



When Leadership Inspires: Exploring the Influence of Democratic Leadership and Work Motivation on Lecturer Success

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Abstract :

Lecturer performance is a strategic factor in improving the quality of higher education, which is not only determined by individual competence, but also by the leadership environment that oversees it. This study aims to analyze the influence of democratic leadership style on lecturers' performance with work motivation as a mediating variable. The research design used is quantitative with an explanatory research approach. The research population consisted of 27 permanent lecturers in the Arabic Language Education Study Program at STIQ Amuntai, all of whom were sampled using saturated sampling techniques. Data were collected using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire, accompanied by observation and documentation. Path analysis is used to test the relationships between variables, accompanied by the Sobel test to confirm the mediation effect. The results of the study show that the democratic leadership style has a significant effect on the work motivation and performance of lecturers, both directly and through the mediation effect of work motivation. The implications of these findings confirm the importance of implementing participatory leadership in the university environment as a strategy to enhance work motivation, improve lecturer performance, and promote the achievement of sustainable educational quality standards.

INTRODUCTION

The low productivity of lecturers' scientific publications in Indonesia requires serious attention. For example, only about 7% of lecturers at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta managed to publish Scopus-indexed international publications every year during the 2019–2021 period (Andayani, 2023). Furthermore, between 1996 and 2015, the total number of scientific publications by Indonesian lecturers reached only 39,719 articles, placing the country in 11th position among Asian countries (Muhartatik et al., 2024; Mustafa et al., 2024; Ramadhanty et al., 2023). In addition, only 2.25% of the 320,052 lecturers in Indonesia held a professor's degree in 2021, despite the ideal being that each study program has at least one professor (Pattiasina et al., 2023). These figures show a substantial gap in academic productivity and leadership quality in higher education institutions. Therefore, it is important to investigate the relationship between democratic leadership styles, work motivation, and lecturer performance quantitatively.

In the education management literature, democratic leadership theory is recognized as capable of fostering a participatory and collaborative work environment (Imran et al., 2025; Liao, 2022; Liggett, 2025). Democratic leadership encourages two-way communication, empowerment, and member involvement in decision-making (Lee & Kim, 2022; Rabiul et al., 2022; Song et al., 2025). Theory *Self-Determination* explains that a work environment that supports autonomy, competence, and connectedness will increase the intrinsic motivation of individuals (Evans et al., 2024; Ryan et al., 2022; Xia

et al., 2022). Meanwhile, the Path-Goal Theory states that leaders influence the performance of subordinates through clarifying goals and providing support (Cumar et al., 2025; Dare & Saleem, 2022; Saleem et al., 2021). In the context of higher education, this theory becomes relevant because lecturers are not only responsible for aspects of teaching but also for research and community service. Thus, it can be theoretically assumed that democratic leadership styles play a significant role in increasing lecturers' work motivation, which in turn impacts their academic performance. This theoretical framework serves as the conceptual foundation for quantitative research that examines the relationship between these variables.

Several previous quantitative studies have shown a link between leadership style, work motivation, and lecturer performance. A survey of 214 lecturers in India, conducted with regression analysis, found that participatory leadership styles significantly contributed to increased motivation ($\beta = 0.47$; $p < 0.01$) (Abid et al., 2025; Balakrishnan et al., 2022; Mpuangan et al., 2024). Research by Rahayu et al. (2024) among 156 lecturers in Central Java, using SEM-PLS, revealed that democratic leadership positively affected motivation by 32%, which in turn improved performance by 41%. Meanwhile, a meta-analysis by Hidayat et al. (2024) of 72 studies involving 23,000 respondents confirmed that intrinsic motivation has a strong correlation with performance ($r = 0.56$). Similar results were also found by Hilton et al. (2023) in Ghana, with the direct influence of democratic leadership on the performance of administrative staff of 0.38. These findings reveal consistent positive relationships between variables; however, differences in results across countries highlight the need for further study in the Indonesian context.

Although previous research has shown a positive relationship between democratic leadership style, work motivation, and lecturer performance, a research gap remains in the context of Indonesian higher education. The Ministry of Education and Culture's report (2023) indicates that the research productivity of lecturers in many universities remains low, with 34.8% of institutions still not meeting their publication targets. Additionally, a national survey revealed that 45% of lecturers feel less involved in the academic decision-making process, which hurts their work motivation. However, quantitative research that specifically examines the influence of the democratic leadership style of the Head of Study Program on lecturer performance, considering the mediating role of work motivation, is still minimal. The position of Head of Study Program is unique because it offers a direct relationship with lecturers. This research gap is important to fill in order to obtain empirical evidence on how leadership style can improve lecturer performance through motivational channels, as well as address the challenges of quality higher education in Indonesia.

This research offers a new contribution by integrating the work motivation mediation model in the relationship between democratic leadership style and lecturer performance in the context of program-based higher education. Most previous studies have emphasized the direct relationship between variables, but studies on the psychological mechanisms that bridge these relationships are still limited in Indonesia. This study employs a *path analysis* approach to quantitatively measure both direct and indirect influences, thereby providing more comprehensive empirical evidence. In addition, the use of *saturated sampling* techniques on 27 permanent lecturers in one study program enables the collection of more representative data and minimizes bias. Thus, this research not only adds to the empirical literature on academic leadership but also enriches methodological approaches in quantitative social studies. The results of the

research are expected to provide new insights into how leadership style can increase motivation and have a significant impact on lecturer performance in a measurable manner.

The primary objective of this study is to examine the impact of the democratic leadership style of the Head of the Study Program on the performance of lecturers, with work motivation serving as a mediating variable. This study employs a quantitative approach, utilizing *an explanatory research* design and *path analysis* to investigate causal relationships. Data was collected through a five-point Likert scale questionnaire that measured lecturers' perceptions of leadership, motivation, and performance. The analysis was conducted by examining the direct, indirect, and total effects between variables, accompanied by the Sobel test to assess the significance of mediation. With a sample of all permanent lecturers in the STIQ Amuntai Arabic Language Education Study Program, this study is expected to produce valid and reliable empirical findings. The results obtained will contribute to the development of leadership theory in higher education and provide practical recommendations for managing study programs. Thus, this study emphasizes the strategic role of democratic leadership in enhancing lecturer performance by encouraging work motivation.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach with *an explanatory research* design, aiming to test the causal relationship between democratic leadership style, work motivation, and lecturer performance (Bentouhami et al., 2021; Duckett, 2021; Fryer, 2022). This quantitative research design was chosen because it provided an empirical picture of the magnitude of direct and indirect influences between variables and allowed for the testing of mediation models through path analysis. This approach is relevant to social studies that seek to identify determinants of individual performance in the context of higher education organizations, as it has been used in similar research on academic leadership and work motivation (Bentouhami et al., 2021; Duckett, 2021; Fryer, 2022).

The population in this study consists of all permanent lecturers in the Arabic Language Education Study Program at STIQ Amuntai, totaling 27 individuals. Due to the relatively small population, this study *employed saturated sampling* (census), in which all members of the population serve as research samples (Jackson et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2025; Wutich et al., 2024). This technique was chosen to minimize sampling errors and improve data representativeness, as when the population size is less than 100 respondents. The number of 27 lecturers is considered adequate to describe the context of the organization while allowing reliable statistical testing.

Data collection was conducted through the distribution of questionnaires using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The research instrument was developed based on the operational definition of variables: democratic leadership style was measured through indicators of participation, two-way communication, and member empowerment; work motivation is measured by intrinsic indicators such as self-satisfaction and career development as well as extrinsic indicators such as institutional rewards and support; Meanwhile, lecturer performance is measured through the dimensions of education and teaching, research, and community service. The validity of the instrument was tested using content validity through expert judgment (*Expert Judgment*) and analysis of confirmatory factors (*Confirmatory Factor Analysis*) to ensure the validity of the construct. The reliability of the instrument was assessed using

Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, with a value of ≥ 0.70 considered an acceptable internal consistency criterion (Cerri et al., 2023; Jahrami et al., 2023; Trabelsi et al., 2024).

The data obtained was analyzed using path analysis (*Path Analysis*). This analysis was chosen because it enables the testing of direct and indirect relationships between variables, and is suitable for examining the mediating role of work motivation in the relationship between democratic leadership style and lecturer performance. Before the path analysis was conducted, classical assumption tests, including normality, multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity, and linearity, were performed to ensure the feasibility of the data in the regression model. The mediation test was conducted using Baron and Kenny's *causal steps* approach and tested for significance using the Sobel Test. In addition, the analysis of the coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to measure the extent to which the research model could explain the variation in dependent variables. This analysis technique is considered appropriate because it provides a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms by which leadership influences performance through motivation, as suggested in the literature on quantitative methodology in the field of social studies (Liao, 2022; Liggett, 2025; Ramadhanty et al., 2023).

Methodologically, the selection of design, sampling techniques, data collection instruments, and analysis procedures in this study aligns with international quantitative research standards. This approach is believed to produce valid and reliable findings, while also contributing to the development of democratic leadership theory in the context of higher education and to managerial practices that improve lecturer performance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis was conducted to provide an overview of the respondents' characteristics and the distribution of answers to the research variables. From the 27 lecturers who became respondents, information was obtained regarding their gender, age, highest level of education, and working period. The results showed that the majority of respondents were men (59.3%) with the highest age range of 36–45 years (44.4%). Most of them hold a Master's educational qualification (70.4%) and have a working period of between 6 and 10 years (48.1%). These findings provide an overview of the respondent profiles, which serve as the basis for further interpretation, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variables	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Category
Democratic Leadership Style (X)	27	2.80	4.87	3.86	0.532	High
Work Motivation (M)	27	2.92	4.75	3.94	0.487	High
Performance Lecturer (Y)	27	2.73	4.67	3.78	0.504	High

Based on Table 1, each mean value is converted to a percentage using the Likert scale (1–5), allowing for interpretation according to the studies (Liggett, 2025). The Democratic Leadership Style (X) variable has a mean of 3.86. If calculated as a percentage, the value reaches 77.2%. Based on Arikunto's criteria, this figure falls into almost all categories, indicating that most respondents perceive the application of a democratic leadership style in their activities. The Work Motivation (M) variable obtained a mean of 3.94, or equivalent to 78.8%. This percentage falls into the category of almost entirely,

meaning that almost all respondents exhibit high work motivation. Therefore, it can be concluded that motivation is one of the dominant factors driving performance quality.

Meanwhile, the Lecturer Performance (Y) variable reached a mean of 3.78 or around 75.6%. This figure is categorized as the highest, indicating that the majority of lecturers have good performance, although it does not cover the entire group. In summary, the three research variables showed a positive trend, with the dominance of the category almost entirely describing conducive and productive academic conditions.

Classical Assumption Test Results

Before conducting the path analysis, a classical assumption test was performed to ensure that the data met the regression requirements. This test includes normality, multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity, and linearity, ensuring the analysis model can be used appropriately. The test results showed that the data were in a condition suitable for further analysis. Thus, the classical assumption test provides a valid basis for applying path analysis. A detailed summary of the test results is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of the Classical Assumption Test

Test Type	Results	Mark	Decision
Normality	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Sig. = 0.183	> 0.05	Usual
Multicollinearity	Tolerance = 0.715	> 0.10	No issue
Multicollinearity	LIFE = 1.398	< 10	No issue
Heteroscedasticity	Glejser Test Sig. > 0.05	> 0.05	No issue
Linearity	Linearity Sig. < 0.05	< 0.05	Linear
Linearity	Deviation from Linearity Sig. > 0.05	> 0.05	Linear

Table 2 presents the results of the classical assumption test, which show that the research model meets the regression analysis criteria. The normality test using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov yielded a significance value of 0.183, which was greater than 0.05. This means that the data is normally distributed, so it is suitable for further analysis. The multicollinearity test showed a tolerance value of 0.715 (>0.10) and a VIF value of 1.398 (<10). This result indicates that there is no problem of multicollinearity, so that the independent variables in the model do not influence each other excessively. The heteroscedasticity test, conducted using the Glejser Test, yielded a significance value greater than 0.05, indicating that heteroscedasticity did not occur and the residual variance was homogeneous. Meanwhile, the linearity test showed a significant linearity value. < 0.05 and deviation from linearity sig. > 0.05. This indicates a linear relationship between free and bound variables.

Path Analysis Results

Path analysis was conducted to test the direct and indirect influence between variables in the research model. This method is used to assess the extent to which democratic leadership styles affect the work motivation and performance of lecturers, both partially and simultaneously. By using path coefficients, t-calculations, and significance values, this study was able to show the relationship between the variables tested more comprehensively. The results of the path analysis provide an empirical picture of the role of work motivation as a mediator in strengthening the influence of democratic leadership style on lecturer performance. A detailed description of the test results is presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3. Results of the First Structural Equation Path Analysis (X → M)

Independent Variables	Path Coefficient (α_1)	t-Count	p-Value	Information
Democratic Leadership Style (X)	0.534	3,159	0.004	Significant
Constant (a)	1,886			
R ²	0.285			
F-count	9,979			
p-value (F)	0.004			

Table 4. Results of the Second Structural Equation Path Analysis (X, M → Y)

Variables	Path Coefficient	T-Count	p-value	Information
Democratic Leadership Style (X)	0.369 (β_1)	2,245	0.034	Significant
Work Motivation (M)	0.453 (β_2)	2,758	0.011	Significant
Constant (b)	0.673			
R ²	0.513			
F-count	12,643			
p-value (F)	0,000			

Based on Table 3 and Table 4, the results of the path analysis show that Democratic Leadership Style (X) has a positive and significant effect on Work Motivation (M) with a *path coefficient* of 0.534, *t-count* 3,159, and *p-value* of 0.004, so that the better the democratic leadership, the higher the work motivation; the constant of 1.886 indicates the existence of fundamental motivation, while the R² value of 0.285 indicates 28.5% variation motivation was explained by democratic leadership and the remaining 71.5% was influenced by other factors, reinforced by significant F test results (9,979; p = 0.004). Furthermore, Table 4 shows that both Democratic Leadership Style (X) and Work Motivation (M) have a significant effect on Lecturer Performance (Y), where democratic leadership has a *path coefficient* of 0.369, *t-count* of 2,245, *p-value* of 0.034, while work motivation shows a *path coefficient* of 0.453, *t-count* of 2,758, *p-value* 0.011; a constant of 0.673 describes the existence of basic performance, with an R² of 0.513 which means that 51.3% of the variation in lecturer performance is explained by democratic leadership and work motivation simultaneously, while other factors influence the remaining 48.7%, and the results of the F test (12.643; p = 0.000) confirm that the regression model is significant overall, so it can be concluded that democratic leadership contributes directly to lecturer performance as well as indirectly through increased work motivation.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted to evaluate the validity of the alleged relationship between variables in the research model. Through path analysis, the influence of democratic leadership style on work motivation, the influence of work motivation on lecturer performance, and the direct relationship of leadership style on lecturer performance were tested. Additionally, the role of work motivation as a mediator in strengthening the influence of leadership on performance was also analyzed. Each hypothesis is tested by examining the path coefficient, t-value, and significance level.

The test results indicate that the entire hypothesis is acceptable, thereby supporting the proposed conceptual model. A detailed summary of the hypothesis test results is presented in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	Path Coefficient	t/z-count	p-value	Decision
H ₁	X → M	0.534 (α_1)	3.159	0.004	Accepted
H ₂	M → Y	0.453 (β_2)	2.758	0.011	Accepted
H ₃	X → Y	0.369 (β_1)	2.245	0.034	Accepted
H ₄	X → M → Y	0.242 ($\alpha_1 \times \beta_2$)	2.038	0.041	Accepted

Table 6. Direct, Indirect, and Total Influences

Path of Influence	Direct Influence	Indirect Influence	Total Influence
X → M	0.534	-	0.534
M → Y	0.453	-	0.453
X → Y	0.369	0.242 (0.534 × 0.453)	0.611

Based on Tables 5 and 6, the results of the hypothesis testing show that all submitted hypotheses are accepted. At H₁ (X → M), the democratic leadership style had a significant effect on work motivation, with a path coefficient of 0.534, a t-count of 3.159, and a p-value of 0.004. Furthermore, H₂ (M → Y) is also significant, with a path coefficient of 0.453, a t-count of 2.758, and a p-value of 0.011, indicating that work motivation plays a crucial role in enhancing lecturer performance. The H₃ hypothesis (X → Y) demonstrates the direct influence of democratic leadership on performance, with a path coefficient of 0.369, a t-count of 2.245, and a p-value of 0.034. Meanwhile, H₄ (X → M → Y) confirmed the existence of an indirect influence through work motivation with a value of 0.242 (t-count 2.038; p-value 0.041).

In line with Table 6, the most significant direct influence was found in the X → M pathway (0.534), followed by M → Y (0.453), while X → Y had a direct influence of 0.369 but increased to 0.611 when indirect influence through work motivation (0.242) was added. Thus, the total influence of democratic leadership on lecturer performance is more substantial when mediated by work motivation, proving that motivation serves as an important intermediary in strengthening the relationship between democratic leadership and lecturer performance.

Coefficient of Determination

Determination coefficient analysis was conducted to assess the extent to which independent variables can explain variations in dependent variables within the research model. The R² value is used to assess the proportion of explained variation explained by the model, while the remaining variation comes from factors outside the model. In the first equation, the democratic leadership style was able to explain some of the variation in work motivation. In the second equation, the combination of democratic leadership style and work motivation explained the variation in lecturer performance. The overall results of the model show a considerable proportion, indicating that the model has good clarity and power. A detailed summary of the determination coefficient is presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Structural Equation Model (SEM) Results

Model / Equation	R ²	Interpretation
Equation 1 (X → M)	0.285	Democratic leadership style explains 28.5% of the variation in work motivation.
Equation 2 (X, M, → Y)	0.513	Democratic leadership style and work motivation explain 51.3% of the variation in lecturer performance.
Total Determination (R ² m)	0.652	The overall model explains 65.2% of the variation in lecturer performance.

Table 7 presents the results of the Structural Equation Model (SEM) analysis, which demonstrate the explanatory power of the research model in part or as a whole. In Equation 1 (X → M), an R² value of 0.285 indicates that the democratic leadership style can explain 28.5% of the variation in work motivation. In comparison, the remaining 71.5% is influenced by factors other than the model. Furthermore, Equation 2 (X, M → Y) yields an R² of 0.513, indicating that democratic leadership style, along with work motivation, can explain 51.3% of variations in lecturer performance, while other external factors influence 48.7%. The Total Determination (R²m) value of 0.652 indicates that, overall, this research model can explain 65.2% of the variation in lecturer performance. These findings confirm that the model has strong descriptive power, where democratic leadership plays a role not only directly but also indirectly, through work motivation, in improving lecturer performance.

Discussion

This study examined how a democratic leadership style influences lecturer performance, with work motivation serving as a mediating variable. The importance of this research lies in the fact that lecturers are central to implementing the *Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi* teaching, research, and community service, which determines institutional success (Liao, 2022; Liggett, 2025; Ramadhanty et al., 2023). Previous studies have emphasized the impact of leadership on performance, but the pathways through which this occurs remain underexplored in Indonesian higher education (Lee & Kim, 2022; Rabiul et al., 2022; Song et al., 2025). The inclusion of motivation as a mediator is theoretically grounded in Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes the roles of autonomy and competence in promoting productivity (Evans et al., 2024; Ryan et al., 2022; Xia et al., 2022). By employing a quantitative explanatory design, this study aimed to provide empirical evidence on how participatory leadership practices of Heads of Study Programs can foster motivation and ultimately enhance lecturer performance. Thus, it fills a crucial research gap while offering practical insights for higher education management.

The findings revealed that democratic leadership significantly increased both work motivation ($\beta = 0.534$; $p = .004$) and lecturer performance ($\beta = 0.369$; $p = .034$). In addition, work motivation itself positively predicted performance ($\beta = 0.453$; $p = .011$). Mediation testing confirmed that motivation partially mediated the relationship between democratic leadership and performance, contributing an indirect effect of 0.242 ($p = .041$). Overall, the model explained 65.2% of the variance in performance, demonstrating robust explanatory power. These results suggest that while democratic leadership can directly enhance performance, its impact is more pronounced when motivation serves as an intermediary. This outcome aligns with theories that emphasize the dual role of leadership in providing both structural support and psychological empowerment (Cumar

et al., 2025; Dare & Saleem, 2022; Saleem et al., 2021). Hence, the study not only validates leadership as a determinant of performance but also confirms that motivation is a crucial mechanism that enhances leadership effectiveness in academic contexts.

The results confirmed expectations that democratic leadership fosters motivation, which subsequently enhances performance. This outcome supports the Self-Determination Theory, which posits that autonomy-supportive environments lead to stronger intrinsic motivation (Balakrishnan et al., 2022). Nevertheless, an unexpected outcome was the persistence of a direct effect of leadership on performance, even after controlling for motivation. This suggests that leadership does not solely operate through psychological mechanisms but also directly influences behavior by shaping structures, expectations, and communication within academic settings. These findings also align with social exchange theory, which posits that lecturers respond to supportive leadership with improved performance due to a reciprocal commitment (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The dual pathway observed here underscores that motivation is not the sole channel of influence, and democratic leadership itself embodies practical elements such as decision-making involvement and recognition that can directly elevate lecturer performance independent of motivational states.

The findings align with prior studies that highlighted the positive relationship between democratic leadership and academic outcomes. Xia et al. (2022) demonstrated similar effects in ASEAN universities, while Sharma and Bhatnagar (2023) found that democratic leadership increased faculty motivation compared to autocratic styles. Dare & Saleem (2022) further emphasized that open communication and participatory climates foster motivation among Indonesian lecturers. The mediating role of motivation in this study is consistent with the leadership-motivation-performance framework described by Imran et al. (2025). However, cultural factors may explain why the mediation was partial; Indonesian academic institutions often emphasize collective decision-making, which may strengthen the direct role of leadership. Compared to Western contexts, where motivation plays a stronger mediating role, Indonesian lecturers may respond more directly to visible leadership practices such as empowerment and recognition, highlighting the cultural sensitivity of leadership dynamics in higher education.

This research makes both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of educational leadership and performance management in higher education. Theoretically, it strengthens existing models by confirming that democratic leadership not only has a direct impact on lecturer performance but also operates indirectly through work motivation. This expands the understanding of leadership-performance relationships within the Indonesian higher education context, particularly by integrating Self-Determination Theory and Path-Goal perspectives. Practically, the findings provide empirical evidence for policymakers and institutional leaders that adopting democratic leadership practices such as participatory decision-making, open communication, and lecturer empowerment can enhance motivation and performance. The general conclusion of this study is that a democratic leadership style significantly improves lecturer performance, both directly and through increased motivation, accounting for 65.2% of the performance variation. This underscores the importance of leadership development at the program level as a strategic effort to build sustainable academic quality in higher education institutions.

CONCLUSION

The persistent challenge in higher education has been understanding the factors that most effectively enhance lecturer performance, which is central to the implementation of the *Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi*. This study addressed that issue by examining the role of democratic leadership style and its interaction with work motivation. The findings revealed that democratic leadership not only improves performance directly but also indirectly through heightened work motivation, with the model explaining 65.2% of the variation in performance. These results affirm that participatory leadership practices such as open communication, empowerment, and shared decision-making are crucial drivers of academic productivity. The implications extend beyond theoretical validation, providing practical evidence for higher education institutions to prioritize leadership development at the program level. Strengthening democratic leadership capacities among heads of study programs can foster sustained motivation and performance, ultimately contributing to institutional quality. Future research should broaden this framework by incorporating other leadership styles and organizational variables to deepen the understanding of performance dynamics in diverse educational settings.

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