



Exploring the Role of Principal Appreciation and Motivation in Shaping Work Culture Among Vocational School Teachers in South Aceh, Indonesia

Jusnaini Rasyid ¹, Hizir Sofyan ^{2,*} and Nasir Usman ¹

¹ Graduate School of Education Administration, Universitas Syiah Kuala, Banda Aceh 23111, Indonesia; baratjusnainirasyid@gmail.com (J.R.); nasir@usk.ac.id (N.U.)

² Department of Statistics, Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Universitas Syiah, Banda Aceh 23111, Indonesia; hizir@usk.ac.id (H.S.)

* Correspondence: hizir@usk.ac.id

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of principal appreciation and motivation on the work culture of vocational school teachers in South Aceh District, Indonesia. Utilizing a quantitative approach, data were collected from 113 vocational school teachers across five schools through a survey that measured three key variables: principal appreciation, principal motivation, and teacher work culture. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, including simple and multiple regression, were employed to determine the relationships between the variables. The results showed that both principal appreciation and motivation have a positive and significant influence on teacher work culture, explaining 11.6% of its variation individually and 34.1% when combined. These findings underscore the importance of school leadership in fostering a supportive and collaborative work environment, suggesting that principals who appreciate and motivate their teachers significantly enhance the overall work culture, which in turn contributes to improved teacher performance and educational outcomes. This research highlights the critical role of leadership in shaping a productive and engaging school culture.



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1. Introduction

Education is a fundamental asset and necessity for Indonesia, playing a crucial role in transforming individuals into empowered and productive members of society [1]. It aims to develop high-quality human resources capable of advancing Indonesia as a dignified and competitive nation. Education serves as a pivotal tool in preparing individuals to meet the challenges of globalization. According to Indonesia's National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003, education is defined as a conscious and planned effort to create a

learning environment and learning process that enables students to actively develop their spiritual, moral, intellectual, and social potential. National education also serves to cultivate talent, character, and a civilized society, fostering individuals who are knowledgeable, skilled, creative, independent, and responsible citizens [2].

To achieve these objectives, education must prepare students to be competitive and creative, supported by effective management from both policymakers and practitioners. Leadership within schools, particularly

from principals, plays a critical role in shaping a conducive work environment and motivating teachers [3]. Effective school leadership, combined with professional and motivated teachers, contributes significantly to enhancing the overall quality of education. Teachers, as key human resources, are essential in driving educational success, and their performance directly impacts student achievement [4].

Research on leadership and work culture has consistently demonstrated the importance of school principals in fostering a positive work environment. For example, Maryati et al. [5] and Badaruddin [6] highlighted the significant role of leadership in influencing teacher performance and work culture. Similarly, several studies emphasized that leadership, school environment, and teacher motivation are critical factors that shape work culture and, consequently, affect the overall quality of education [7–9]. These studies underscore the importance of leadership in providing recognition and motivation, which are essential in enhancing teacher performance and creating a supportive work culture [10, 11].

To better understand the relationships between principal appreciation, motivation, and work culture, this study is grounded in Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory and Transformational Leadership Theory. Herzberg's theory distinguishes between motivators (such as achievement and recognition) and hygiene factors (like working conditions and salary), suggesting that principal appreciation and motivation serve as key motivators that drive positive work culture and teacher satisfaction. On the other hand, Transformational Leadership Theory emphasizes the role of leaders in inspiring and motivating their followers by creating a vision and fostering an environment of trust and collaboration. In this context, school principals who demonstrate appreciation and motivation can inspire teachers, increase their job satisfaction, and promote a culture of excellence in the school. Together, these theoretical frameworks provide a foundation for understanding how principal leadership influences the work culture in vocational schools.

The educational situation in South Aceh District presents a unique set of challenges for vocational schools. In this region, a mix of rural and urban areas often leads to issues like limited access to modern teaching resources, poor infrastructure, and a lack of professional development for teachers. These problems can negatively impact teacher morale and effectiveness, especially in vocational schools, where it is important to align education with the needs of the job market. Teachers in these schools face the added pressure of

helping students gain practical skills that will help them succeed in a changing economy. Additionally, the local culture and socio-economic conditions can affect how leadership practices, such as appreciation and motivation, are understood and applied in schools. Despite these challenges, there is little research on how school leadership, particularly principal appreciation and motivation, impacts the work culture in vocational schools in this region. This study aims to fill that gap by looking at how leadership in South Aceh can create a positive work environment, help teachers perform better, and improve the overall success of schools.

In vocational education, which is closely tied to societal needs and economic development, the role of teachers becomes even more strategic. Teachers in vocational schools are responsible for equipping students with practical skills that align with labor market demands. Given this responsibility, fostering a positive work culture is essential for ensuring that teachers perform effectively and adapt to changes in the educational environment. A work culture driven by appreciation and motivation from school leadership can significantly enhance teacher engagement, morale, and overall effectiveness.

This study aims to explore the impact of principal appreciation and motivation on the work culture of vocational school teachers in South Aceh District. Specifically, the research will focus on four key objectives. First, it seeks to examine the influence of principal appreciation on the work culture of vocational school teachers. Second, the study will assess how principal motivation affects teachers' work culture. Third, it aims to explore the combined effects of both appreciation and motivation on teachers' overall performance and professional responsibilities. Lastly, the study will investigate the role of school leadership in shaping a supportive and dynamic work environment for teachers in vocational schools within South Aceh District. These objectives will guide the investigation into how leadership practices, particularly appreciation and motivation, contribute to the creation of a positive and productive work culture in vocational education.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Approach

This study employs a quantitative research approach, which involves the use of statistical procedures or other quantitative techniques for data analysis [12]. The research was conducted using a survey method, with data collected through questionnaires distributed to vocational school teachers. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to explore the relationships between the variables.

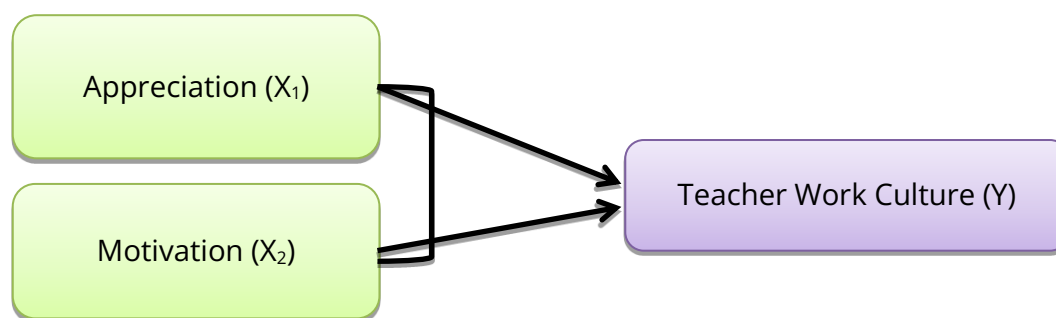


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of this study.

Table 1. The distribution of sample across the five schools.

No	School Name	Total Teachers	Sample Size
1	SMK Negeri 1 Kluet Selatan	43	31
2	SMK Negeri 1 Pasie Raja	34	24
3	SMK Negeri 1 Tapaktuan	32	22
4	SMK Negeri 1 Meukek	12	8
5	SMK Negeri 1 Labuhan Haji	36	25
Total		158	113

The study focuses on three key variables: two independent variables, principal appreciation (X_1) and motivation (X_2), and the dependent variable, teacher work culture (Y). A conceptual framework was developed to guide the research, illustrating the relationship between these variables (Figure 1).

2.2. Research Location and Time

The study was conducted in five vocational schools in South Aceh District, Indonesia. These schools were selected based on accessibility and geographical distribution. The selected schools represent a diverse range of educational environments, though logistical constraints limited the study to five schools. The research was conducted from January to March 2024.

2.3. Population and Sample

The study's population comprised all teachers and principals from five selected vocational schools, totaling 158 individuals. To determine the sample size, Slovin's formula was utilized, providing a 5% margin of error, which resulted in a sample size of 113 respondents. Slovin's formula was chosen for its simplicity and effectiveness in calculating sample size for small to medium populations when the population variance is unknown, offering a pragmatic approach to ensure statistical reliability with a limited number of participants. The sample was drawn using simple random sampling, giving every individual an equal opportunity to be included, thus reducing selection bias. The distribution of this sample across the five schools is detailed in Table 1.

2.4. Research Instruments

The primary instrument for this study was a questionnaire designed to collect data on principal appreciation, motivation, and teacher work culture. The questionnaire utilized a five-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." The development of the questionnaire involved several methodological steps. Initially, items were generated through an extensive literature review focusing on theories related to principal leadership, motivation, and organizational culture in schools. These items were then reviewed by a panel of experts in educational psychology and management to ensure content validity. Their feedback was crucial in refining the questionnaire to accurately reflect the intended constructs [13].

2.5. Data Collection Techniques

2.5.1. Questionnaire

Data were collected primarily through an online and hard copy questionnaire distributed to the selected teachers. The online questionnaire was created using Google Forms for ease of distribution, while hard copies were provided where necessary. The questionnaire included closed-ended questions designed to assess respondents' perceptions of principal appreciation, motivation, and their work culture.

2.5.2. Observation

Observations were conducted to supplement the data collected from the questionnaires, providing additional

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for principal appreciation, principal motivation, and teacher work culture.

Statistic	Principal Appreciation	Principal Motivation	Teacher Work Culture
Mean	38.15	53.92	57.23
Standard Error	0.24	0.41	0.35
Median	38	54	57
Mode	37	54	56
Standard Deviation	3.02	5.17	4.43
Minimum	32	38	42
Maximum	45	65	67

context on the school environment and leadership practices. This method allowed the researcher to directly observe school culture and leadership dynamics, helping to validate the data collected through the questionnaires.

2.5.3. Documentation

Documentation was used as a secondary data collection technique, gathering information such as school records, reports, and other relevant materials. These documents provided additional insights into the work environment and leadership practices within the schools.

2.6. Data Validity and Reliability

To validate the questionnaire, it was pilot tested with a small, representative sample from educational institutions not included in the main study. This pilot phase was essential for evaluating the clarity, relevance, and reliability of the items. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha to confirm internal consistency within the constructs. Items that did not meet the reliability criteria were either revised or removed. Following this, the questionnaire was finalized based on the pilot test outcomes and expert suggestions, ensuring both validity and reliability. This thorough process guaranteed that the questionnaire effectively measured the key aspects of principal appreciation, motivation, and teacher work culture in the study's context.

2.7. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this study followed a structured process, beginning with data cleaning and coding. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the basic features of the data, while inferential statistics were employed to test hypotheses.

Simple linear regression was used to analyze the relationship between principal appreciation and teacher work culture, as well as between principal motivation and teacher work culture. The goal was to determine whether these independent variables significantly predict changes in the dependent variable.

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the combined effect of principal appreciation and motivation on teacher work culture. This method helps to

identify the extent to which both independent variables jointly influence the dependent variable [11].

The coefficient of determination (R^2) was calculated to determine how much variation in teacher work culture can be explained by principal appreciation and motivation. This analysis helps to understand the predictive power of the independent variables.

An F-test was conducted to assess the overall significance of the regression model. This test determines whether the independent variables, when taken together, have a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable.

2.8. Hypothesis Testing

The hypotheses were tested using regression analysis, employing the following decision criteria: if the p-value is less than 0.05, the hypothesis is accepted, indicating a significant relationship between the variables. Conversely, if the p-value is greater than 0.05, the hypothesis is rejected, suggesting no significant relationship between the variables.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Research Results

This study focused on three main variables: principal appreciation, principal motivation, and teacher work culture. The data were collected from 158 vocational school teachers in South Aceh District through a questionnaire consisting of 42 items, each measured using a Likert scale. The responses were analyzed to identify the relationship between the independent variables (principal appreciation and principal motivation) and the dependent variable (teacher work culture). The analysis of the data is summarized in [Table 2](#). These statistics provide an overview of how teachers rated the levels of appreciation and motivation they received from their principals and how they perceived their work culture.

The principal appreciation variable was measured using 26 items in the questionnaire, with a maximum possible score of 130 and a minimum score of 26. The data analysis yielded a mean score of 38.15 (SD = 3.02),

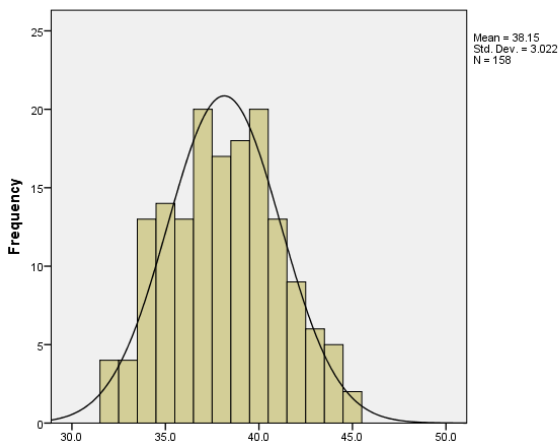


Figure 2. Histogram of appreciation scores.

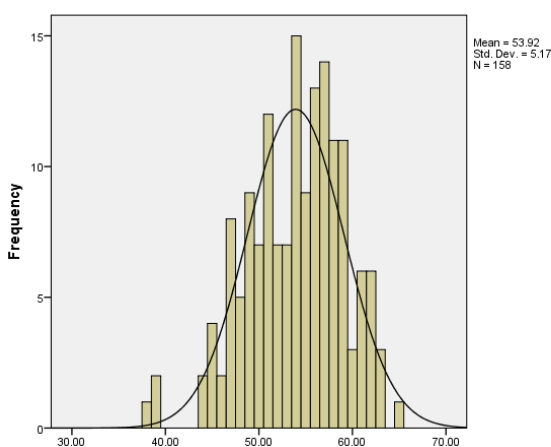


Figure 3. Histogram of motivation scores.

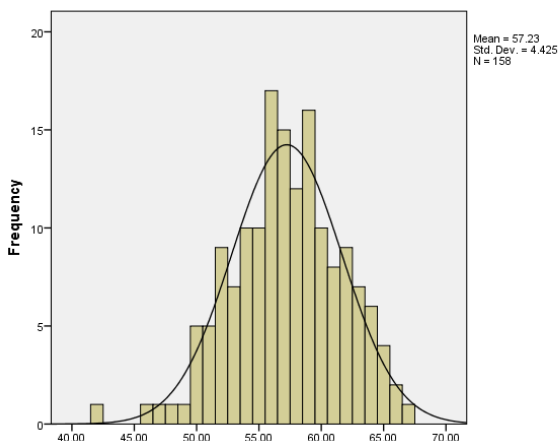


Figure 4. Histogram of work culture scores.

indicating that teachers generally felt moderately appreciated by their principals. While the score suggests that principals are making some efforts to recognize teachers' contributions, the moderate standard deviation of 3.02 points to variability in how different teachers perceived this appreciation. Some teachers may feel highly appreciated, while others may not perceive as much recognition. Principal appreciation was measured in terms of both extrinsic (e.g., public recognition,

rewards, and tangible incentives) and intrinsic appreciation (e.g., personal feedback, acknowledgment in private). This blend of extrinsic and intrinsic factors is crucial, as teachers often respond positively when their work is recognized in meaningful ways that go beyond mere rewards. The normal distribution of appreciation scores (Figure 2) suggests a consistent pattern in teacher responses, with most perceiving their level of appreciation as falling within a similar range.

The variable principal motivation was also measured using 26 items in the same questionnaire. This variable encompassed various dimensions of motivation, such as achievement, recognition, work itself, advancement, and responsibility. The mean score for principal motivation was 53.92 (SD = 5.17), which indicates that teachers generally view their principals as effective motivators. A high motivation score suggests that principals are actively involved in promoting a work environment where teachers feel driven to achieve and excel in their roles. This is particularly important in the school context, where motivated teachers are more likely to create dynamic and engaging learning environments for their students. However, the standard deviation of 5.17 points to greater variability in teachers' perceptions of their principals' motivational efforts, meaning that while some teachers feel strongly motivated, others may not experience the same level of encouragement. The distribution of scores for principal motivation was also normal, as evidenced by the histogram in Figure 3, reinforcing that most teachers rated this aspect similarly, but there are notable differences in individual experiences.

Finally, teacher work culture was measured using 16 items designed to capture various elements of the school environment, including discipline, openness, mutual respect, and collaboration among teachers. The mean score for teacher work culture was 57.23 (SD = 4.43), suggesting that teachers generally view their work culture positively. A positive work culture score indicates that vocational schools in South Aceh District are fostering environments where teachers feel supported by their peers and leadership. High levels of openness and mutual respect, in particular, contribute to a collaborative culture, which is essential for effective teamwork in schools. The relatively low standard deviation (4.43) for this variable suggests that there is less variability in teachers' perceptions of the work culture compared to the other two variables. This may indicate that most schools in the district have a relatively consistent work culture, which teachers find supportive and conducive to their professional growth. The normal distribution of responses (as shown in Figure 4) further supports this

Table 3. Hypothesis testing results for principal appreciation and principal motivation.

Model	r	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Standard Error	t-Statistic	p-Value
Principal Appreciation	0.341	0.116	0.105	4.19	11.897	0.001
Principal Motivation	0.340	0.116	0.105	4.19	11.897	0.001

Table 4. Hypothesis testing results for the combined effect of principal appreciation and motivation.

Model	r	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error
Combined (Appreciation & Motivation)	0.341	0.116	0.106	4.19

conclusion, with most teachers reporting similar experiences regarding their work environment.

3.2. Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis testing results regarding the influence of principal appreciation and principal motivation on teacher work culture. Simple and multiple regression analyses were conducted to test these relationships, with the findings summarized in Table 3. The analysis reveals important insights into how these two leadership factors impact teacher work culture in vocational schools.

The first analysis focused on how principal appreciation influences teacher work culture. The results showed that principal appreciation has a positive and significant effect on teacher work culture, with a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.341. The R² value of 0.116 means that 11.6% of the variation in teacher work culture can be explained by how much teachers feel appreciated by their principals. The p-value ($p < 0.001$) indicates that this relationship is statistically significant, meaning that principal appreciation plays a meaningful role in shaping a positive school work environment.

Similarly, the second analysis examined the impact of principal motivation on teacher work culture. The findings showed a strong and significant relationship, with a correlation coefficient of 0.34. As with appreciation, the R² value of 0.116 suggests that principal motivation explains 11.6% of the variation in teacher work culture. The significance level ($p < 0.001$) confirms that principal motivation is a key factor in fostering a positive and productive school culture.

The identical R² values (0.116) for both principal appreciation and motivation present an intriguing finding, as one might typically expect these leadership factors to demonstrate different levels of influence on teacher work culture. This similarity suggests that there may be underlying factors or shared dynamics that drive their impact on teacher work culture in comparable ways.

One potential explanation is the presence of shared influence between appreciation and motivation. These factors may be closely intertwined conceptually or behaviorally. For instance, when principals demonstrate

appreciation for teachers, it could naturally enhance teachers' motivation, creating overlapping effects on teacher work culture. This connection suggests that appreciation and motivation may work in tandem rather than as entirely separate constructs.

Another explanation could involve underlying contextual factors that simultaneously influence both appreciation and motivation. Variables such as the overall school climate, the strength of teacher-principal relationships, or organizational culture could play a role in shaping both appreciation and motivation. These broader environmental factors may contribute to their seemingly equal explanatory power for teacher work culture.

Finally, the finding could reflect the fact that appreciation and motivation often operate as complementary aspects of leadership. Both factors might tap into the same foundational elements of teacher engagement and satisfaction, which would result in similar impacts on work culture. Their individual effects may appear identical because they are both part of a larger leadership approach that holistically influences the school environment.

To assess the combined effect of both appreciation and motivation, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. The results are summarized in Table 4. The analysis revealed that when both principal appreciation and motivation are considered together, they explain 11.6% (R² = 0.116) of the variation in teacher work culture. This indicates that both factors together contribute to the work environment but with a smaller effect size than initially stated. The adjusted R² of 0.106 suggests that after accounting for the number of predictors, approximately 10.6% of the variance in teacher work culture can be explained by these variables.

The F-statistic for the combined model was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), confirming that the combined effects of appreciation and motivation are meaningful in shaping teacher work culture. However, the standard error of 4.19 indicates variability in the data that is not accounted for by the model.

Based on the results, 88.4% of the variance in teacher work culture remains unexplained by principal

appreciation and motivation. Several other factors may contribute to this unexplained variance. These include organizational support, such as the availability of resources and professional development, which can influence teachers' perceptions of their environment. Strong collegial relationships and collaboration among staff also play a significant role, as does managing workload and stress levels, which can affect teachers' job satisfaction. Furthermore, the leadership style of principals, particularly their ability to communicate effectively and make collaborative decisions, impacts work culture. School policies, including those related to discipline and teacher autonomy, also contribute, as well as external factors like student behavior, parental support, and societal attitudes toward education.

3.2. Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that both principal appreciation and principal motivation have significant and positive effects on teacher work culture in vocational schools. These findings contribute to the growing body of research on school leadership and its impact on creating a productive and supportive work environment for teachers. To effectively implement these findings, school leaders should adopt specific strategies for demonstrating appreciation and providing motivation. Principals can show appreciation through regular, personalized recognition of teachers' contributions, such as public acknowledgment during meetings, handwritten notes, or small rewards for outstanding performance. Providing opportunities for professional growth, offering constructive feedback, and fostering a sense of respect for teachers' expertise also communicate appreciation. Regarding motivation, principals should create a culture of growth by supporting teachers' professional development through training programs, mentorship, and clear paths for career advancement. Additionally, encouraging a collaborative environment, where teachers feel part of decision-making processes and have the autonomy to innovate in their teaching practices, can enhance motivation and engagement.

The study also reveals that principal motivation and appreciation are essential for improving teacher work culture, and these effects are amplified when both factors are present. This combination creates a dynamic, collaborative, and productive school environment where teachers feel valued and empowered [14]. These findings align with existing literature, which emphasizes the importance of principals balancing both administrative duties and the role of motivating and appreciating staff [15].

Furthermore, it is crucial to consider how these findings relate specifically to the cultural context of South Aceh's educational system. Indonesian educational culture, particularly in areas like South Aceh, places a strong emphasis on respect for authority and hierarchical structures within schools [16]. Principals are often viewed as figures of authority and guidance, which means that appreciation and motivation may be best received when they align with the culturally embedded norms of respect and deference. In this context, principals should be mindful of how they communicate their appreciation and motivation to teachers, ensuring that it reflects the local cultural expectations. For instance, in South Aceh, public acknowledgment in formal settings such as school assemblies may be more effective than informal methods, as respect for authority is an essential value. Additionally, motivating teachers by providing clear leadership and stability, as well as demonstrating commitment to the local community, can further enhance teacher morale and work culture in South Aceh's educational system.

By understanding the intersection of these leadership practices and the cultural values of South Aceh, school principals can implement more tailored strategies to foster a positive work environment. This culturally sensitive approach to leadership will not only improve teacher satisfaction but also contribute to overall school performance, aligning with the broader goals of creating an educational system that values both professional growth and cultural respect.

4. Conclusions

This study highlights the significant impact of principal appreciation and motivation on fostering a positive work culture among vocational school teachers in South Aceh District. The findings demonstrate that both appreciation and motivation play crucial roles in shaping the work environment, enhancing collaboration, teacher engagement, and overall performance. Principals who effectively recognize and motivate their teachers not only create a supportive and dynamic work culture but also promote higher levels of teacher satisfaction and professional growth. By adopting a leadership approach that balances both appreciation and motivation, school leaders can contribute significantly to improving the quality of education and advancing school performance. These results reinforce the importance of strong, motivational leadership in creating thriving educational environments.

Our study shows that how principals show appreciation and motivate teachers really matters in shaping the work culture in vocational schools in South Aceh. Both

appreciation and motivation from principals significantly boost the work culture, with each explaining 11.6% of the change when looked at alone, and 34.1% together. This means that the way principals lead is key to creating a good environment for teachers, which helps improve educational outcomes.

Education policies should focus more on training principals to appreciate and motivate their teachers. This could include teaching them how to give feedback that feels personal and meaningful. In South Aceh, policies could introduce reward systems for principals who do well in creating positive school cultures. For practical steps, principals should make it a habit to celebrate teachers' successes publicly or in meetings. They can also offer more chances for teachers to grow professionally through workshops or leading projects, which can keep motivation high by giving teachers more say in what happens at school.

This study was done over just a few months, which might not show how these effects change over time or with different seasons. Also, with only five schools, our results might not apply everywhere in South Aceh or Indonesia. For future research, it would be good to look at these effects over longer periods or compare schools in different areas to see if location matters. Another idea is to study how cultural aspects in South Aceh might affect how teachers perceive appreciation and motivation.

This research tackles the real issues in South Aceh's schools, like not enough resources or support for teachers. By focusing on how principals show appreciation and motivate, we can help solve these problems. A good leadership approach can make teachers feel better about their jobs and perform better, which in turn helps students learn skills needed for jobs in the area and beyond.

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Informed Consent Statement: Written informed consent has been obtained from the respondents to publish this paper.

Data Availability Statement: The data supporting this study is available upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest: All the authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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