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Ethical Leadership, Work Stress, and Teacher Performance: Moderated by Psychological Capital in Elementary to Senior High Schools

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ABSTRACT

Ethical leadership has increasingly attracted attention as an important factor in promoting positive work outcomes and organizational effectiveness. In educational institutions, teacher performance plays a critical role in ensuring educational quality and student success. This study aims to examine the relationships among ethical leadership, work stress, psychological capital, and teacher performance. An explanatory research design was employed to test the proposed hypothesis and explain the relationships among variables. The sample consisted of 114 teachers from Elementary-Senior High school (SD–SMA) level SPK schools in Surabaya. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The empirical findings indicate that ethical leadership has no significant direct effect on teacher performance. However, ethical leadership significantly reduces teachers' work stress, and lower work stress leads to higher teacher performance. Furthermore, work stress significantly mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and teacher performance. In contrast, psychological capital does not moderate the relationship between work stress and teacher performance.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the important factors that can support a worker to work professionally and achieve good performance is having good health, both physically and mentally. However, in September 2022, the WHO reported that 15% of working-age adults live with a mental disorder. Without effective support, mental disorders and other mental health conditions can affect a person's confidence and identity in the workplace, their capacity to work productively, their absenteeism, and their ability to maintain or obtain employment. According to a survey conducted by Mercer Marsh Benefit (MMB), two in five employees (37%) experience stress. Meanwhile, only 56% of employees in Indonesia have access to mental health care. The survey found that employees who have access to mental health care are less likely to leave their jobs. The survey results suggest that when employees feel cared for by their company, they are more likely to stay at work, engage, and thrive (Situmorang, 2021). As many as 30.27% of 80,000 teachers suffer from stress at work (Arismunandar, 2008 in Mohbar & Rahmawati, 2017). According to the same study, stress at work will affect teacher performance. The higher the level of stress experienced by teachers, the lower their productivity and performance will be. From the facts presented above, we can see that work stress has a significant impact on employee work performance. In fact, the results of a survey conducted by Deloitte reported that 91% of respondents agreed that stress has a negative impact on work quality.

Initial interviews with several teachers in Surabaya also indicated that some teachers were experiencing burnout and struggling to balance professional demands with their psychological well-being. Furthermore, there was a perception that school leadership styles were not fully accommodating teachers' emotional and psychological needs, potentially increasing work stress levels and impacting performance. Unfortunately, researchers are still rare in examining leadership behavior in reducing stress, even though leaders in organizations play a crucial role in the

organization because they bear the obligation to shoulder responsibility. Poor leadership can bring hardship to every member affected (Romarowska et al., 2013 in Fong et al., 2015). Research by Silalahi & Marpaung (2025) states that managing teacher work stress cannot be separated from humanistic and adaptive leadership. An ideal school can be transformed into a shared living space where the values of ethics, justice, tolerance, respect, democracy, cooperation, and social responsibility are taught (Okcu 2014 in Göçen 2021). An ideal school climate can be created by ethical leaders who exemplify this spirit and listen to the voices of teachers and staff (Göçen 2021). Ethical leadership is positively related to teachers' voice behavior, where these leaders increase the level of autonomy of their followers to shape a climate of safety and an ethical culture (Sagnak, 2017 in Göçen 2021). Work stress experienced by an employee is often also caused by the employee's ability to maintain and manage the resources they have, this is stated in the COR (Conservation of Resource) theory which states that stress will occur after the loss of resources, the threat of losing resources, or failure to obtain resources after significant resource investment (Hall et al., 2006). The COR theory has several principles, one of the principles, which is the 4th principle, states that a person's personal resources, such as self-efficacy, optimism and self-esteem will influence a person's actions. A person's personal resources as mentioned in the fourth principle of the COR theory, one of which is psychological capital.

There are several perspectives on stress and how a person reacts to stressful situations. Janke and Erdmann (2008) in Harzer & Ruch (2015) provide a stress coping model. Twenty different stress coping models are categorized into two broad categories: positive and negative coping strategies. Negative coping strategies involve behaviors that do not reduce stress but instead increase it over time in an attempt to avoid stressful situations. Positive coping strategies reduce stress by viewing difficult and demanding situations as personal challenges. Individuals with positive coping strategies are not reactive but proactive, as they take constructive action and recognize opportunities. Research shows that positive coping strategies have a positive influence on psychological capital, a positive psychology construct (Li & Xiangpei, 2011; Jacobs, 2016). Psychological capital is believed to influence employees' attitudes toward their work and increase their resilience (Avey, Luthans, & Jensen, 2009 in Çelik, 2017). The literature suggests that some individuals are unable to handle the psychological impact of stressors, leading to physical and psychological health symptoms, while others have the capacity to recover and experience little or no change in their functioning (Youssef & Luthans, 2007 in Jacobs, 2016). Research suggests a positive relationship between the capacity to cope with stress and positive work-related characteristics (optimism, hope, resilience, and self-efficacy) called psychological capital (Jacobs, 2016). From the facts presented above, it can be seen that previous studies examined the effect of workload on work stress and work performance (Mohbar & Rahmawati, 2017), the effect of leadership type on stress levels (Fong et al., 2015) and the effect of psychological capital on stress levels (Jacobs, 2016) separately, in this study, the author wants to conduct research on Ethical Leadership, Stress and Performance: Moderated by psychological capital, especially on teachers at SPK schools at elementary-high school levels in Surabaya.

The COR theory states that stress stems from the difficulty of achieving shared goals that have been instilled in each member of the organization (employee). The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory also offers a framework for understanding responses to stress and the things or resources that may be lost due to stress. COR (Conservation of Resources) states that an individual's primary motivation is to build, protect, maintain, and preserve objects, people, conditions, and energy resources (Hobfoll & Kay, 2000). Following this foundation, the COR theory argues that stress occurs (a) when a central or key resource is threatened with loss, (b) when a central or key resource is threatened with loss, or (c) when there is a failure to obtain a primary or key resource after significant effort (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Ethical leadership is the desire to pursue, implicitly and explicitly, ethical behavior for oneself and followers through efforts governed by rules and principles that encourage motivation to learn, healthy optimism, and clarity of purpose to uphold the values of empowerment, service to others, concern for human rights, change for the better, and fulfilling obligations to society, future generations, the environment, and its sustainability (Shakeel et al., 2019). Ethical leadership can be defined as the "normative demonstration" of appropriate behavior through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such behavior to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making (Brown et al., 2005 in Schwepker & Dimitriou, 2021). This definition implies two primary roles of an ethical leader: the moral person and the moral manager. The role of the moral person refers to the ethical values of the leader himself (Shakeel et al., 2019), such as fairness, honesty, and trustworthiness (Sari, 2019). Meanwhile, a moral manager refers to the activities carried out by leaders to instill ethical values in their followers (Shakeel, 2019) such as making principled, fair, and transparent decisions by considering the interests of followers and the organization (Sari, 2019). Performance is the level of achievement attained by an individual, team, organization, or process (EFQM, 2003 in Ghalem et al., 2016). Performance is formally defined as the value of a set of employee behaviors that contribute, either positively or negatively, to the achievement of organizational goals (Colquitt et al., 2017 in Saraswati et al., 2020). Performance measures the results of an employee's work compared to their goals, whether the results are equivalent to the expected results (Mark et al., 2014 in Tunio et al., 2021).

In general, performance can be divided into two aspects: process and outcome (Sonnentag et al., 2008). One aspect of the process is a person's behavior, which refers to what people do while working and the actions themselves (Campbell, 1990 in Sonnentag et al., 2008). Meanwhile, the outcome aspect refers to the results of a person's behavior (Sonnentag et al., 2008). Meanwhile, the concept of teacher performance refers to teacher behavior, namely how he behaves in the teaching and learning process in his environment, in such a way that the teacher successfully carries out the assigned actions or completes his tasks (Duze, 2012 in Azeem & Omar, 2018). Teacher performance is very important to maintain because teachers are central to school improvement efforts. To increase the efficiency and equity of school quality, it is very important to ensure that competent people want to work as teachers, that their teaching is of high quality, and that students have access to high-quality teaching (OEDC, 2005 in Jones et al., 2006: viii).

Job-related stress is a pattern of reactions that occurs when workers are faced with job demands that do not match their knowledge, skills or abilities and that challenge their ability to cope (Houtman & Jettinghoff, 2007:13). Job stress is also defined as a psychological state that can cause individuals to behave dysfunctionally in the workplace and is a person's response to an imbalance between job demands and their ability to cope (Stranks, 2005:2). The things that can cause stress according to Sauter et al (2014) are task design, management style, interpersonal relationships, job duties, career concerns and environmental conditions. Meanwhile, the things that cause stress in teachers in particular as stated by Ahmed (2019) are students who cannot be controlled without punishment, lack of respect for teachers, delays in promotions, low salaries, salaries that do not match the work, teacher problems not being resolved by management, workloads that impact social life and additional tasks.

Psychological capital is an individual's state of positive psychological development and is characterized by: (1) having the confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed in challenging tasks; (2) making positive attributions (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) being persistent toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting the path toward goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and difficulties, sustaining and bouncing back and even surpassing (resilience) to achieve success (Luthans, Yousseff and Avolio, 2015:2). Psychological capital encompasses the idea that individuals who are able to interpret situations and events positively are likely to be more effective members of organizations than those who are not (Harms & Luthans, 2012 in Çimen & Özgan, 2018). Psychological capital consists of four dimensions, namely self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and fighting spirit, which are defied by Luthans, Youssef, and Avolio (2007) as follows (Çelik, 2018): a.) Have the confidence to overcome challenges (Self-Efficacy), b.) Have a positive attitude and hope to achieve success now or in the future (Optimism), c.) Have perseverance towards success and be able and willing to reconsider choices (Hope), d.) Able to face problems and have fighting power (Resilience)

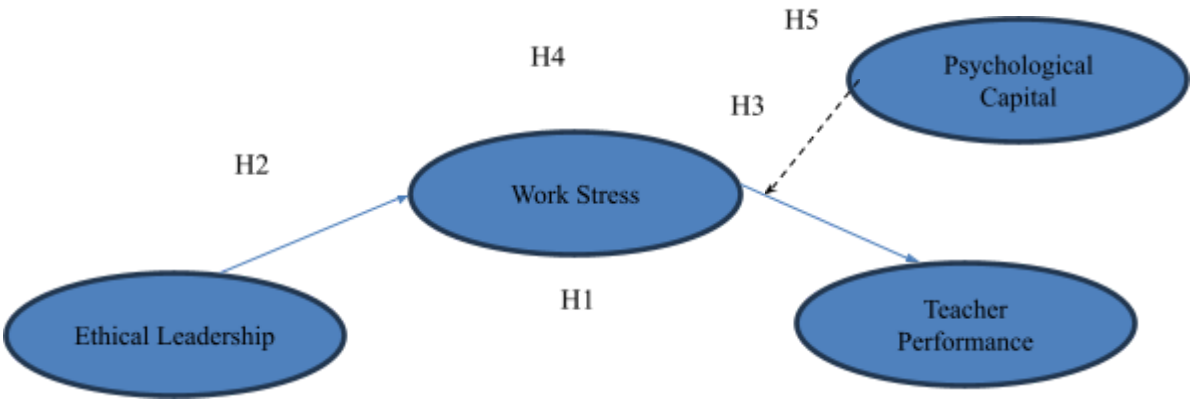

Figure 1. Research Framework

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative explanatory research design aimed at examining the relationships between variables in the research model. Quantitative research begins with a problem statement, generating hypotheses or research questions, reviewing related literature, and conducting quantitative data analysis (Williams, 2011 in Apuke 2017). The subjects in this study were teachers working at Cooperative Education Unit (SPK) schools from elementary to high school levels in Surabaya City. The number of respondents in this study was 114 teachers, selected using a purposive sampling technique with the criteria of having worked for a minimum of 6 months at the school concerned, so that they were considered to have understood the organizational conditions and leadership in the work environment.

In this study, the dependent variable is teacher performance, while the independent variable is ethical leadership, and the mediating variable is work stress, there is also a moderator variable, namely psychological capital. Work stress will be measured using the work stress model scale (Parker and Decotiis, 1983 in Amirrudin, 2018). Psychological capital is measured using the PCQ 24. Contextual performance can be measured with 16 items (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993 in Motowidlo & Scotter, 1994). Ethical leadership will be measured using the ethical leadership scale (Brown, Treviño, Harrison, 2005). The data analysis technique used in this study was partial least squares SEM (PLS-SEM, also known as PLS path modeling). This method is suitable for analyzing complex research models involving latent variables, mediation and moderation relationships, and a relatively limited sample size. Furthermore, SEM-PLS requires strict assumptions about data normality, making it more flexible for use in this study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The following are the results of the Research Model after being created using SmartPLS:

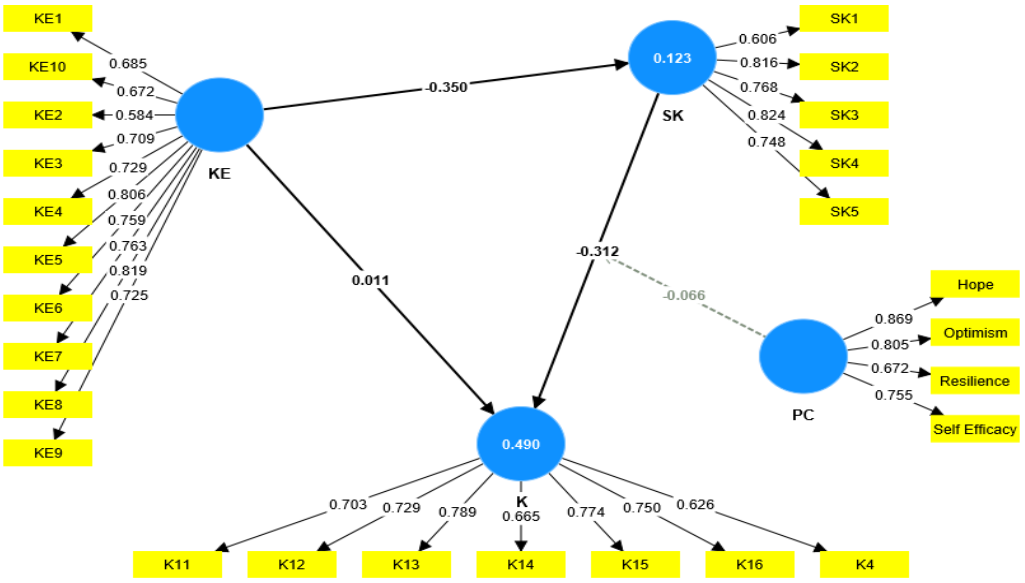

Figure 2. SEM PLS result

Source: Processed data (2023)

Structural Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

In this study, the evaluation of the measurement model was divided into two tests: validity and reliability. The validity test was used to assess convergent validity and discriminant validity, while the reliability test was used to assess *composite reliability*. First evaluation *of the outer model is by examining the Average Variance Extracted* (AVE). *Average Variance Extracted* (AVE) is used to determine whether the requirements for discriminant validity have been met. The minimum value to indicate that reliability has been achieved is 0.50 . The following data results, based on *the Average Variance Extracted* (AVE):

Table 1. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Value

Research Variables	***Average Variance Extracted* (AVE)**	Information
Ethical Leadership	0.530	Valid
Work Stress	0.573	Valid
Psychological capital	0.606	Valid
Performance	0.521	Valid

Convergent *Validity* Test

Further evaluation can be conducted by measuring convergent validity. The convergent validity of each indicator can be determined by its *loading factor* . Convergent validity is considered good or valid when the *loading factor* is >0.7, but if the outer loading of an indicator is between 0.4 and 0.7, the indicator is still acceptable and usable (Hair, 2017:113). This often occurs in social research (Hulland, 1999 in Hair, 2017:113). The following are the *outer loading results* for each research variable.

***Discriminant* Validity Test**

The next validity test is the discriminant validity test. The discriminant validity value can be determined by the *cross-loading value*. A latent variable can be considered valid if its correlation with each indicator is greater than the correlation between the latent variable and the other indicators. The following table shows the *cross-loading value* for each indicator.

Table 2. Outer Loading Results for Each Indicator

Variables	Indicator	*Loading Factor*	Information
Ethical Leadership	KE1	0.685	Valid
	KE2	0.584	Valid
	THE 3RD	0.709	Valid
	KE4	0.729	Valid
	KE5	0.806	Valid
	KE6	0.759	Valid
	KE7	0.763	Valid
	KE8	0.819	Valid
	KE9	0.725	Valid
	KE10	0.672	Valid
Work Stress	SK1	0.606	Valid
	SK2	0.816	Valid
	SK3	0.768	Valid
	SK4	0.824	Valid
	SK5	0.748	Valid
Psychological capital	*Hope*	0.869	Valid
	Self Efficacy	0.755	Valid
	Resilience / Fighting Power	0.672	Valid
	Optimism / Optimism	0.805	Valid
Performance	K1	0.626	Valid
	K2	0.703	Valid
	K3	0.729	Valid
	K4	0.789	Valid
	K5	0.665	Valid
	K6	0.774	Valid
	K7	0.750	Valid

Source: Processed data (2023)

Table 3. Cross Loading Discriminant Validity Value

Indicator	Ethical Leadership	Work Stress	*Psychological capital*	Performance
KE1	0.685	-0.282	0 . 408	0 . 304
KE2	0.584	-0.249	0.251	0.253
THE 3RD	0.709	-0.222	0.346	0.238
KE4	0.729	-0.302	0.407	0.318
KE5	0.806	-0.168	0.302	0.221
KE6	0.759	-0.208	0.355	0.168
KE7	0.763	-0.301	0.312	0.185
KE8	0.819	-0.332	0.385	0.306
KE9	0.725	-0.230	0.447	0.366
KE10	0.672	-0.097	0.212	0.102
SK1	-0.138	0.606	-0.224	-0.276
SK2	-0.275	0.816	-0.329	-0.362
SK3	-0.253	0.768	-0.397	-0.493
SK4	-0.263	0.824	-0.411	-0.508
SK5	-0.374	0.748	-0.217	-0.307
Hope	0.412	-0.436	0.869	0.615
Self-Efficacy	0.387	-0.221	0.755	0.451
Fighting Power	0.401	-0.408	0.672	0.393
Optimism	0.341	-0.266	0.805	0.485
K1	0.273	-0.349	0.401	0.626
K2	0.426	-0.537	0.464	0.703
K3	0.264	-0.398	0.362	0.729
K4	0.158	-0.343	0.483	0.789
K5	0.104	-0.372	0.385	0.665
K6	0.338	-0.365	0.603	0.774
K7	0.215	-0.287	0.460	0.750

Source: Processed data (2023)

Based on Table 3, it can be seen that the correlation of the latent variables with each indicator (numbers in black with *bold)* has a large value and meets the criteria *for discriminant validity*. Furthermore, discriminant validity can also be seen from *the Fornell-Larcker Criterion* to determine the average AVE value of all latent variable indicators. The following data results can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	Ethical Leadership	Work Stress	*Psychological capital*	Performance
Ethical Leadership	0 . 728			0 . 364
Work Stress	-0 . 350	0 . 757	-0 . 430	-0 . 530
Psychological capital	0 . 491		0 . 778	0 . 635
Performance	0 . 722			

Source: Processed data (2023)

Composite *Reliability* Test

The next evaluation is using *composite reliability* . This is done to prove the accuracy of the latent variables. This measurement is performed using SmartPLS by examining *Cronbach's alpha* . Latent variables with good reliability are those with *a Cronbach's alpha value* >0.7.m*composite reliability* and *Cronbach's alpha* measurements can be seen in Table 5. Table 5 shows that *Cronbach's alpha value* for all research variables is >0.6 and *the composite reliability* of each research variable is >0.7. Therefore, it can be concluded that the latent variables have met the *composite reliability criteria*.

Table 5. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability

Research Variables	*Cronbach's Alpha*	*Composite Reliability*
Ethical Leadership	0 . 901	0 . 907
Work Stress	0 . 813	0 . 834
Psychological capital	0 . 781	0 . 811
Performance	0 . 845	0 . 852

Source: Processed data (2023)

Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

Hypothesis testing in this study was conducted to determine and explain the correlation between variables. Using the SmartPLS 4.0 application, hypothesis testing can be performed by examining *boothstrapping results* and t-statistic values. The critical t-values for a two-tailed test are 1.65 (significance level = 10%), 1.96 (significance level = 5%), and 2.57 (significance level = 1%). Alternatively, check the p-value, which should be lower than 0.10 (significance level = 10%), 0.05 (significance level = 5%), or 0.01 (significance level = 1%) (Hair, 2017:208). In general, research uses the assumption of a 5% significance level. The following are the results of the hypothesis testing in this study.

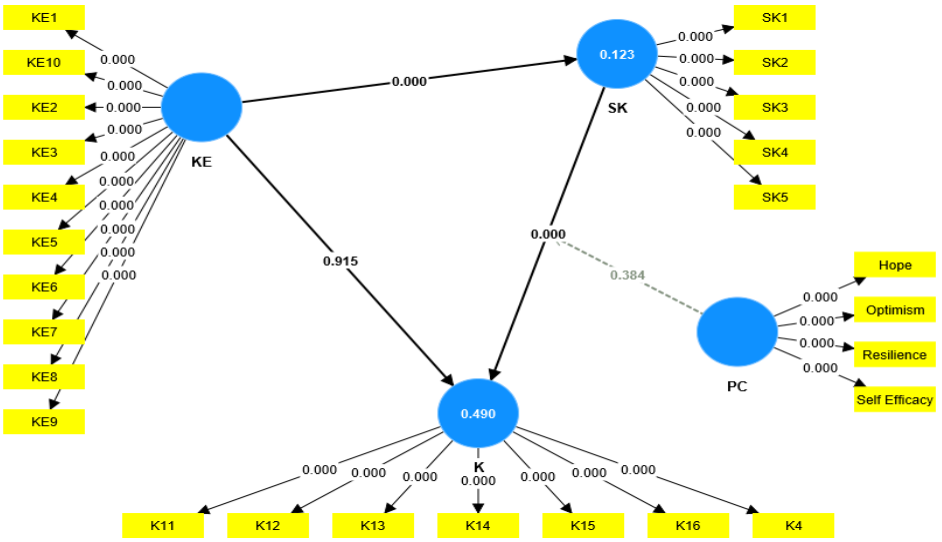

Figure 3. Bootstrapping (Inner Output)

Table 6. *Path Coefficients* and t-statistics

Hypothesis	*Original Sample* (O)	Standard Deviation	*T Statistics*	*p-values*
Ethical leadership has a positive influence on teacher performance (H1)	0.011	0.105	0.107	0.915
Ethical leadership has a negative effect on work stress (H2)	-0.350	0.072	4,886	0.000
Job stress has a negative effect on teacher performance (H3)	-0.312	0.089	3,500	0.000
Ethical leadership improves teacher performance by reducing work stress (H4)	0.109	0.041	2,659	0.008
Psychological capital moderates the effect of work stress on teacher performance. The negative effect of work stress on teacher performance will be weakened when psychological capital is high, and vice versa. (H5)	-0.066	0.076	0.871	0.384

Source: Processed data (2023)

Discussion

The Influence of Ethical Leadership on Performance

Based on the hypothesis test that has been conducted, it shows that ethical leadership has a positive influence on teacher performance in SPK schools at the elementary-high school level in Surabaya City but is not significant with a significance assumption of 5%, Adawiyah et al. (2022) conveyed the results of their research regarding the influence of ethical leadership on performance is positive and significant with a significance assumption of 10% with a p-value of 0.075. Several previous studies found that ethical leadership has a significant positive influence on employee performance in general, including Sentoso & Putra (2021); Amirudin & Nugroho, (2022), however, the results of this study show that ethical leadership has a positive influence on teacher performance but is not significant in SPK schools at the elementary-high school level in Surabaya City. The results of this study are in line with the results of research conducted by Kelidbari et al. (2016) which stated that ethical leadership does not have a significant direct relationship to performance, but ethical leadership has a stronger relationship to performance through intermediary variables. This may occur because leadership is only one resource factor in school operations, so ethical leadership plays an insignificant role in influencing teacher performance. This aligns with research by Kanya et al. (2021), which found that several factors influence teacher performance, including principal leadership, organizational culture, and teacher competency.

The Influence of Ethical Leadership on Work Stress

In this study, the hypothesis that ethical leadership negatively impacts job stress was accepted. This demonstrates that leadership style can influence a teacher's stress levels. This aligns with Schwepker & Dimitriou's (2021) findings that ethical leadership can serve to reduce job stress and improve performance quality when considered within the context of ethical impact theory. Ethical leadership can directly affect work stress, this is in line with the results of Lantican's (2020) study which stated that by incorporating ethical leadership, the effects of work-related stress were significantly reduced, this confirms the claim of social exchange theory that ethical leaders encourage followers to believe that leaders have their best interests in mind and that they show genuine concern for them. Ethical leaders can provide guidance on how to behave ethically and create a fair environment through their honesty and genuine concern for employees. Ethical leaders, through their influenced employees, are rewarded with positive organizational behavior by making their followers experience fairness, trust, and justice (Benevene et al, 2018 in Lantican, 2020). When a leader is able to implement ethical leadership patterns, it will help teachers reduce potential work stress.

The Influence of Job Stress on Teacher Performance

This study demonstrated the hypothesis that work stress negatively impacts teacher performance. Research conducted by Tsalasah et al. (2019) found the same finding: work stress had a negative and significant effect on performance. Stressful work situations arising from, for example, the need for tedious or repetitive work patterns, such as assembly line work, poor physical work environments, isolated work situations, inadequate opportunities for communication between coworkers and constant harassment from managers to meet deadlines can have a direct impact on job performance (Stranks, 2005:13). There are several things that can be stress triggers for teachers which ultimately affect teacher performance, including students who experience demotivation, workload, work environment discipline, problems with coworkers, administrative matters, task conflicts and unacceptable working conditions (Turna, 2014 in Cheku & Wangdi, 2021). From research conducted by Agarwal (2021) also concluded that overall teacher stress originating from stress-causing factors has a negative and significant impact on teacher performance.

The Influence of Ethical Leadership on Performance Mediated by Work Stress

In the first hypothesis test, where ethical leadership had a positive effect on performance, it was not significantly proven. However, in the fourth hypothesis, where ethical leadership improves teacher performance by reducing work stress, a positive and significant correlation was found. Therefore, work stress can mediate ethical leadership and performance positively and significantly. Several studies have found that ethical leadership has a positive and direct impact on performance, one of which is the study by Resick et al. (2011) in Olannye, (2021). However, in this study, ethical leadership will only have a positive and significant impact when mediated by work stress, resulting in a positive and significant indirect relationship. This is in line with the results of research conducted by Kelidbari et al. (2016) which stated that ethical leadership does not have a significant direct relationship with performance, ethical leadership has a stronger relationship with performance through intermediary variables. Ethical leadership can improve teacher performance by reducing work stress in teachers.

The Influence of Psychological Capital on Work Stress and Performance

In this study, the hypothesis test regarding the role of psychological capital as a moderator of the influence of work stress and performance was not proven significantly. Jacob (2016) found in his research that psychological capital has a significant negative effect on work stress. In this study, the results of hypothesis testing also found that psychological capital has a negative impact on work stress, but this was not significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that psychological capital is not sufficient to reduce stress in teachers and therefore cannot moderate performance improvement.

This study shows a direct, positive, and significant relationship between psychological capital and performance, but psychological capital does not moderate the relationship between job stress and performance. Another study conducted by Setar et al. (2015) showed that psychological capital does not moderate the relationship between job stress and job engagement. Setar et al. (2015) stated that psychological capital does not show a significant relationship with job stress. Psychological capital can positively influence performance, but when interacted with work stress, the relationship becomes insignificant. This may occur because the stress experienced by teachers is largely influenced by external factors, including professional demands and regulations (institutional pressure), so that the psychological capital possessed is not able to mitigate the negative impact of work stress on performance. Research conducted by Luo et al. (2016) found that psychological capital is not utilized as a resource to help individuals resolve conflict.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that ethical leadership does not directly influence teacher performance but has a significant indirect effect through the mediation of work stress. Ethical leadership contributes to reducing job stress by fostering fairness, trust, and ethical behavior, which in turn supports improved performance. Job stress itself has a significant negative impact on teacher performance, arising from factors such as workload, student behavior, workplace conditions, and administrative challenges. Although ethical leadership alone is not sufficient to directly enhance performance, it becomes more effective when it helps minimize stress levels. Meanwhile, psychological capital does not significantly moderate the relationship between work stress and performance, indicating that its role in reducing stress and improving performance is minimal, possibly due to stronger external factors affecting teachers beyond individual psychological resources.

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