

# The mediating role of job satisfaction in the relationship between ethical leadership and person-job fit on teacher performance at SMK Taruna Abdi Bangsa Winong

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the effects of person-job fit and ethical leadership on teacher performance using job satisfaction as a mediating variable. This study is motivated by the phenomenon of suboptimal teacher performance in vocational high schools, which is thought to be influenced by the principal's leadership style and the suitability of the teacher's role to his job. The purpose of this study is to determine the direct and indirect effects of ethical leadership and person-job fit on teacher performance, with job satisfaction as a mediator. SEM-PLS is used to analyze the quantitative approach and questionnaire used in the study, which was conducted at SMK Taruna Abdi Bangsa. The sample in this study amounted to 31 teachers selected through a total sampling technique. The research findings indicate that ethical leadership and person-job fit have a significant influence on teacher performance and job satisfaction. However, work happiness does not operate as a mediator in the relationship between ethical leadership or person-job fit and teacher performance, and it has no appreciable effect on teacher performance. The study emphasizes the significance of leadership and job alignment in improving teacher performance, even though job satisfaction is not a useful mediator in this situation. The implications of this research are expected to be a reference for school management in developing strategies to improve teacher performance through ethical leadership and teacher placement according to their expertise.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Teacher quality is a crucial factor in determining educational success, particularly at the Vocational High School (SMK) level (Juhji, 2016). At this level, the teacher's role is not limited to teaching activities but also encompasses preparing students for the workforce (Pala'langan et al., 2021). Based on observations at SMK Taruna Abdi Bangsa, it was found that some teachers were not yet performing optimally, particularly in teaching and discipline.

One approach considered effective for improving teacher quality is through the implementation of ethical leadership by the principal. Leaders who uphold moral values, fairness, and honesty can create a positive and supportive work environment (Brown et al., 2005). This

conducive work environment has the potential to increase teacher satisfaction and work enthusiasm (Judge & Bono, 2001; Robbins & Judge, 2013).

Furthermore, the match between a teacher's individual characteristics and the demands of their job—known as person-job fit—is also a crucial factor influencing performance (Kristof-Brown & Schneider, 2005). When teachers feel their work aligns with their competencies and values, their job satisfaction and productivity tend to increase (P. Silaen, 2018).

Although numerous studies have explored the relationship between ethical leadership, job fit, job satisfaction, and performance outcomes (Yuki, 2013), most of these studies are limited and have not comprehensively examined the role of job satisfaction as a mediating variable. Research by Afsar and Umrani (2020) and Hanaysha (2016) suggests that the impact of ethical leadership on performance often occurs indirectly, through psychological factors such as job satisfaction. However, research on this mediating role, particularly in the context of vocational high school teachers in Indonesia, remains limited. This indicates a gap in research that needs to be addressed by this study.

In this study, job satisfaction is considered crucial because it theoretically serves as a psychological bridge connecting work environment influences such as ethical leadership and job fit to employee behavioral outcomes, namely performance (Locke, 1976). From a practical perspective, understanding the mediating role of job satisfaction can help schools plan strategies that will not only improve working conditions, but also encourage optimal performance from teachers (Robbins & Judge, 2013).

However, previous studies have shown mixed results regarding whether work ethic and person-job fit can directly support performance through ethical leadership. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the relationship between ethical leadership, person-job fit, and teacher performance, considering job satisfaction as a mediating variable. This study can contribute to the development of scientific literature and educational management practice (Campbell et al., 2003; Locke, 1976a).

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD (10 PT)**

This study used a quantitative survey method to examine the relationship between ethical leadership, person-job fit, job satisfaction, and teacher performance, including examining the role of job satisfaction as a mediator. This research was conducted at SMK Taruna Abdi Bangsa Winong, involving all 31 full-time teachers. Given the relatively small population and the potential for comprehensive coverage, this study employed a census sampling technique.

Data collection was conducted using a closed-ended questionnaire structured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire covered four main constructs, adapted from previous research with proven validity and reliability. These were: Ethical Leadership, using the scale of Brown et al. (2005); Person-Job Fit, adapted from Kristof-Brown and Schneider (2005); Job Satisfaction, measured using job satisfaction indicators based on Locke's (1976) theory; and Teacher Performance, measured using teacher effectiveness indicators from Campbell et al. (2003).

The data analysis in this study used Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method using SmartPLS software version 4.0. In the initial stage of the analysis, convergent validity was tested using factor loading values, construct reliability using Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha, and discriminant validity using Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and the Fornell-Larcker test.

After the measurement model was proven valid and reliable, hypothesis testing was conducted to determine the direct and indirect effects between variables and to examine the mediating role of job satisfaction. Bootstrapping techniques were used to test the significance of these influence paths (Hair et al., 2017).

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The results of the analysis using the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) method based on Partial Least Squares (SmartPLS) show a comprehensive picture of the mediating role of job satisfaction in the relationship between ethical leadership and person-job fit on teacher performance at SMK Taruna Abdi Bangsa Winong. The analysis process begins with an evaluation of the outer model to test the

validity and reliability of the construct, followed by an evaluation of the inner model to test the strength of the relationship between latent variables.

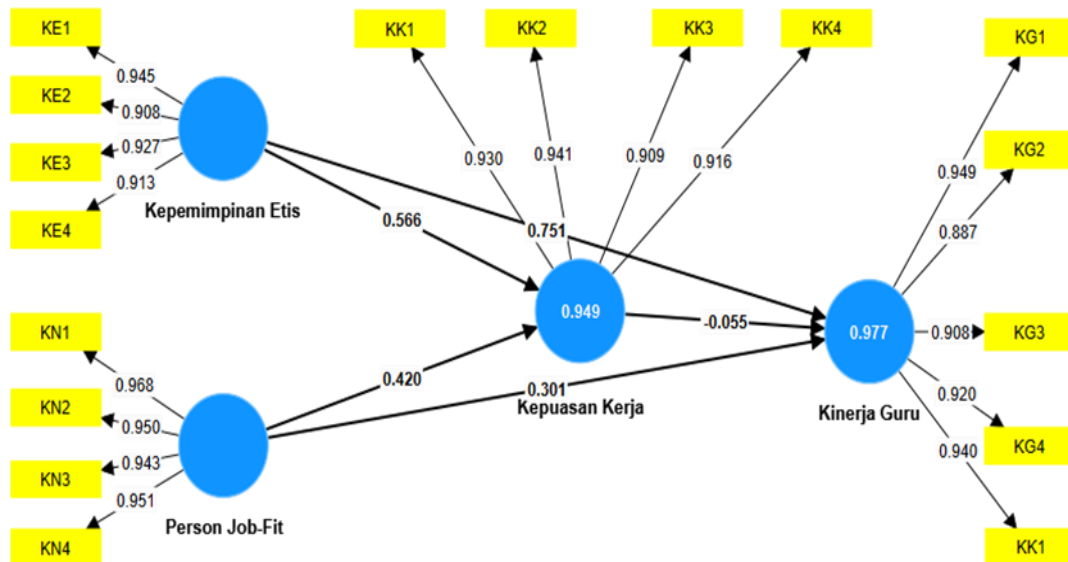


Figure 1 . Bootstrapping test results

Before field data collection, the questionnaire instruments underwent expert review by several management lecturers and educational leaders to ensure their validity. This was essential to verify the clarity, applicability, and theoretical validity of each instrument. This type of expert-based validation is typically used when the population is limited and the research relies on adapted instruments (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

The results of the measurement model evaluation (outer model) show that each indicator in the variables of ethical leadership, person job fit, job satisfaction, and teacher performance has an outer loading value above 0.70. This indicates that all indicators are convergently valid (Ghozali & Latan, 2015; Hair et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value also exceeds 0.50 and the Composite Reliability (CR) is higher than 0.80, indicating that the constructs in this model meet internal validity and reliability standards (Chin, 1998; Henseler et al., 2009). The R<sup>2</sup> value in the structural model reveals that job satisfaction can be explained by ethical leadership and individual-job alignment by approximately 51.2%, while teacher performance can be explained by these three variables by approximately 60.7%, indicating this model has fairly good predictive ability (Hair et al., 2022)

The selection of SEM-PLS in this study was based on its advantages in handling small sample sizes ( $n = 31$ ), its tolerance for non-normal data distributions, and its suitability for predictive and exploratory models. PLS-SEM is also recommended when the model is complex and the theory is still developing (Ghozali & Latan, 2015; Hair et al., 2017).

Path analysis shows that ethical leadership has a significant positive impact on job satisfaction. This means that the more ethical the principal's behavior, the higher the teacher's job satisfaction. Fair, honest, and responsible leaders are able to create a conducive work environment and foster a sense of appreciation and motivation in teachers (Brown et al., 2005; Kalshoven et al., 2011; Neubert et al., 2009). This finding supports the view of Walumbwa et al. (2011) who stated that ethical leadership builds emotional bonds and commitment that influence views on work. Other studies have also revealed that ethical leaders increase trust and reduce uncertainty in the workplace (Avey et al., 2012; Demirtas & Akdogan, 2015), which in turn increases satisfaction.

On the other hand, person job fit has also been shown to have a positive impact on job satisfaction, in line with the findings of Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) and Choi (2020) Teachers who feel a good fit with their jobs in terms of abilities, personal values, and preferences tend to be more

satisfied, as they feel their work aligns with their true selves (Saks & Ashforth, 2002; Sekiguchi, 2004). This fit not only increases comfort but also motivates teachers to perform at their best (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). In the educational context, this fit is crucial because teachers interact directly with students, the curriculum, and a variety of complex administrative pressures (Pinder, 2008; Vroom, 1964).

However, job satisfaction has not been shown to significantly impact teacher performance. While contrary to the common belief that job satisfaction drives performance improvement (Locke, 1976), these findings align with Robbins and Judge (2017), who suggest that the link between satisfaction and performance is often influenced by other factors, such as motivation, organizational support, or work culture. Not all satisfied teachers automatically perform well; Some may feel comfortable but are not motivated to increase productivity or innovation in teaching (Gagne & Deci, 2005; Leiter & Maslach, 2004). Factors such as the environment, workload, and direct leadership can also influence the consistency of these results (Denison, 1990).

In addition, job satisfaction did not act as a mediating variable in the relationship between ethical leadership and person-job fit on teacher performance. These results indicate that although teachers are satisfied with their jobs, this satisfaction does not necessarily mediate the influence of ethical leadership or person-job fit on performance improvement. In other words, the indirect pathway through job satisfaction was not proven significant. This supports the view that job satisfaction is not the sole psychological mechanism explaining the relationship between the work environment and performance outcomes (Avey et al., 2012; P. Silaen, 2018). Therefore, it is important for school management to consider other factors, such as intrinsic motivation, organizational support, or work culture, which may be more relevant in improving teacher performance in vocational high schools.

Overall, there was no significant indirect effect through job satisfaction on teacher performance from either ethical leadership or individual-job fit. Therefore, job satisfaction was not shown to act as a mediator in this model. This finding reinforces the notion that job satisfaction is not the sole pathway linking leadership and performance (Avey et al., 2012; R. Silaen, 2018). Therefore, school management needs to pay attention to other factors such as work culture, intrinsic motivation, teacher training, and empowerment (Locke, 1976; Yukl, 2013). In the context of human resource management in vocational education, a more holistic approach to performance improvement is crucial.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

After analyzing the data using SmartPLS 4.0, this research concluded that Ethical Leadership Style and Individual-Job Alignment had a positive and significant impact on Job Satisfaction Levels. Both also have a direct and significant influence on Teacher Performance, indicating that ethical school leadership and a strong person-job fit can directly improve teacher performance in their roles. However, Job Satisfaction Levels did not significantly influence Teacher Performance, nor did they bridge the relationship between Ethical Leadership Style and Individual-Job Alignment on Teacher Performance. These findings indicate that although ethical leadership and person-job fit increase teacher job satisfaction, satisfaction alone does not seem to guarantee improved performance. This emphasizes the need for a more comprehensive approach, including intrinsic motivation, work culture, and organizational support, as part of a performance improvement strategy. Practically, the study's findings emphasize the importance of strengthening ethical leadership practices at the school level, such as increasing transparency, fairness, and integrity in decision-making. Furthermore, efforts to align teachers' work with their skills, interests, and values should be a priority to improve the job-person fit. This strategy is particularly relevant in vocational education settings, where the teacher's role is complex and closely linked to preparing students for the workforce. Future research is recommended to explore other psychological or organizational variables, such as commitment, motivation, or perceived organizational support, that may serve as stronger mediators in the relationship between ethical leadership and person-job fit and performance outcomes. Longitudinal or mixed-methods research designs could also provide deeper insights into this relationship over time. Theoretically, this study contributes to the understanding of the limitations of job satisfaction as a mediating variable and encourages the integration of broader behavioral and organizational theories in examining teacher performance in the context of vocational high schools.

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