Leadership Styles and Employee Performance: The Mediating Role of Work Motivation at Galaxy Kindergarten

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Abstract

This study examines the relationships between transactional, transformational, and participative leadership styles and employee work motivation and performance, including the mediating role of work motivation at Galaksi Kindergarten, Bandar Lampung. A quantitative explanatory study was conducted using cross-sectional data from 60 employees selected through saturated sampling and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results showed that all three leadership styles had a positive and significant effect on work motivation. Work motivation also had a positive and significant effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.503$, $p < 0.001$). Transformational leadership demonstrated the strongest direct effect on performance ($\beta = 0.318$, $p < 0.001$) and the strongest indirect effect through work motivation ($\beta = 0.232$, $p < 0.001$). Work motivation partially mediated the relationships between all three leadership styles and employee performance. The findings extend leadership research by demonstrating how complementary leadership approaches translate into performance through employee motivation in early childhood education. Practically, kindergarten management should prioritize inspirational and developmental leadership while maintaining clear performance standards and employee participation.

Keywords: *Employee Performance, Leadership Style, PLS-SEM, Transformational Leadership, Work Motivation*

1. INTRODUCTION

Employee performance is essential for organizational effectiveness, particularly in educational institutions, where service quality depends on the interactions among educators, staff, students, and parents (Hairudin, Oktaria, & Wenda, 2023). Wang, Luan, and Ma (2024), through a longitudinal meta-analysis, found that work motivation in the previous period positively predicted subsequent performance, while the reverse relationship was not significant. These findings highlight work motivation as a potential mechanism linking organizational leadership to employee performance. In educational settings, Adipa, Sulaiman, and Saleh (2021) identified relationships among school leadership, work motivation, and teacher performance, while Fau, Sarmini, and Aisyah (2022) found that principal leadership and work motivation were associated with teacher performance.

This issue is relevant to Galaksi Kindergarten in Bandar Lampung, an early childhood education institution that depends on employee discipline, initiative, coordination, and responsiveness to maintain its service quality. Preliminary observations identified variations in attendance, administrative completion, initiatives in undertaking additional tasks, and coordination among employees. Monthly attendance fluctuated between 88% and 94%, which is below the stated organizational expectation of at least 95%. Punctuality was also inconsistent, administrative tasks were sometimes delayed, and employee initiative and team coordination required improvement. These conditions indicate an empirical gap between the expected and observed employee performance. Addressing this gap requires examining not only performance standards and supervision but also leadership practices and the motivation that may encourage employees to meet the organizational expectations.

Leadership style is an organizational factor associated with employee behavior and performance. Kim, Yang, and Lee (2023) found that organizational leadership capabilities are related to performance-related processes, although their effects are not always direct. In educational institutions, Elfira, Rasdiana, Fitrawati, Jasman, Reski, Anwar, and Enaldi (2024) demonstrated that

instructional leadership positively influences teacher performance, with teacher self-efficacy mediating this relationship. Sariakin, Yeni, Usman, Mare, Munzir, and Saleh (2025) also found relationships among principal leadership, teacher motivation, and performance. Together, these findings suggest that leadership may improve performance through both direct pathways and employee psychological mechanisms.

Three leadership approaches are particularly relevant to this study: Transactional leadership emphasizes task clarity, supervision, performance standards and rewards. Ulfah, Subiyanto, and Kurniawan (2020) found that transactional leadership positively affects motivation and performance, including indirectly through work motivation. Transformational leadership emphasizes vision, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individual development. Wang et al. (2024) found a positive relationship between transformational leadership and job performance through mechanisms including employee engagement, while Baskoro, Fuadi, and Kahpi (2021) identified work motivation as a mediator between transformational leadership and employee performance. Udin (2023a) similarly highlighted intrinsic work motivation as a mechanism connecting transformational leadership with performance. Participative leadership emphasizes employee involvement in decision making and problem solving. Ali and Susilawati (2025) found that leadership practices involving clear communication, fair task allocation, support, and teacher participation in decision-making were associated with teacher professionalism and performance. These approaches provide complementary explanations of how leadership may establish work standards, inspire employees, and encourage their participation.

Despite these findings, empirical evidence concerning the relationship between leadership and performance remains inconsistent. Aristana, Adhika, Rihayana, and Salain (2024) found that transformational leadership did not directly affect employee performance but operated through organizational citizenship behavior, whereas Kher, Lo, Mohamad, and Khoo (2024) reported a positive relationship between certain dimensions of transformational leadership and job performance. This inconsistency indicates that leadership effectiveness may depend on the mechanisms through which leadership behaviors are translated into employee performance. Widianto and Wilderom (2023) highlighted the importance of followers' psychological resources in explaining the relationship between transformational leadership and performance, while Udin (2023b) identified organizational learning culture as a possible mechanism. These studies point to a theoretical gap concerning the psychological pathways that connect leadership practices to performance.

Work motivation is particularly relevant to this gap because it influences the direction, intensity, and persistence of employee effort. Wang et al. (2024) found that motivation predicted subsequent performance, while Atiyyah, Hamdiah, Febriyanti, Serlly, Salfika, Ernanto, and Sales (2024) reported that work motivation mediated the relationship between principal leadership and teacher performance. Usmar and Santosa (2022) also found that leadership and work motivation positively influenced teacher performance, while Parveen, Kumar, and Shah (2022) identified a relationship between principal leadership style and teacher job performance. Athapaththu and Rebecca (2025) further reported a mediating role of work motivation in the relationship between leadership style and employee performance. Aristana et al. (2024) and Kher et al. (2024) illustrated that leadership–performance relationships may differ across studies and mechanisms.

Beyond these differing findings, there remains a contextual and model-related research gap. Previous studies have often examined transformational leadership separately or investigated leadership and motivation in companies, government organizations, universities, and primary and secondary schools. The simultaneous examination of transactional, transformational, and participative leadership, with work motivation as a mediator, remains limited in private early childhood education institutions. Although Firmansyah, Yulandari, and Zakiah (2025) emphasized the relevance of leadership style and motivation to employee performance, further evidence is needed to understand how these three leadership approaches operate in the specific organizational conditions of a kindergarten. This gap is directly relevant to Galaksi Kindergarten, where the observed problems of attendance, punctuality, administrative completion, initiative, and coordination indicate a need to

understand how leadership can translate into improved employee performance through motivation. The study therefore examines the relationships between transactional, transformational, and participative leadership styles, employee work motivation, and performance, and tests the mediating role of work motivation.

The novelty of this study lies in integrating three leadership approaches into a single empirical model and examining work motivation as the mechanism linking each approach to employee performance in an early childhood education institution. Rather than treating leadership as a uniform construct, the model distinguishes the contributions of transactional, transformational, and participative leadership and evaluates both their direct relationships with performance and their indirect relationships through work motivation. This study contributes to the leadership and human resource management literature by extending the examination of motivational mediation to a private kindergarten context. Practically, the findings are intended to inform leadership decisions at Galaksi Kindergarten, particularly in strengthening employee motivation, discipline, initiative, and coordination to support the quality of educational services. This study addresses four related questions: whether each leadership style is associated with employee work motivation, whether work motivation is associated with employee performance, whether each leadership style is associated directly with performance, and whether work motivation mediates these relationships.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Literature Review: Leadership Style, Work Motivation, and Employee Performance

Leadership style shapes employees' work motivation and performance through direction, inspiration, and participation. Transactional leadership emphasizes clear expectations and rewards, while transformational leadership promotes vision and development; participative leadership encourages employee involvement (Hadaming & Rayyani, 2026). These approaches can strengthen motivation, which translates organizational direction into effort, persistence, and task achievement. Adipa, Sulaiman, and Saleh (2021), Atiyyah, Hamdiah, Febriyanti, Serlly, Salfika, Ernanto, and Sales (2024), and Wang, Luan, and Ma (2024) highlight the relevance of leadership and motivation to employee outcomes. (Erlangga, Sugiarti, Winta, Bunyamin, & Riesta, 2024) also emphasize the importance of leadership and motivational factors in organizational performance. Accordingly, this study examines both the direct relationships between leadership styles and employee performance and the indirect relationships mediated by work motivation.

2.2 The Relationship between Leadership Style and Work Motivation

Transactional leadership can strengthen work motivation by establishing clear performance expectations and linking employees' efforts to rewards. Transformational leadership may increase motivation by communicating an inspiring vision, recognizing employee contributions, and supporting personal development (Anggraini, Rosalina, & Anggita, 2026; Santosa, Thahira, & Rimbasari, 2026). Participative leadership can foster motivation by involving employees in decisions and encouraging a sense of ownership. These mechanisms are supported by previous research on leadership and employee motivation (Adipa, Sulaiman, & Saleh, 2021; Asman, Syafrina, & Wirawan, 2022; Atiyyah, Hamdiah, Febriyanti, Serlly, Salfika, Ernanto, & Sales, 2024). Accordingly, each leadership style is expected to enhance work motivation through a distinct but complementary mechanism: transactional leadership emphasizes exchange and clarity, transformational leadership emphasizes inspiration, and participative leadership emphasizes involvement. The following hypotheses are proposed:

- H_1: Transactional leadership style has a positive and significant effect on employee work motivation at Galaksi Kindergarten, Bandar Lampung
- H_2: Transformational leadership style has a positive and significant effect on employee work motivation at Galaksi Kindergarten, Bandar Lampung
- H_3: Participative leadership style has a positive and significant effect on employee work motivation at Galaksi Kindergarten, Bandar Lampung

2.3 The Relationship between Work Motivation and Employee Performance

Work motivation is important for employee performance because it influences the intensity, direction, and persistence of work-related effort. Employees with stronger motivation are more likely to complete tasks, maintain responsibility, and pursue organizational goals (Sudarmadi, & Lasmana, 2026; Jamlean, Iek, & Urip, 2026). Motivation provides a behavioral mechanism through which employees translate their abilities and available resources into work outcomes (Atiyyah, Hamdiah, Febriyanti, Serlly, Salfika, Ernanto, & Sales, 2024; Wang, Luan, & Ma, 2024). Previous studies also support the connection between motivation and employee outcomes, indicating that motivated employees are more likely to demonstrate productive work behavior (Adipa, Sulaiman, & Saleh, 2021). Based on this reasoning, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H_4: Work motivation has a positive and significant effect on employee performance at Galaksi Kindergarten, Bandar Lampung

2.4 The Relationship between Leadership Style and Employee Performance

Leadership styles may directly influence employee performance by shaping work expectations, employee development, and coordination. Transactional leadership can support performance through clear standards and accountability, whereas transformational leadership can encourage employees to pursue shared goals and improve their capabilities. Participative leadership may enhance performance by incorporating employees' knowledge into decisions and strengthening coordination. These mechanisms suggest that leadership can contribute to performance beyond its relationship with work motivation (Ibrahim, Karollah, Juned, & Yunus, 2022; Parveen et al., 2022). Empirical studies have examined the relationship between leadership approaches and employee outcomes, providing a basis for expecting positive direct relationships between the three leadership styles and performance (Asman et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2024). Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H_5: Transactional leadership style has a positive and significant effect on employee performance at Galaksi Kindergarten, Bandar Lampung

H_6: Transformational leadership style has a positive and significant effect on employee performance at Galaksi Kindergarten, Bandar Lampung

H_7: Participative leadership style has a positive and significant effect on employee performance at Galaksi Kindergarten, Bandar Lampung

2.5 The Mediating Role of Work Motivation in the Relationship between Leadership Style and Employee Performance

Work motivation may mediate the relationship between leadership style and employee performance because leadership influences employees' willingness to exert effort, which subsequently affects work outcomes. Transactional leadership may motivate employees through clear expectations and rewards, transformational leadership may strengthen motivation through inspiration and development, and participative leadership may encourage motivation through involvement and ownership. These pathways explain how leadership can indirectly influence performance through employee motivation (Adipa et al., 2021; Atiyyah et al., 2024). The mediating mechanism also allows leadership to be examined through both direct and indirect pathways. Previous research provides a basis for investigating these relationships, including studies on leadership and employee outcomes (Asman et al., 2022; Harianto, Wardhani, & Aziz, 2026). Accordingly, the study proposes:

H_4: Work motivation mediates the positive and significant influence of leadership style on employee performance at Galaksi Kindergarten, Bandar Lampung

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Participants

This study used a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design to examine the causal relationships between variables through empirical hypothesis testing (J. Hair & Alamer, 2022). This design was chosen because the study aimed to analyze the influence of leadership style on

employee performance, both directly and indirectly through work motivation as a mediating variable. Data were collected using a cross-sectional approach, which means that all data were collected over a single research period. This research was conducted at Galaksi Kindergarten in Bandar Lampung. The research population consisted of all employees, including the principal, teachers, administrative staff, and support staff, totaling 60 people. Due to the relatively limited population size, all members of the population were selected as respondents using a saturated sampling technique (census), resulting in a sample size of 60 respondents. This sampling approach ensured that all members of the defined population were included in the study.

3.2 Variables and Measurement

The research model consists of three groups of variables, such as leadership style as the independent variable, work motivation as the mediating variable, and employee performance as the dependent variable. In the operationalization of the model, leadership style is represented by three dimensions, such as transactional leadership (X_1), transformational leadership (X_2), and participatory leadership (X_3). Transactional leadership is measured through performance-based rewards, supervision, rule enforcement, and task clarity. Transformational leadership includes idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, whereas participatory leadership includes employee involvement, deliberation in decision-making, two-way communication, and delegation of authority. Work motivation (Z) was measured through work ethic, discipline, enthusiasm, loyalty, responsibility, and willingness to develop. Employee performance (Y) was measured based on work quality, quantity, punctuality, cooperation, responsibility, and initiative. All constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

The questionnaire was structured around the operational definitions and indicators of each construct to ensure consistency between the conceptual research model and measurement items. The items were organized to capture the respondents' perceptions of leadership behavior, work motivation, and employee performance. However, the original sources of the measurement scales and whether the items were adopted, adapted, or developed specifically for this study should be explicitly identified in the final manuscript. Where applicable, the questionnaire development process should also explain how the items were adapted to the kindergarten context and whether the instrument was reviewed or pilot-tested before the main data collection.

3.3 Data Collection

Primary research data were obtained through a structured questionnaire administered to all respondents. The questionnaire was used to elicit employee perceptions regarding leadership behavior, work motivation levels, and performance. In addition to the questionnaire, observations, brief interviews, and documentation were used as supporting data to understand organizational conditions and strengthen the interpretation of the research phenomena. These supplementary sources provided contextual information to support the interpretation of the questionnaire findings.

Because the main constructs were measured using self-report questionnaires, the possibility of common method bias was considered. Common method bias may arise when the same respondents provide information about predictor, mediator, and outcome variables using the same measurement method. The manuscript should specify whether procedural measures, such as assuring respondent confidentiality and emphasizing that there were no right or wrong answers, were implemented during data collection. It should also report any statistical assessment of common method bias that was conducted.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with the assistance of SmartPLS. PLS-SEM was chosen because the study involved several latent constructs, several indicators, and mediating relationships that needed to be analyzed simultaneously. Hair and Alamer (2022) explain that PLS-SEM is appropriate for prediction-oriented research involving relatively complex models and when data distribution assumptions are not a

primary requirement. In this study, PLS-SEM was used to assess the measurement model and estimate the direct and indirect relationships among the three leadership styles, work motivation, and employee performance. Its suitability was therefore based on the model's latent constructs and mediation structure, rather than on sample size alone.

The analysis was conducted through two main stages. First, the measurement model (outer model) was evaluated to ensure construct validity and reliability. Convergent validity was evaluated through outer loading and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), while construct reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. Discriminant validity was evaluated through the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). The common criteria used are loadings of approximately ≥0.70, AVE ≥0.50, and Composite Reliability ≥0.70 (J. F. Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2019). The measurement model was assessed before the structural relationships were interpreted to establish whether the constructs demonstrated adequate validity and reliability. The results should report the actual loading, AVE, reliability, and HTMT values to demonstrate compliance with the stated criteria. Second, the structural model (inner model) was evaluated by assessing R^2, effect size (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and path coefficients. R^2 was used to determine the ability of exogenous constructs to explain endogenous variables, while Q^2 was used to evaluate the model's predictive relevance. These assessments were conducted to evaluate the explanatory capacity, relative contribution of predictor constructs, and predictive relevance of the structural model.

Hypothesis testing was conducted using the bootstrapping procedure in SmartPLS to determine the significance of the relationship between variables in the research model. The direct effect was tested to determine the influence of each leadership style, namely transactional leadership, transformational leadership, and participative leadership, on employee performance, as well as the influence of work motivation on employee performance. The indirect effect was used to test whether work motivation mediates the relationship between transactional leadership, transformational leadership, and participative leadership with employee performance. The existence of mediation was determined based on the significance of the indirect effect and the comparison between the direct and indirect effects. Given the use of self-reported questionnaire data, the manuscript should also report whether common method bias was statistically assessed. If a full-collinearity assessment was conducted, the procedure and the criterion used should be stated; alternatively, any other method actually applied should be identified and its results reported. If no statistical test was performed, this limitation should be acknowledged rather than implying that common method bias has been ruled out. The specific procedure and findings must reflect the analyses actually undertaken.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Respondent Characteristics and Descriptive Results

The study involved 60 employees of Galaksi Kindergarten in Bandar Lampung, consisting of educators, administrative staff, and support staff. The majority of respondents were female (58%), aged 25–35 years (58%), had a bachelor's degree (78.3%), and had 2–5 years of service (45%). This composition indicates that the respondents were predominantly productive-age employees with a bachelor's degree and relatively adequate work experience. The descriptive statistics of the research variables, including their mean, standard deviation, and category, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of research variables

Variables	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Category
Transactional Leadership	60	4.08	0.512	High
Transformational Leadership	60	4.32	0.468	Very High
Participative Leadership	60	4.11	0.496	High
Work Motivation	60	4.27	0.455	Very High
Employee Performance	60	4.24	0.441	Very High

Descriptively, all variables were in the high-to-very-high category. Transformational leadership received the highest average score (4.32), followed by work motivation (4.27), and employee

performance (4.24). These descriptive results indicate that respondents generally perceived leadership practices positively and reported high levels of work motivation and performance. However, descriptive statistics alone do not establish causal relationships; these relationships are examined using the structural model.

4.2 Measurement Model

The evaluation of the outer model shows that all indicators have an outer loading between 0.798 and 0.873, indicating that all indicators exceed the commonly applied threshold of 0.70 and satisfy the outer-loading criterion for convergent validity. These findings suggest that the indicators adequately represent their respective constructs and demonstrate satisfactory indicator reliability. The construct reliability and validity results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Construct reliability and validity

Construct	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Transactional Leadership	0.842	0.894	0.678
Transformational Leadership	0.881	0.918	0.737
Participative Leadership	0.826	0.885	0.658
Work Motivation	0.902	0.924	0.671
Employee Performance	0.891	0.917	0.649

All constructs had Cronbach's Alpha > 0.70, composite reliability > 0.70, and AVE > 0.50, demonstrating satisfactory internal consistency and convergent validity. These results indicate that the constructs account for more than 50% of the variance in their respective indicators on average. Nevertheless, discriminant validity must also be evaluated to establish that the constructs are empirically distinct. The PLS-SEM measurement model is illustrated in Figure 1.

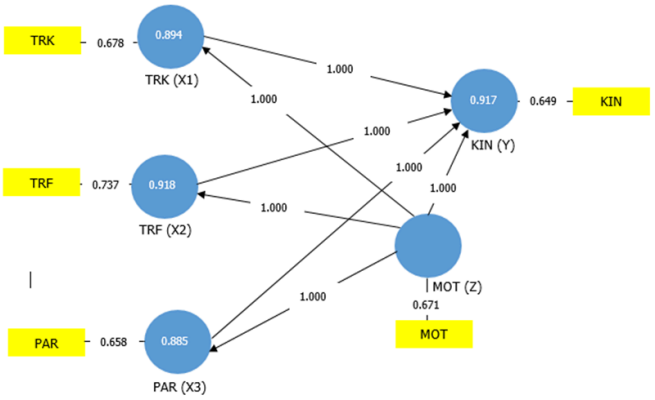


Figure 1. PLS-SEM measurement model

4.3 Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model evaluation results show that the R^2 of work motivation is 0.642, meaning that 64.2% of the variation in work motivation can be explained by the three leadership styles. The R^2 of employee performance is 0.718, indicating that 71.8% of the variation in performance can be explained by leadership style and work motivation. The remaining 35.8% of the variance in work motivation and 28.2% of the variance in employee performance are not explained by the predictors included in the respective equations. These results indicate that the model has substantial explanatory capacity in this sample, although R^2 should not be interpreted as evidence of causal relationships or predictive performance.

The Q^2 reported a Q^2 value of 0.899, which requires clarification regarding the calculation method and the endogenous construct to which it applies. In PLS-SEM, a Q^2 value greater than zero is generally interpreted as evidence of predictive relevance under the relevant assessment procedure. However, the value should not be characterized as demonstrating very high predictive relevance until

the method used to obtain it and the corresponding output are verified. If the predictive performance was evaluated using PLSpredict, the relevant prediction error results should also be reported.

Effect size (f^2) shows the individual contribution of each predictor to an endogenous construct. The commonly used reference values are 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 for small, medium, and large effects, respectively. The actual f^2 values are not provided in the current results and must be obtained from SmartPLS before the individual contributions of transactional, transformational, and participative leadership, as well as work motivation, can be interpreted. The PLS-SEM structural model is illustrated in Figure 2.

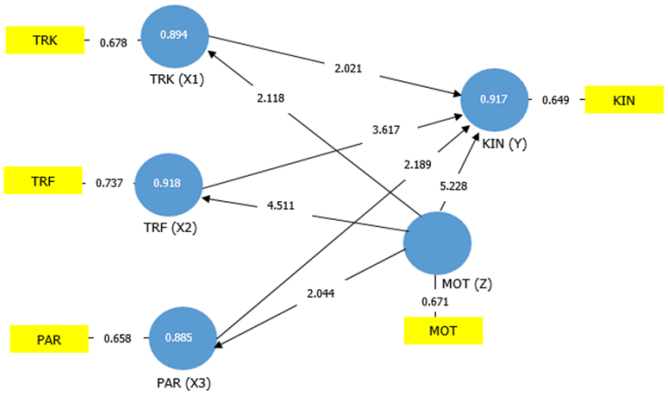


Figure 2. PLS-SEM structural model

Table 3. Direct effects and hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	*β*	*t*-statistic	*p*-value	Decision
H_1	Transactional Leadership → Work Motivation	0.241	2.118	0.035	Supported
H_2	Transformational Leadership → Work Motivation	0.462	4.511	0.000	Supported
H_3	Participative Leadership → Work Motivation	0.216	2.044	0.041	Supported
H_4	Work Motivation → Employee Performance	0.503	5.228	0.000	Supported
H_5	Transactional Leadership → Employee Performance	0.174	2.021	0.044	Supported
H_6	Transformational Leadership → Employee Performance	0.318	3.617	0.000	Supported
H_7	Participative Leadership → Employee Performance	0.196	2.189	0.029	Supported

The direct effects and hypothesis-testing results are presented in Table 3. All direct relationships were positive and significant, with a t-statistic of > 1.96 and a p-value of < 0.05. Transformational leadership was the strongest predictor of work motivation ($\beta = 0.462$) and had the largest direct effect on performance ($\beta = 0.318$). Work motivation had the strongest direct effect on performance ($\beta = 0.503$). The bootstrapping procedure was used to assess the statistical significance of estimated path coefficients. The reported *t*-statistics and p-values indicate that all seven direct relationships are statistically significant at the 5% level. To ensure reproducibility, the final manuscript should also specify the number of bootstrap subsamples, whether one-tailed or two-tailed testing was applied, the significance level, and the confidence interval method used. These procedural details were not included in the supplied draft and should be reported in the actual SmartPLS settings.

The results suggest that transformational leadership has the strongest estimated direct relationship with work motivation among the three leadership styles. Work motivation has the largest estimated direct relationship with employee performance among the predictors in the performance equation. These comparisons concern the reported standardized coefficients and do not, by themselves, establish that the differences between the coefficients are statistically significant.

4.4 Mediation Analysis

The indirect-effect analysis showed that all three mediation paths were positive and statistically significant. These findings support the proposition that work motivation mediates the relationships between transactional leadership, transformational leadership, participative leadership, and employee performance. The indirect effects and mediation results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Indirect effects and mediation

Hypothesis	Mediation Relationship	β	*t*-statistic	*p*-value	Result
H8a	Transactional → Motivation → Performance	0.121	2,004	0.046	Significant
H8b	Transformational → Motivation → Performance	0.232	3,771	0.000	Significant
H8c	Participative → Motivation → Performance	0.109	2.012	0.045	Significant

The strongest mediation path was transformational leadership → work motivation → employee performance ($\beta = 0.232$), followed by transactional leadership ($\beta = 0.121$) and participative leadership ($\beta = 0.109$). Because the direct effects of all three leadership styles on employee performance and their respective indirect effects through work motivation were statistically significant, the results were consistent with partial mediation. This classification assumes that the direct and indirect effects are estimated within the same structural model and that the reported coefficients correspond to the same specification.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that all three leadership styles have a positive effect on employee work motivation and performance, and that work motivation also has a positive effect on performance. Transformational leadership is the most dominant approach to improving motivation and performance. Furthermore, all mediation pathways were significant, indicating that performance improvements at Galaksi Kindergarten occurred not only through the direct influence of leadership but also through increased employee work motivation.

Taken together, the findings highlight the importance of considering both direct leadership–performance relationships and indirect pathways operating through work motivation. Transformational leadership had the largest estimated coefficients for both work motivation and the indirect relationship with employee performance. Nevertheless, the interpretation of model quality should be finalized only after the missing f^2 results, HTMT assessment, verified Q^2 output, and complete bootstrapping information have been added.

4.5 Discussion

4.5.1 The Influence of Transactional Leadership on Work Motivation

The results indicate that transactional leadership positively and significantly affects the work motivation of employees at Galaksi Kindergarten, Bandar Lampung. This relationship is indicated by a path coefficient value of 0.241, *t*-statistic of 2.118, and *p*-value of 0.035. These values indicate that the better the implementation of transactional leadership, the higher the employees' work motivation. Thus, H_1 is supported. The large effect size of 0.142 also indicates that the influence is small to moderate. These findings indicate that leadership mechanisms that emphasize task clarity, targets, supervision, rewards, and rule enforcement are important in shaping work motivation.

Theoretically, this relationship can be explained through transactional leadership, which views the relationship between leaders and subordinates as an exchange process. Leaders clarify expected outcomes and recognize achievement, while employees respond by directing their efforts toward established standards. This mechanism is primarily associated with extrinsic motivation because employees can identify the relationship between effort, performance, evaluation, and consequences. Expectancy theory provides a complementary explanation: employees are more likely to exert effort when they believe that their performance will be evaluated consistently and that achievement will lead to valued outcomes. Leaders who set clear targets, provide feedback, conduct consistent evaluations, and recognize achievement can strengthen this expectation (Kumalasari, Masthurah, Hairudin, Maryani, & Khoirina, 2026).

The finding is consistent with Ulfah et al. (2020), who reported a positive relationship between transactional leadership, motivation, and performance, including an indirect relationship through work motivation. In the educational context, Sariakin et al. (2025) also linked school leadership to teacher motivation and performance. These similarities suggest that the exchange mechanism associated with transactional leadership remains relevant in educational organizations, where employees must meet operational requirements and maintain consistent service standards. The contribution of the present finding is to show that this mechanism also supports motivation in an early-childhood education setting, although it should be complemented by leadership approaches that foster inspiration and employee development.

4.5.2 The Influence of Transformational Leadership on Work Motivation

Transformational leadership has been shown to have a positive and significant effect on work motivation. The test results yielded a path coefficient of 0.462, a *t*-statistic of 4.511, a *p*-value of 0.000, and an effect size of 0.298. This coefficient value is the largest compared to transactional and participative leadership. Thus, H_2 is supported. Rather than merely confirming that leadership matters, this result indicates that employees' motivation is particularly responsive to leadership that communicates purpose, provides inspiration, and supports growth.

This finding is consistent with transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These dimensions may foster motivation by helping employees develop trust in their leaders, understand the meaning of their work, and perceive opportunities for personal and professional growth. In early childhood education, these conditions are particularly relevant because teachers and staff require patience, creativity, emotional involvement, and interpersonal skills. As Hairudin et al. (2023) suggest, leadership in educational settings is closely connected to the conditions that enable employees to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

This finding aligns with that of Wang et al. (2024), who identified a positive relationship between transformational leadership and job performance through employee-related psychological mechanisms. Vila-Vázquez, Castro-Casal, García-Chas, and Álvarez-Pérez (2024) similarly showed that the relationship between transformational leadership and task performance can operate through psychological mechanisms and work engagement. The present result extends this discussion by demonstrating that work motivation is one relevant pathway through which transformational leadership may operate in the specific context of an early childhood education institution. It also suggests that inspirational leadership may be more motivationally salient than leadership based primarily on exchange or participation, although this interpretation should be understood within the limits of the present sample and research design. Accordingly, leadership development at Galaksi Kindergarten should emphasize the principal's capacity to communicate a shared vision, serve as a role model, stimulate new ideas, develop employee competencies, and provide individualized support to teachers. The theoretical implication is that employee motivation may be strengthened not only through external incentives but also through the meaning and psychological support that employees derive from their work.

4.5.3 The Influence of Participative Leadership on Work Motivation

The results of the study indicate that participative leadership has a positive and significant effect on work motivation, with a path coefficient of 0.216, a *t*-statistic of 2.044, and a *p*-value of 0.041. Thus, H_3 is supported. The effect size of 0.117 indicates that the effect is relatively small but still makes a significant contribution to work motivation. This suggests that employee involvement can support motivation, but its contribution may depend on whether participation is accompanied by clear direction and meaningful support from leadership.

Participative leadership emphasizes employee involvement in decision-making, two-way communication, opportunities to express opinions, deliberation, and the delegation of authority. These practices may strengthen motivation because employees experience greater recognition, trust, autonomy, and a sense of belonging. At Galaksi Kindergarten, decisions concerning learning

activities, student services, school programs, and daily operations often benefit from teachers and staff members' practical knowledge. Involving employees in these decisions can make organizational processes more responsive while reinforcing the perceived value of their contributions.

This finding is consistent with Ali and Susilawati (2025), who associated leadership communication, fair task distribution, support, and teacher participation in decision-making with teacher professionalism and performance. The agreement between these findings supports the relevance of participation in educational organizations. However, the smaller coefficient compared with transformational leadership indicates that participation and inspiration may serve different functions: participation provides opportunities to contribute, whereas transformational leadership can provide the vision and meaning that guide those contributions. Thus, participative leadership is best understood as a complementary approach that strengthens employees' involvement rather than as a substitute for inspirational leadership.

4.5.4 The Influence of Work Motivation on Employee Performance

Work motivation has been shown to have a positive and significant effect on employee performance, with a path coefficient of 0.503, a *t*-statistic of 5.228, and a *p*-value of 0.000. The effect size of 0.335 indicates a moderate to large effect and is also the largest direct influence in the research model. Thus, H_4 is supported. This finding place work motivation at the center of the explanation of employee performance: leadership practices may establish expectations and working conditions, but employees' willingness to direct and sustain their efforts helps translate those conditions into work outcomes.

Expectancy theory explains this relationship by proposing that employees are more likely to exert effort when they believe that effort can produce effective performance and that performance will lead to valued outcomes. Intrinsic motivation provides a complementary perspective by emphasizing competence, purpose, recognition, and opportunities for growth. In an early childhood education institution, motivation may be reflected in employees' willingness to prepare learning activities, attend to students, communicate with parents, coordinate with colleagues, and complete administrative duties responsibly.

The result is consistent with Wang et al. (2024), whose meta-analysis of cross-lagged longitudinal studies found that prior work motivation positively predicted subsequent performance, whereas prior performance did not significantly predict subsequent motivation. This finding provides a stronger temporal perspective on the relationship than a cross-sectional study alone can offer. In the educational context, Atiyyah et al. (2024) reported that work motivation is relevant to teacher performance and the relationship between principal leadership and performance. Sariakin et al. (2025) likewise emphasized teacher motivation in a productive educational environment.

Taken together, these studies and the present findings support the interpretation of motivation as an important mechanism connecting organizational conditions with employees' work behavior. The contribution to human resource management is that performance improvement should not focus exclusively on monitoring outputs or enforcing procedures, it should also consider whether employees have the motivation and support needed to perform their responsibilities consistently. However, because the present study uses a cross-sectional design, the results should be interpreted as an observed association rather than definitive evidence of causality over time.

4.5.5 The Influence of Transactional Leadership on Employee Performance

Transactional leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance (β = 0.174, t = 2.021, p = 0.044), supporting H_5. This finding suggests that clear expectations, supervision, evaluation, rewards, and enforcement of work standards can contribute to performance. This relationship is theoretically plausible because transactional leadership reduces ambiguity about responsibilities and clarifies the link between employee contributions and organizational expectations. At Galaksi Kindergarten, this may help employees coordinate routine responsibilities, maintain attendance and

punctuality, and complete learning-related and administrative tasks according to established procedures.

Previous research also supports the relevance of transactional leadership (Mandala, Sudiro, and Rofiq (2024), which examined the role of contingent rewards and management by exception in employee motivation and performance effectiveness. Catherin, Ardi, and Sunarjo (2025) reported a relationship between transactional leadership and employee performance, with work motivation strengthening the explanation of this relationship. Sudarmadi and Santosa (2025) also reported a positive relationship between transactional leadership and employee performance, while Putri, Alie, and Roswaty (2025) identified positive relationships between transactional leadership, work motivation, and teacher performance. Palefi, Agustina, and Jamali (2024) similarly found that transactional leadership was positively associated with performance and operated through work motivation.

These findings broadly converge with the present results, but should not be interpreted as demonstrating that transactional leadership is equally effective in every organizational setting. Its contribution may depend on job characteristics, the clarity of performance standards, and the extent to which rewards and supervision are consistently applied. In the present study, the direct relationship was positive but smaller than the corresponding relationship for transformational leadership. This suggests that transactional leadership is useful for maintaining discipline and role clarity, while its potential to encourage performance may be enhanced when employees experience motivation, inspiration, and opportunities to contribute. Accordingly, transactional leadership should not be reduced to control or compliance. For human resource management, the practical implication is to connect clear performance expectations with constructive feedback and fair recognition so that supervision supports employees' development rather than merely correcting deviations.

4.5.6 The Influence of Transformational Leadership on Employee Performance

Transformational leadership has a positive and significant relationship with employee performance ($\beta = 0.318$, $t = 3.617$, $p < 0.001$), thus supporting H_6. It also has the largest direct relationship with performance among the three leadership styles. Theoretically, this pattern suggests that performance is associated not only with the clarification of tasks but also with the leader's ability to communicate purpose, model expected behavior, stimulate problem solving, and support individual development.

These findings are consistent with those of Wang et al. (2024), who reported a relationship between transformational leadership and job performance, and with Vila-Vázquez et al. (2024), who highlighted the psychological mechanisms and work engagement in explaining this relationship. The convergence suggests that transformational leadership may support performance by creating psychological conditions that encourage employees to invest effort in their work. In an educational organization, this is especially relevant because performance involves interpersonal engagement and responsive service, not simply the completion of routine tasks

The present findings also correspond with the relationship between transformational leadership and work motivation. In this model, transformational leadership has the strongest relationship with both work motivation and performance. This consistency strengthens the interpretation that inspirational and developmental leadership may contribute to performance both directly and indirectly through motivation. Nevertheless, the relative strength of these relationships should be understood within the specific context of the Galaksi Kindergarten and should not be generalized to all educational or organizational settings. The practical implication is that leadership development at Galaksi Kindergarten should extend beyond administrative competence to include role modeling, vision communication, employee coaching, intellectual stimulation, and personalized attention. These capabilities can help align employees' daily responsibilities with the institution's broader purpose and support a work environment conducive to sustained performance.

4.5.7 The Influence of Participative Leadership on Employee Performance

Participative leadership has a positive and significant relationship with employee performance ($\beta = 0.196$, $t = 2.189$, $p = 0.029$), thus supporting H_7. This finding suggests that employee involvement can contribute to performance by strengthening ownership of decisions, accountability, and willingness to implement the agreed actions. At Galaksi Kindergarten, involving teachers and staff in program planning, problem-solving, and discussions about school activities can help leaders draw on employees' direct knowledge of daily operations.

This result is consistent with Ali and Susilawati (2025), who associated clear communication, fair task distribution, leadership support, and teacher involvement in decision-making with teacher professionalism and performance. This similarity supports the relevance of participative leadership in educational settings, where the quality of implementation often depends on coordination among employees. Participation may improve the fit between decisions and operational needs because employees can contribute information that may not be fully visible to principals.

However, the relationship is smaller than that of transformational leadership. This difference suggests that participation and inspiration are complementary rather than interchangeable leadership mechanisms. Participation creates space for employees to contribute, while transformational leadership can establish shared direction and meaning. For human resource management, this implies involving employees in decisions while ensuring that the purpose, responsibilities, and expected outcomes of those decisions remain clear.

4.5.8 The Mediating Role of Work Motivation in the Relationship between Leadership and Employee Performance

The indirect-effect results indicate that work motivation significantly mediates the relationships between all three leadership styles and employee performance. The indirect effect is significant for transactional leadership ($\beta = 0.121$, $t = 2.004$, $p = 0.046$), transformational leadership ($\beta = 0.232$, $t = 3.771$, $p < 0.001$), and participative leadership ($\beta = 0.109$, $t = 2.012$, $p = 0.045$). Thus, H_8a, H_8b, and H_8c are supported. The central implication is that leadership is associated with performance not only through the behaviors leaders enact directly but also through its relationship with employees' motivation.

The largest indirect relationship was between transformational leadership and performance through work motivation. This pattern is consistent with the direct relationships reported in the preceding sections: transformational leadership has the strongest relationship with work motivation and the largest direct relationship with performance among all three leadership styles. This convergence provides a more integrated explanation for the findings. Vision, inspiration, role modeling, and individualized support may encourage employees to invest greater effort, whereas motivation helps translate these leadership experiences into work behavior. In contrast, transactional leadership may contribute through clarity and reinforcement, whereas participative leadership may operate through involvement and ownership.

These findings are consistent with Baskoro et al. (2021), who identified the mediating role of work motivation in the relationship between transformational leadership and performance. Atiyyah et al. (2024) also reported, in an educational context, that principal leadership is related to teacher performance through work motivation. Harianto et al. (2026) further examined leadership style, performance, and work motivation as a mediating mechanism. The agreement with these studies supports the relevance of motivation as an explanatory pathway between leadership and performance, while the present study contributes evidence from an early childhood education institution and compares the indirect relationships associated with three leadership styles within the same model. Because both direct and indirect relationships remain significant, the results are consistent with partial mediation. This indicates that work motivation accounts for part of the relationship between each leadership style and employee performance, while the direct relationships remain present. Therefore, the findings do not imply that motivation is the only mechanism linking leadership to performance, other mechanisms may also be relevant but were not examined in this model.

Overall, the findings suggest that the three leadership styles serve complementary functions. Transactional leadership provides structure, clarity, and reinforcement, participative leadership supports involvement and a sense of ownership, and transformational leadership provides vision, inspiration, and individual development. The theoretical contribution is to bring these leadership approaches together with work motivation to explain employee performance, rather than treating leadership style as an isolated predictor. The results suggest that the relative contribution of each style differs, with transformational leadership showing the strongest relationships in this particular sample.

The practical implication for Galaksi Kindergartenis to combine clear performance standards with participative decision-making and inspirational leadership while deliberately strengthening work motivation. The model explained 64.2% of the variance in work motivation and 71.8% of the variance in employee performance. These values indicate substantial explanatory power within the sample, although they do not establish that the model will explain the same proportion of variance in other samples. Overall, the findings contribute to human resource management by emphasizing that performance improvement involves not only leadership practices and work structures but also the motivational processes through which employees respond to these practices.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that transactional, transformational, and participative leadership have positive and significant relationships with employee work motivation and performance at Galaksi Kindergarten, Bandar Lampung, with transformational leadership showing the strongest relationship among the three. Work motivation also has a significant and substantial relationship with employee performance and partially mediates the relationship between the three leadership styles and performance. These findings indicate that the relationship between leadership and employee performance involves not only the direct contribution of leadership practices but also the motivational mechanisms through which leadership is associated with employees' work behavior.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the leadership and human resource management literature by integrating three leadership styles into a single model that positions work motivation as a mediating variable. The findings demonstrate that the three leadership styles have different relationships with motivation and performance, with transformational leadership showing the strongest relationships in the context examined. Accordingly, this study provides an integrated understanding of the relationships among leadership styles, work motivation, and employee performance in an early childhood education institution.

5.2 Research Limitations

This study has several limitations that need to be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study was conducted at only one educational institution, namely, TK Galaksi Bandar Lampung. Therefore, the specific characteristics of the organization, leadership, and human resources may limit the generalizability of the results to other kindergartens or educational institutions. The relationships observed in this setting may reflect the institution's particular organizational culture, management practices, and employee characteristics. Consequently, the findings should not be assumed to apply equally to institutions with different organizational structures, leadership practices, or working conditions.

Second, the study involved 60 respondents, representing the entire population of the institution under investigation. Therefore, the study used saturated sampling. Although saturated sampling enabled the study to include the entire target population at TK Galaksi, it did not ensure that the findings were representative of employees in other educational institutions. The relatively small institution-specific population also limited the extent to which the results could be generalized beyond the research setting. Accordingly, the findings are most appropriately interpreted as evidence of the relationships among the variables within the institution studied.

Third, the study used a cross-sectional design, therefore, the relationships between variables were observed in a single period and cannot explain long-term changes in motivation or performance. As a result, the findings cannot establish whether changes in leadership styles precede changes in work motivation and employee performance or whether these relationships are stable over time. Although the results indicate significant relationships among the variables, they should not be interpreted as definitive evidence of causal effects or the long-term development of these relationships.

Fourth, the study variables included only three leadership approaches and work motivation as mediating variables. Other factors that could theoretically influence employee performance, such as the work environment, organizational culture, job satisfaction, employee engagement, competence, workload, and psychological empowerment, were not included in this model. The omission of these factors means that the model provides only a partial explanation of employee performance. These variables may account for additional differences in performance or help explain why leadership styles are associated with performance to varying degrees. Therefore, the relationships identified in this study should be interpreted within the boundaries of the variables examined, rather than as an exhaustive explanation of employee performance.

Furthermore, the primary data were obtained through respondents' perceptions via questionnaires, so the possibility of common method bias and subjectivity of perception still needs to be considered. Because the study relied on questionnaire responses, the measured relationships may partly reflect respondents' individual interpretations, response tendencies, or perceptions of their leadership and performance. The findings should therefore be interpreted with caution, particularly when considering the strength of the relationships among variables measured through the same data collection method. The possibility of common method bias should also be acknowledged as a potential measurement limitation, rather than assumed to have occurred without empirical evidence.

5.3 Suggestions and Directions for Future Research

Future research is recommended to expand the scope of the study by involving several kindergartens or early childhood education institutions in different regions. to compare leadership practices across institutions and determine whether the relationships among leadership styles, work motivation, and employee performance are consistent across different organizational settings. Future research could also utilize a larger sample size and a multi-group analysis approach to determine whether the influence of leadership style differs based on employee characteristics, such as job position, tenure, and education level, or organizational characteristics. Comparisons between public and private institutions, relevant to the research context, could further clarify whether differences in organizational arrangements are associated with variations in these relationships.

From a methodological perspective, future research should employ a longitudinal design to examine changes in motivation and performance over time. Collecting data at multiple time points would help establish the temporal sequence of relationships and assess whether changes in leadership practices precede changes in work motivation and employee performance. A mixed-methods approach could also be used to delve deeper into how principal behavior translates into employee motivational experiences and work behaviors. For example, interviews with principals and employees could be used to explain quantitative findings and identify specific leadership behaviors that employees perceive as either motivating or discouraging.

Model development could be carried out by incorporating variables such as employee engagement, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, work environment, organizational culture, psychological empowerment, and self-efficacy as mediators, moderators, or additional explanatory variables. To maintain a focused research model, future studies could first test employee engagement or job satisfaction as an additional mediator to examine whether leadership is associated with performance through psychological and attitudinal mechanisms. Alternatively, self-efficacy or psychological empowerment could be examined as a moderator to determine whether employees' confidence in their abilities or perceptions of autonomy strengthens or weakens the relationship

between leadership styles and work motivation. Multigroup analysis can then be used to assess whether these relationships differ according to job position, tenure, education level, or institutional characteristics. Taken together, these focused directions would help clarify the consistency of leadership effects across institutions, the temporal relationships among leadership, motivation, and performance, and the mechanisms or conditions through which different leadership styles are associated with employee performance in early childhood education organizations.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

MCR contributed to the conceptualization of the study, problem formulation, methodology development, data collection, data analysis, and preparation of the initial draft. YCN contributed to the development of the conceptual framework, methodological supervision, interpretation of research results, and critical review of the manuscript. MSA contributed to the development of the theoretical foundation and hypotheses, validation of research instruments, interpretation of results, and refinement of the manuscript. D was responsible for data processing, checking the results of the statistical analysis, and revising the manuscript. ETO played a role in academic supervision, validation of the research results, substantive editing, and finalization of the manuscript. All authors have actively contributed to the discussion of the results, approved the final version of the manuscript, and are responsible for the integrity and scientific accuracy of the article.

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