



Enhancing Teacher Engagement and Organizational Motivation Through the Interpersonal Communication Strategies of School Principals

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to explore how the interpersonal communication patterns of school principals contribute to enhancing organizational motivation among teachers. Specifically, it examines the forms of communication employed to address motivational challenges, the current condition of teacher motivation, and the factors influencing principal-teacher interactions. A descriptive qualitative approach with field research was employed, involving interviews, observations, and document analysis with principals, vice-principals, teachers, and education staff as informants. Data were analyzed through data collection, reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing, while validity was ensured using source, technique, and time triangulation. Findings indicate that principals implement interpersonal communication effectively through a combination of formal and informal channels that are open, dialogical, and supportive, fostering teacher motivation via clear direction, appreciation, active participation, and harmonious working relationships. Key supporting factors include open and egalitarian leadership, a conducive work environment, and a stable organizational climate. These results suggest that principal communication strategies are vital for promoting organizational motivation and cultivating a positive and collaborative school culture.

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INTRODUCTION

Effective leadership in educational institutions is critical for ensuring that schools fulfill their social and educational roles. Principals, as key organizational leaders, significantly influence teacher motivation, school culture, and student outcomes. Interpersonal communication is one of the most important skills in effective leadership, enabling principals to engage various stakeholders, including teachers, students, and administrative staff (Febrina & Rahmat, 2024).

Strong interpersonal communication fosters harmonious relationships, enhances collaboration, and increases organizational productivity, which ultimately benefits society by ensuring the provision of quality education (Nisa et al., 2025). By understanding and applying interpersonal communication strategies, principals can cultivate trust, respect, and mutual understanding among staff members, leading to improved school performance and student learning outcomes. Therefore, examining how principals employ interpersonal communication is crucial not only for organizational success but also for societal well-being, as it directly affects the quality and effectiveness of educational services. This research aims to contribute to this broader societal goal.

In many educational organizations, suboptimal leadership communication remains a persistent problem. Teachers often report feeling unrecognized or inadequately informed, which can negatively affect their engagement and motivation (Tanjung et al., 2022). Misaligned expectations, lack of clarity regarding organizational policies, and inconsistent feedback can hinder teacher performance and reduce institutional effectiveness (Purwanugraha et al., 2022). Despite recognition of its importance, interpersonal communication is frequently undervalued or applied inconsistently by school leaders, creating gaps between management intentions and teacher experiences. In particular, principals may rely heavily on formal channels, neglecting informal dialogue that could address individual concerns (Hikmah & Mudarris, 2026; Kusumawati, 2025; Shoha, 2026). These shortcomings not only reduce teacher motivation but also limit opportunities for collaboration and innovation, which are essential for achieving organizational goals (Nisa et al., 2025). By investigating the patterns and impact of principal communication, this study addresses a pressing problem that affects both educators and the broader educational system.

Field observations indicate that the interpersonal communication practices of principals often do not fully meet organizational needs. In practice, principals may provide instructions without sufficient explanation or fail to engage teachers in decision-making processes, creating a sense of detachment (Hassan & Laval, 2024; Maulidy, 2025; Mustaghfiroh & Mubaroq, 2025). Teachers may receive formal directives but lack opportunities for dialogue, feedback, or clarification. Such conditions lead to partial alignment between teacher expectations and organizational objectives, reducing motivation and enthusiasm. Additionally, environmental factors, such as hierarchical barriers or lack of collaborative structures, can further limit communication effectiveness (Belle & Chemen, 2025; Joseph et al., 2025; Tohet et al., 2025). The observed phenomena suggest that while principals attempt to manage teacher motivation through communication, structural and interpersonal factors often impede optimal results. These observations provide the contextual basis for this study, emphasizing the need to analyze how communication practices influence organizational motivation in school settings.

Previous research has highlighted the positive impact of effective principal communication on teacher motivation. Studies have shown that communication practices characterized by openness, empathy, support, positive attitude, and equality enhance organizational outcomes (Azizah et al., 2024). International studies similarly indicate that principals who adopt interpersonal approaches in interactions with teachers improve message clarity and engagement (Tatang et al., 2021). However, much of this literature focuses on the descriptive effects of communication rather than examining underlying mechanisms or contextual factors that support or inhibit its effectiveness. Research gaps exist regarding how interpersonal communication patterns function in specific educational settings and how organizational, cultural, and technological factors mediate these effects (Janiah et al., 2023). By investigating these gaps, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the causal pathways between principal communication, teacher motivation, and organizational performance in educational institutions.

While prior studies have established the importance of communication, few have explored how the integration of formal and informal communication channels affects teacher motivation in the digital age (Nisa et al., 2025). Modern educational organizations increasingly rely on technology-mediated interactions, such as messaging applications, to disseminate information and facilitate dialogue (Febrina & Rahmat, 2024; Nisa et al., 2025). This introduces novel dynamics that may enhance or impede interpersonal communication, yet existing research often overlooks these factors (Yusuf, 2024). Furthermore, contextual factors, such as leadership style, work environment, and organizational climate, remain underexplored despite their critical role in determining communication effectiveness (Hussen & Onia, 2024; Mebratu et al., 2024; Nhlakanipho et al., 2025). Addressing these gaps is vital for providing actionable recommendations that principals can implement to foster motivation and engagement. This study, therefore, aims to provide a contemporary, contextually relevant analysis that reflects both traditional and digital communication practices in school leadership.

The novelty of this study lies in its holistic examination of principal communication, encompassing both traditional face-to-face interactions and technology-mediated channels. By combining qualitative field research with multiple data sources, including interviews, observations, and documentation studies, this research captures the complexity of interpersonal communication and its influence on organizational motivation. The study not only evaluates communication patterns but also identifies supporting and inhibiting factors that affect their effectiveness, providing insights that extend beyond descriptive findings. This comprehensive perspective allows for practical recommendations for principals, emphasizing adaptive strategies that integrate openness, empathy, and responsiveness with formal and digital communication tools. The findings

are expected to contribute to theory and practice by illustrating how principals can optimize communication to enhance motivation, performance, and organizational cohesion in educational contexts.

Based on these insights, this study formulates the research problem: how can principals utilize interpersonal communication to enhance teacher motivation and organizational performance effectively? The study hypothesizes that effective communication is associated with active teacher involvement, perceived support, and alignment with organizational goals. It further examines the role of mediating factors, such as leadership style, work environment, and organizational climate, in shaping the communication-motivation relationship. By addressing these questions, the research contributes to the existing literature, offering empirical evidence on practical strategies for improving teacher motivation and organizational outcomes in schools. The anticipated contribution is both theoretical, by refining communication and motivation frameworks, and practical, by informing leadership development and policy interventions in education.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employed a descriptive qualitative design to explore in depth how principals' interpersonal communication influences organizational motivation within schools. The descriptive qualitative approach was selected because it allows for a comprehensive understanding of complex social phenomena, including behaviors, perceptions, motivations, and actions of participants, through detailed verbal descriptions in natural contexts (Machali, 2021). By adopting this approach, the study could capture nuanced patterns of principal communication, as well as both supporting and inhibiting factors affecting teacher motivation and engagement. This design also facilitated an in-depth examination of interactions within the school environment, providing rich insights into the mechanisms through which interpersonal communication impacts organizational outcomes.

The study was conducted in a formal school selected due to its relevance in demonstrating significant human resource management practices, particularly in the context of leadership communication and teacher motivation. The location was chosen because of the observable phenomena regarding how principals interact with teachers to foster engagement, provide guidance, and cultivate a positive organizational climate. The research was carried out over approximately one month, encompassing data collection, data processing, compilation of research findings, and ongoing research guidance. Selecting this site enabled direct observation of communication dynamics in a real-world educational setting, ensuring the study's findings would reflect practical realities and challenges.

Data were collected through three primary methods: interviews, observations, and document analysis. Interviews allowed for comprehensive exploration of the experiences, perspectives, and perceptions of the principal, vice principal, teachers, and education staff regarding interpersonal communication. Observations were conducted directly within the school environment to capture social interactions, behaviors, and communication practices as they occurred naturally. Document analysis involved collecting relevant archival materials, reports, activity records, and official documents related to communication and organizational practices to supplement and triangulate the interview and observational data (Balaka, 2022). The combination of these methods ensured a rich and diverse dataset that reflected multiple perspectives.

Data analysis was performed interactively and continuously throughout the research. The process included four stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Initially, all information obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation was organized, simplified, grouped, and focused according to the research objectives. Reduced data were then presented in descriptive narrative form to facilitate clear understanding of the phenomena. Finally, conclusions were drawn by identifying patterns, relationships, and meanings emerging from the data (Albi Anggito & Johan, 2018). To ensure reliability and validity, the study applied source, technical, and time triangulation. Source triangulation compared information from multiple informants, technical triangulation compared data from different collection methods, and time triangulation re-verified data at various times and conditions, ensuring consistency and accuracy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study examines the role of the principal's interpersonal communication in enhancing organizational motivation among teachers and staff. To gain a comprehensive understanding, the researcher collected data through interviews with key informants, supported by direct observations and document analysis. The findings indicate that the principal's communication is consistently open, direct, and responsive to contextual needs, allowing teachers not only to receive information but also to interpret its purpose and relevance. Communication is multi-dimensional, encompassing formal forums, such as scheduled meetings, as well as informal daily interactions. These interactions provide teachers with clarity regarding organizational goals, expectations, and

individual roles, fostering a sense of alignment between staff members and institutional objectives. Beyond the transmission of information, communication is also a medium for psychological support, incorporating appreciation, encouragement, and acknowledgment of teacher contributions, which serves to enhance morale, motivation, and active participation in school activities.

The principal's interpersonal communication is implemented through a combination of structured practices and adaptive strategies. Regular meetings, digital communication channels such as WhatsApp, and one-on-one interactions form the core of information-sharing practices. Interviews with the principal reveal that refresher meetings are held monthly, supplemented by messages through digital platforms to ensure all teachers are informed in advance. Written notifications and letters further reinforce formal communication, while private consultations provide opportunities to address sensitive issues or individual concerns (KM, Interview February 12, 2026). The deputy principal highlighted that this blended approach allows for timely updates while maintaining flexibility for context-specific discussions, ensuring that communication remains relevant, actionable, and participatory (WKM interview, February 13, 2026). Such a dual-channel system allows teachers to feel included in decision-making processes and encourages a culture of transparency and responsiveness.

Teachers described the principal's communication as highly relational, emphasizing mutual respect, empathy, and support. Interviews demonstrated that the principal actively engages teachers in dialogue, providing spaces for them to express opinions, raise challenges, and receive feedback. Teachers reported feeling valued and appreciated, which strengthened their commitment to organizational objectives and increased their willingness to contribute beyond formal responsibilities (Teacher interview, February 14, 2026). The communication approach not only enhances understanding of tasks and responsibilities but also creates a harmonious environment where collaboration and mutual support are encouraged. Teachers consistently reported that active engagement in committees and shared organizational activities fostered a sense of ownership and responsibility, while guidance and recognition from the principal reinforced motivation and confidence in carrying out their duties.

The impact of the principal's communication extends to the broader organizational environment, affecting the psychological and social dynamics among staff members. Effective interpersonal communication contributes to a positive organizational climate, characterized by trust, openness, and collective responsibility. Teachers reported that their motivation and work engagement improved as a result of clear guidance, timely information, and supportive

interactions with the principal. Appreciation and recognition were frequently cited as key factors that encouraged sustained engagement and participation. Communication patterns that integrate encouragement, clarification, and feedback were instrumental in reducing confusion, addressing conflicts, and aligning individual teacher goals with institutional objectives. These dynamics illustrate that communication is not merely a technical skill but a strategic tool that shapes organizational culture, promotes commitment, and enhances collective motivation.

Factors supporting effective communication include open and egalitarian leadership, a supportive work environment, and a stable organizational climate. Teachers highlighted that the principal's approachable attitude and perception of teachers as partners fostered stronger interpersonal connections and reduced hierarchical barriers. An environment that encourages participation in meetings, extracurricular activities, and school events amplifies the frequency and quality of communication, allowing for collaborative problem-solving and mutual understanding. Stability within the organization allows for predictable and consistent interactions, ensuring that communication processes are maintained even during periods of change or uncertainty. Teachers reported minimal communication barriers, noting that differences of opinion or misunderstandings were typically resolved through open discussion and mutual deliberation (KM, Interview February 12, 2026; WKM interview, February 13, 2026; Teacher interview, February 14, 2026).

Teacher motivation within the organization was observed to be closely linked to the principal's communication practices. Active listening, appreciation of contributions, and recognition of effort were consistently associated with higher motivation levels. Teachers participating in committees and decision-making processes reported feeling more responsible and invested in organizational outcomes. Rewards, encouragement, and timely guidance from the principal reinforced engagement, while opportunities for teachers to express concerns strengthened trust and collaboration. Communication was perceived not only as a channel for instructions but also as a motivational tool that nurtures commitment, promotes professional development, and enhances work satisfaction. Teachers' accounts suggest that consistent, relational communication practices directly contribute to a positive psychological environment where appreciation, belonging, and shared responsibility thrive.

Overall, the principal's interpersonal communication in this study demonstrates a combination of formal and informal practices that are dialogic, open, and contextually adaptive. The integration of structured meetings, digital

communication, and direct interactions allows for comprehensive dissemination of information while maintaining responsiveness to situational needs. Teachers consistently reported that this approach enabled them to clarify roles, receive timely guidance, and actively participate in organizational initiatives. The principal's practices fostered a culture of appreciation, mutual support, and collaboration, creating conditions conducive to high levels of engagement and sustained motivation. Collectively, the findings indicate that interpersonal communication is a key driver of organizational motivation, shaping the school's climate, reinforcing relationships, and enhancing teacher performance. Effective communication emerges not merely as a procedural task but as a strategic leadership practice that strengthens organizational cohesion and promotes long-term institutional success.

Discussion

Interpersonal Communication of the Principal in Addressing Organizational Motivation

The findings of this study indicate that the principal applies a highly effective interpersonal communication pattern in managing organizational motivation. Communication is implemented through both formal and informal channels in a structured and sustainable manner. Regular meetings, digital media such as WhatsApp, and personal interactions create a dialogic, open, and responsive communication environment. This pattern strengthens working relationships, clarifies tasks and responsibilities, and encourages active teacher involvement in organizational activities.

The effectiveness of the principal's communication aligns with prior studies showing that leadership communication positively influences motivation and employee performance, though the effect may vary in strength (Qorilani et al., 2025). From the theoretical perspective of interpersonal communication, these practices reflect DeVito's four pillars: openness, empathy, supportiveness, and equality (Efendi et al., 2024). The principal in this study demonstrates these principles through flexible communication, providing spaces for dialogue, and responding to teacher concerns (Akmansyah et al., 2026; Kamilah, 2026; Kartikowati et al., 2026).

The study further reveals that the integration of digital communication enhances coordination and relational closeness between the principal and teachers. WhatsApp and other digital media are not merely tools for information dissemination but have evolved into essential channels for interpersonal communication, facilitating engagement and maintaining a collaborative work

environment (Nada Hanifah Harahap et al., 2025). These findings expand on previous research (Uqoiziah, 2023; Yusuf et al., 2025; Magfiroh, 2020) by highlighting the adaptive combination of traditional and technology-based communication in modern educational organizations.

Teacher Motivation within the Organization

Teacher motivation in this study emerges from a synergistic interaction between leadership, effective communication, and a supportive organizational climate. The principal actively identifies teacher needs through regular meetings, provides appreciation and awards, and responds promptly to challenges. These efforts foster positive psychological conditions, including a sense of value, active involvement, and shared responsibility (Agus et al., 2025; Annisa & Syafril, 2025; Firmansyah et al., 2025).

Communicative leadership and appropriate recognition strongly influence work motivation. Findings align with prior studies demonstrating that motivation has a significant effect on performance (Suriyana, 2020; Lanes et al., 2020). In line with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, fulfilling esteem and self-actualization requirements enhances teacher engagement. Active involvement in organizational activities reinforces belonging and accountability, creating a motivated workforce.

This research also extends prior studies by showing that continuous interpersonal communication, supplemented by digital channels, is crucial for sustaining teacher motivation (Amin & Harahap, 2022; Khairani et al., 2018; Wijaya, 2017). Motivation is not solely a result of individual factors but is deeply influenced by relational dynamics and adaptive communication practices (Rifa'i, 2019). Therefore, effective principal communication integrates supportive leadership and motivational strategies to improve organizational outcomes.

Factors Influencing Interpersonal Communication

The effectiveness of communication between principals and teachers is shaped by several key factors: open and egalitarian leadership, a supportive work environment, and a stable organizational climate. Principals who cultivate emotional closeness without creating hierarchical distance foster harmonious and dialogic communication relationships (Wibowo & Murniati, 2022; Savitri & Syukri, 2025). Communication grounded in humanistic and personal approaches strengthens trust, cooperation, and organizational cohesion.

A supportive environment, including diverse school activities and inclusive participation, further enhances communication intensity and quality.

The interplay of leadership, environment, and organizational conditions facilitates two-way, open communication and minimizes obstacles (Sihabudin et al., 2024; Hidayat & Ritonga, 2026). From a theoretical perspective, effective communication is built on openness, equality, and supportive attitudes, which foster smooth interpersonal relationships and improve work quality (Ngalimun, 2022).

This study emphasizes that organizational communication effectiveness is not solely determined by formal mechanisms but also by the relational quality maintained by the principal. Teachers reported that potential conflicts or misunderstandings were typically resolved through collaborative discussion, illustrating how open leadership and a conducive environment minimize communication barriers (Imansyah et al., 2025; Jeni & Syafril, 2025; Zuhadi & Afdal, 2025).

Overall, these findings demonstrate the importance of integrating equitable leadership, a supportive organizational climate, and stable conditions to achieve effective interpersonal communication. Principals' capacity to establish flexible, collaborative, and high-quality relationships is critical for sustaining motivation, fostering a positive school culture, and supporting organizational goals.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight that interpersonal communication of madrasah principals is a crucial factor in fostering teacher motivation and enhancing organizational performance. Communication that is transparent, supportive, dialogic, and relationally close creates a harmonious and conducive work environment where teachers feel valued, understood, and actively involved. The study demonstrates that effective communication integrates formal channels, such as routine meetings and digital media, with informal interactions that allow two-way dialogue, enabling teachers to express opinions, share challenges, and gain clarity on their roles. This pattern not only strengthens understanding of tasks but also increases engagement, morale, and commitment, illustrating the practical wisdom that adaptive and relational leadership is essential in educational organizations. Teacher motivation is further reinforced through participatory activities, recognition, and a supportive climate, which together foster a sense of ownership and shared responsibility toward institutional goals, providing a tangible lesson for school leaders and policymakers seeking to improve organizational culture and educational outcomes.

This study contributes to scholarly knowledge by empirically

demonstrating how interpersonal communication strategies, including technology-mediated interactions, can be effectively applied to enhance motivation in Islamic educational settings. The research strengthens the theoretical understanding of relational leadership, communication dynamics, and organizational psychology in schools, offering insights that extend beyond conventional approaches. However, the study is limited by its focus on a single school context, which may restrict generalizability across different institutions or cultural settings. Future research could expand to multiple schools, compare different leadership styles, or examine longitudinal impacts of communication practices on teacher motivation and student outcomes. Such research would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how interpersonal communication can sustainably improve organizational effectiveness and professional development in educational institutions.

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