy and will not leave an impact on the future when we do it wholeheartedly.
KS 3	: The management approach I implement here is informed by my background as a leading teacher, particularly in decision-making. For instance, I have studied several decision-making patterns, such as Dilemma versus Ethics. I am more emotional, but that does not mean being too emotional will negate the principles of the rules. So I emphasize that when making decisions, I do not want to go against human nature. For example, when there are pregnant teachers, breastfeeding mothers, or family members who are sick, we will be tolerant. I am convinced that they may be in need now, but someday we may be the ones in need. So, I adhere to the principle of humanizing humans. What I need to emphasize is that once I have made that decision, I must provide a solution to the class. For example, switching hours with another teacher or finding a substitute teacher. So, we decided to humanize people with the proviso that students will not be disadvantaged.
KS 4	: When I became the principal here, my principle was not to be too administrative. Nevertheless, administration is also necessary. Nevertheless, what I emphasized here, especially when I entered SMP 4, is that the issue is the number of students. The number of students is very small. So, one of my motivations for coming here was to grow SMP 4 by having more students than when I arrived. So I motivate my colleagues to be more enthusiastic, and we work together to achieve this. I explained to my friends that, to attract students, we do not need to sell goods by offering free uniforms; instead, we must sell quality by designing excellent programs for our school. Moreover, we have implemented that, and Alhamdulillah, the response has been extraordinary.
KS 4	: I sell school programs, and I have implemented many flagship programs—these are truly my breakthroughs. One of them is the "Kemda" or Dakwah Camp program. After that, we created the Tahsin Tahfiz program and reinvigorated Scouting activities. Moreover, Alhamdulillah, since I have been leading here, the number of students has increased drastically. I always emphasize to my colleagues that it is no longer the era of selling products; instead, we must improve quality, because parents today are becoming more discerning. However, none of these programs would work if I could not boost teacher motivation, and thankfully, the teachers here have responded very positively because it has to be the teacher's first. So that is my motivation. I motivate my colleagues by telling them that if the principal works alone, it will not be possible. We attract students or make this school a good school, but without the support of all of us—the stakeholders in the school—it will not succeed.

The interview results above illustrate two interviews ²⁶ conducted by the author with ²⁰ school principals. The principal plays a key role in creating a conducive work climate. Interviews with the principal of SMP Negeri 3 Tapaktuan indicate that the leadership style adopted tends to be democratic, characterized by teacher involvement in decision-making, an emphasis on family principles, and policies that humanize people. This approach has successfully fostered a more inclusive school climate, where teachers feel valued and supported in carrying out their duties.

In contrast to SMP Negeri 3 Tapaktuan, the leadership style demonstrated by the principal at SMP Negeri 4 Tapaktuan, as indicated by the interviews, is more indicative of a transformational leadership style, as the principal can inspire, motivate, and bring positive change to SMP Negeri 4 Tapaktuan. Principals who practice transformational leadership can improve teacher well-being by setting clear goals and fostering a culture of mutual respect [15]. The strategies implemented by the principal of SMP Negeri 4 Tapaktuan include creating various flagship school programs (such as the Da'wah Camp, Scouts, and Tahfiz-tahsin) to attract more students. This transformational leadership directly impacts increased teacher motivation, as teachers are actively involved in developing and implementing school programs.

Based on interviews and field observations, three main trends emerge in the leadership practices of principals at both junior high schools. First, the principal serves as a central figure who can build emotional engagement with teachers through a familial approach, empathy, and open communication, thereby creating a harmonious, trusting work environment. Second, there is a tendency to apply adaptive and situational leadership styles; at SMP Negeri 3 Tapaktuan, the style tends to be democratic and humanistic, while at SMP Negeri 4 Tapaktuan, it is more transformational and results-oriented. Third, the principals of both institutions demonstrate a strong commitment to improving school quality by prioritizing teacher motivation across all managerial policies and programs. These three tendencies illustrate that the effectiveness of principals' leadership depends not only on their leadership style but also on their ability to adapt their approach to the social context, teacher characteristics, and school needs.

Professional teachers not only possess technical teaching skills but also have a strong passion, commitment, and motivation to continuously learn and develop themselves to improve the quality of learning. Table 2 below illustrates the principal's optimization of teacher professional development management.

Both principals emphasized the importance of improving teacher competency through training, coaching, and collaborative reflection. At SMP Negeri 3 Tapaktuan, professional development is based on an analysis of the school's quality report, which then serves as the basis for planning work programs and teacher training. Teachers are supported in understanding the new curriculum, including its deep learning implementation, and are guided to develop performance plans to improve the quality of learning.

At SMP Negeri 4 Tapaktuan, the principal emphasizes a personal approach through individual coaching, while also encouraging teachers to participate in internal and external training. This motivational drive is also reinforced by displays of appreciation, such as trust and full support, for teachers who seek personal development. As a result, teachers at the school have shown greater enthusiasm for improving their teaching skills and participating in various training programs.

Table 2. Interviews Result on Teacher Professional Development at SMP Negeri 3 Tapaktuan and SMP Negeri 4 Tapaktuan

KS 3	: We refer to the school quality report, analyze it together, and based on that, we compile the RKT for next year, focusing on learning quality and budget planning. We support teachers in developing their competencies by providing multimedia resources to enhance learning and by conducting teacher training on how to make learning enjoyable and improve students' learning outcomes. For example, we recently held training on immersive learning.
KS 4	: As a leader, I usually hold meetings to motivate teachers. To encourage teachers to develop well, for example, by following current developments. However, if there are fellow teachers who, for example, differ in opinion at the start of the meeting, I will still communicate well. I will call them individually because, if there are many, the reasoning can get lost. So sometimes the way to do it is by directly involving teachers in training, I mean, in the meeting, we only say, "Ma'am, develop yourself, participate in activities both externally and internally and so on because today's development is extraordinary, but if I see someone who has not developed when I talk, I will call them, we will coach here well, so I even say sometimes I come to the education office to offer my capable teachers. So my encouragement and motivation is like that, so that these fellow teachers want to develop both internally and externally.
GR 4	: For example, if there is new information, such as a new curriculum we need to adopt, the principal will know about it first. They will share it with us and motivate us to do this, and we will do it. As we do today, we will participate in training at this school, inviting external speakers to discuss the implementation of deep learning.

Creating a positive school environment and culture is a crucial foundation for students' academic, emotional, and social development. A healthy school culture does not just emerge naturally; it is built through the shared commitment of all stakeholders: the principal, teachers, students, parents, and school staff. ⁹Based on the interview results in Table 3 below, the principal has made efforts to foster a positive school environment and culture to increase teacher motivation.

Table 3. Interviews Result on Creating a Positive School Environment at SMP Negeri 3 Tapaktuan and SMP Negeri 4 Tapaktuan

KS 3	: Supporting factors include teacher solidarity with leadership and a harmonious and familial work atmosphere. My presence here is not only as a leader, but also as a partner to my colleagues.
WK 3	: We feel safe and comfortable here first, and God willing, everything will work out because the teachers here are mostly young. However, if that sense of security and good mood is gone, everything will slow down. Once we feel comfortable, we can do anything, whether there is a principal or not, we will keep going.
KS 4	: The supporting factor is that our friends here all want to progress and have the same passion for advancing Indonesian education.
WK 4	: The main supporting factor is the sense of family created by the principal, which makes teachers feel appreciated and increases their motivation.
KS 3	: Efforts to improve teachers' financial well-being are rare. We are focusing on psychological well-being here. Financial well-being is what I am concerned about: honorary teachers, thank God, whether or not school operational funds are disbursed. They receive their salaries every month. It is up to them how much they get. Every month, they are constantly being paid, calculated by the hour."
WK 3	: Although not often, usually on Teacher's Day, certificates of appreciation are given.

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- KS 4 : Our allowance depends on what we receive at school, so when it is calculated in the RKAS and so on, we can provide it. God willing, we will give an example of something close by. Today, we have many talents and engaging activities. We will provide welfare to our friends who participate in them as much as possible. If not much, at least a little. I always say to the treasurer, "We do not spend much." At least, that is the school's understanding of teachers who have guided students' talent and interest areas.
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- WK 4 : Improving welfare through financial means is, of course, also adjusted to the school budget, but I have seen the principal still make efforts to consult with the treasurer. For example, if a teacher trains students for competitions like the National Sports Week (OSN) and the National Sports Week (FLS3N), or in sports, she always tries to allocate funds for the teachers who coach them.
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- GR 3 : The principal usually shows appreciation by giving praise and encouraging students to continue doing their best.
-
- GR 4 : Verbal recognition in a small forum at school, and an expression of thanks from him for doing his best.
-
- KS 3 : There are activities at school to strengthen relationships among teachers, but they do not interfere with the learning process. Sometimes we also cook and eat together at school, inviting residents, such as parents and village officials.
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- KS 4 : Of course, I always invite the teachers to go with me to support the children in competitions, for example. We also sometimes go out to eat together, and we even go camping with the children at this school. There is so much more, ma'am.
-

²⁴ The results of this study also revealed that the principals at both junior high schools emphasized creating a comfortable, safe, and family-oriented work environment. At SMP Negeri 3 Tapaktuan, the concept of *school well-being* is implemented to ensure that all members of the school community feel happy, valued, and treat the school as a second home. Meanwhile, at SMP Negeri 4 Tapaktuan, the principal fosters a healthy competitive culture through participation in academic and non-academic competitions, thus encouraging teachers and students to excel.

Furthermore, a culture of togetherness is reinforced through informal activities such as communal meals, Islamic outreach camps, and community engagement. Consideration for teacher well-being is also demonstrated through the provision of additional allowances commensurate with the school's capabilities, as well as through psychological support through open communication. This further strengthens the sense of togetherness and solidarity within the school environment.

Figure 1 shows the atmosphere of the Dakwah Camp activity held at SMP Negeri 4 Tapaktuan as one of the school's flagship programs. This activity not only serves as an extracurricular activity but also as a means of character building, strengthening spiritual values, and instilling a sense of togetherness between teachers and students. In this activity, the principal's role as a driver of positive school culture is evident, where leadership is demonstrated not only in an administrative context but also as a role model in building a religious and inclusive educational community. Strengthening teacher motivation and solidarity can also be achieved through teacher involvement in non-formal activities such as this, as joint activities outside the classroom create a sense of mutual respect, strengthen interpersonal communication, and foster a sense of belonging to the school. Thus, the

dakwah camp serves a dual purpose: as a strategy for developing students' character and as a means of increasing teacher motivation within a humanistic and spiritual school culture.



Figure 1. Documentation of the Da'wah Camp activities at SMP Negeri 4 Tapaktuan
source: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/CyvRSZyFr/?igsh=MWVpa2ZpZTNrdDh1NA>

3.2. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that optimizing principal management to enhance teacher motivation in junior high schools across Tapaktuan District operates through three primary dimensions: leadership style, teacher professional development, and the creation of a positive school environment and culture. Together, these dimensions significantly shape teachers' intrinsic motivation and professional engagement, underscoring the idea that effective principal leadership extends beyond administration to encompass human-centered leadership. This study advances current understanding by illustrating how principals integrate contextual, participatory, and spirituality-based strategies into motivation practices, an aspect rarely discussed in previous educational leadership research.

Principal leadership emerged as a crucial determinant of school direction and progress. At SMP Negeri 4 Tapaktuan, the principal's transformational leadership style was found to inspire teachers to improve performance and adopt innovative teaching approaches. This aligns with prior studies demonstrating that transformational leadership and work discipline contribute significantly to teacher performance and motivation [16]. Meanwhile, other studies have found that transformational leadership, work motivation, and school climate simultaneously have a significant influence on teacher performance [17]. At SMP Negeri 3 Tapaktuan, leadership was more focused on cultivating a supportive environment and teacher well-being. The findings confirm earlier research emphasizing that school culture and emotional support mediate the relationship between leadership and teacher performance [18]. Another study found that teachers' perceptions of the principal's instructional leadership directly impact their work well-being [19]. Furthermore, it was stated that teachers maintain their motivation through reflective strategies and social support, which can be effectively facilitated by the principal [20]. These findings strengthen

transformational leadership theory by showing that motivation thrives not merely through authority, but through empathy, shared vision, and relational trust.

Teacher professional development also plays a pivotal role in sustaining motivation. Principals at both schools consistently encouraged teachers to engage in training and reflective learning aligned with their professional needs. This supports research showing that need-based professional development significantly increases teaching motivation and fosters a sense of competence and belonging [21]. Further evidence suggests that school management strategies emphasizing participation, transparency, and continuous professional growth can create a motivating work climate among teachers [22]. Another study concluded that the need to feel competent is a key driver of teachers' engagement in professional development activities [23]. Moreover, teacher collaboration through professional communities, such as MGMP (Subject Teacher Consultations) and KKG (Teacher Working Groups), proved instrumental in maintaining engagement and mutual learning. Research found that teacher professional development serves as a strong mediator between principal managerial practices and increased motivation [24]. Other findings indicate that competence, work motivation, and experience all have positive and significant influences on performance, with competence as the most dominant factor [25]. Additional research supports that developing teacher competencies positively impacts engagement and motivation, contributing to improved learning quality [26], [27]. The current study extends this evidence by demonstrating that localized, collaborative professional development can be a sustainable driver of teacher growth in rural educational settings.

Creating a positive school culture was found to be equally essential for building teacher motivation. Principals at SMP Negeri 3 and SMP Negeri 4 Tapaktuan fostered environments characterized by open communication, mutual respect, and appreciation for teacher achievements. This aligns with previous findings that an inclusive and supportive culture enhances emotional attachment and intrinsic motivation among teachers [8]. Another study confirmed that leadership practices that prioritize collaboration, recognition, and autonomy significantly contribute to teacher motivation [28]. In the Tapaktuan context, this cultural dimension is further enriched by the integration of religious, social, and family-based activities that promote togetherness and spiritual well-being elements often overlooked in mainstream leadership studies. Thus, this study provides new insight into how principals in regional schools utilize cultural and spiritual values to strengthen teacher motivation and cohesion.

However, the study also acknowledges several limitations. The qualitative design and the limited school sample limit the generalizability of the findings beyond the South Aceh context. Furthermore, the data rely heavily on self-reported perspectives, which may not fully capture latent organizational dynamics. Future research could adopt a mixed-methods design or longitudinal approach to measure how principal management strategies evolve and influence teacher motivation quantitatively.

In contrast to earlier studies that emphasize formal management systems in urban contexts [22], [29], this research highlights the effectiveness of informal, community-based strategies, such as peer mentoring, religious reflection, and family-oriented engagement, in fostering intrinsic motivation among teachers in rural areas. By contextualizing leadership

practices within local values of kinship, spirituality, and cooperation, this study broadens the theoretical application of transformational leadership in non-urban educational settings.

In terms of practical and policy implications, the findings underscore the need for education authorities to strengthen leadership development programs that emphasize emotional intelligence, cultural awareness, and spiritual sensitivity. Local education agencies should support principals through continuous coaching, reflective forums, and localized policy frameworks that encourage collaboration and teacher empowerment. By integrating participatory and humanistic leadership practices into policy and training initiatives, regional governments can foster sustainable teacher motivation, ultimately advancing the broader goal of improving educational quality and equity across Indonesia's diverse school contexts.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that optimizing principal management is crucial for enhancing teacher motivation in junior high schools across Tapaktuan District, South Aceh Regency. Teacher motivation in this context is not merely driven by individual initiative, but by how effectively principals integrate leadership, professional development, and school culture into cohesive management practices. The findings reveal that democratic and transformational leadership fosters teacher engagement through participation, recognition, and collaboration, while continuous professional development and a supportive school culture promote psychological well-being and enthusiasm for work. Collectively, these elements illustrate that teacher motivation grows most effectively within a school environment shaped by empathy, shared vision, and mutual trust.

From a theoretical perspective, this research enriches the field of educational management by offering empirical evidence that participatory, innovative, and humanistic principal leadership can sustainably build teacher motivation. It reinforces the relevance of transformational leadership theory and the concept of school well-being in explaining how school leaders influence motivation and performance at the junior high school level. Beyond academic contribution, this study provides practical insights for school principals, supervisors, and education authorities. Local education policymakers are encouraged to integrate well-being-based and democratic leadership modules into principal training programs, emphasizing emotional intelligence, collaboration, and teacher empowerment. Moreover, the development of school-based professional learning communities and reflective forums should be institutionalized to strengthen teachers' intrinsic motivation and professional growth.

This study used a descriptive, qualitative approach in two schools within the Tapaktuan sub-district, which limits the generalizability of its findings. It also focused primarily on three managerial dimensions, without deeply exploring external influences such as regional education policy, parental involvement, or formal reward systems. In addition, the reliance on interview and observation data may reflect subjective interpretations from both researchers and participants. Future studies should employ mixed-method or longitudinal approaches across broader regions to validate these findings, examine causal

relationships, and propose scalable strategies for leadership development and teacher motivation enhancement.

By integrating democratic and humanistic management principles, school leaders can transform teacher motivation into a catalyst for sustainable educational quality, ensuring that schools achieve academic excellence and nurture a thriving, motivated teaching community.

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