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Teacher Work Motivation in the Post-COVID-19 Era: A Descriptive Study at Vocational High Schools in East Padang in Support of SDG 4 (Quality Education)

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ABSTRACT

Objective: *To analyze the level of teachers' work motivation after the COVID-19 pandemic in vocational high schools in East Padang and to examine its implications for improving educational quality. The findings are expected to provide evidence-based recommendations for strengthening teacher motivation as an essential component in achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: Quality Education.* ***Method:*** *A descriptive quantitative research design. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed to teachers at vocational high schools in East Padang. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques to determine the level of teachers' work motivation based on several motivational indicators.* ***Results:*** *The findings indicate that the overall level of teachers' work motivation reached an achievement score of 78%, which falls within the fairly high category. Responsibility, perseverance, independence, and work enthusiasm contributed positively to teachers' motivation; however, several aspects still require improvement. The study also highlights the important role of school principals in enhancing teachers' motivation through supportive leadership, adequate facilities, and appropriate incentive systems. Strengthening teachers' motivation is expected to improve teaching quality and student learning outcomes, thereby supporting the realization of inclusive and quality education.* ***Novelty:*** *The study provides recent empirical evidence regarding teachers' work motivation in the post-COVID-19 educational context at vocational high schools in Indonesia. Unlike previous studies that primarily examined teacher motivation before or during the pandemic, this research specifically focuses on post-pandemic conditions and emphasizes the importance of school leadership in sustaining teacher motivation. Furthermore, the study links teacher motivation with the achievement of SDG 4, highlighting its contribution to improving educational quality and promoting sustainable educational development.*

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected education management and education policies around the world (Rahman et al., 2021). In an effort to control the spread of COVID-19, most countries have had to take drastic measures, including the physical closure of schools. This forced education systems to adapt quickly and resulted in a number of influential changes. Firstly, many countries turned to distance learning platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet, which required adequate digital infrastructure and internet access. This access gap raised issues of inequality in education. Secondly, curricula and teaching methods had to be adapted to online learning, requiring additional teacher training. Thirdly, the pandemic also disrupted economic stability, which resulted in reductions in education budgets and consequently affected the quality of education. Thus, COVID-19 fundamentally changed the way education is managed and prompted changes in education policy to address the challenges faced in education (Andriani et al., 2018; Mincu, 2015).

After the COVID-19 pandemic ended, educational policies and management patterns also changed. Changes in the learning environment and conditions after the pandemic became an important area for study and evaluation. One aspect requiring evaluation is

how students' learning outcomes changed in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes during online learning. The transition back to face-to-face learning is particularly important to observe. Therefore, research on the effectiveness of post-COVID-19 learning is needed to provide an overview of the return to normal teaching and learning processes and to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum being implemented (Tarkar, 2020). Furthermore, effective strategies are needed to support the transition into the post-pandemic period (Harmban et al., 2021).

These changes have also altered work habits and working patterns. In the field of education, teachers continue to face challenges during the recovery period following the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges include adapting learning methods, work culture and climate, work motivation, and work discipline (Dwivedi et al., 2020).An essential component of education is the teacher. The effectiveness of teachers determines the success of education. As the driving force behind educational success, teachers play a crucial and strategic role in helping students become independent and mature individuals. A teacher's optimal performance reflects their contribution to developing high-quality learners (Sudarjat et al., 2015). Since teachers are at the forefront of implementing educational practices, they play a crucial role in improving the quality of education. In other words, teachers have the greatest influence on the quality of educational processes and learning outcomes (Heale & Twycross, 2015).

The ability of teachers to design learning activities that meet school requirements, implement effective learning, assess learning outcomes, and guide students are all indicators of high teacher performance. Teacher performance refers to the ability of teachers to carry out their professional responsibilities effectively, as reflected in the achievement of learning objectives (Gouëdard et al., 2020). Teacher performance has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic through changes in educational policies, practices, and organizational culture. Therefore, special attention should be given to improving teacher performance to develop high-quality human resources. Darazha et al. (2021) stated that digital competence became one of the major challenges faced by teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers need this competence to conduct learning effectively during and after the pandemic because they are expected to maintain high performance while implementing online learning. This situation also influences teachers' work motivation. Motivation is an internal drive that encourages individuals to perform certain actions. One of the important factors influencing teacher performance is work motivation. Work motivation refers to an individual's internal drive to complete tasks with perseverance, enthusiasm, discipline, and responsibility (Maryani et al., 2021; Hakim, 2015).

Teacher work motivation refers to the encouragement that drives teachers to accomplish their work and achieve organizational goals (Kunter et al., 2013). It is assumed that every teacher is willing to work hard and enthusiastically to achieve high productivity; therefore, motivation plays a crucial role (Nassaji, 2015). Through strong work motivation, teachers are encouraged to complete their responsibilities on time and in accordance with established plans and objectives. Teachers' motivation has a substantial influence on their performance. Teachers with high motivation tend to carry out their responsibilities seriously, whereas teachers with low motivation are less likely to perform optimally. Therefore, research on teachers' work motivation in vocational high schools during the post-COVID-19 period remains important.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design. Descriptive research is conducted to examine a particular condition or phenomenon and present the findings systematically in the form of a research report (Ahmad et al., 2019; Bocanet et al., 2021). A quantitative approach is used to investigate a research population or sample by collecting and analyzing numerical data (Ahmad, 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2020).

This study was conducted at SMK Negeri Padang Timur. The study population consisted of 197 teachers employed at the school. The sample size was determined using the Cochran formula with a 10% margin of error, and the participants were selected using a proportional stratified random sampling technique. Based on these procedures, a total of 72 teachers were included in the study.

The research instrument was a questionnaire developed using a five-point Likert scale (Tennant et al., 2007). The validity and reliability of the instrument were tested using IBM SPSS Statistics version 23. Heale and Twycross (2015) explained that validity and reliability testing is essential to ensure that research instruments accurately measure the intended constructs and produce consistent results. The findings of the validity and reliability tests confirmed that the work motivation instrument met the required standards. After the data were collected and processed, the achievement scores were interpreted. The interpreted findings were subsequently discussed by comparing them with relevant literature and previous studies (Ritchie et al., 2015).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Based on the results of research conducted at State Vocational High School Padang Timur by distributing questionnaires to research samples, it is known that the percentage of achievement scores for teacher motivation after the Covid 19 pandemic is 78% with a fairly high interpretation. For more details, it can be seen in the table below:

Table 1. Average score of work motivation post Covid-19

Variable	Indikator	Average	Achievement Level	Category
Motivation	1. Responsibility	34.26	76.13%	High enough
	2. Perseverance	20.6	82.4%	High
	3. Independence	17.72	70.88%	High enough
	4. Work Spirit	24.86	82.86%	High
Average Score		97.44	78%	High enough

Discussion

Based on the table above, it can be concluded that the responsibility indicator is classified as a fairly high interpretation with an achievement of 76.13%, the perseverance indicator reached 82.40% with a high interpretation, the independence indicator reached 70.88% with a fairly high interpretation, and the work spirit indicator reached 82.86% with a high interpretation (Purnama et al., 2020). Overall, all indicators are classified as having a fairly high level of interpretation in carrying out teachers' work. Although the overall level is fairly high, teachers should continue to maintain and improve their work motivation. Higher work motivation is associated with better teacher performance; therefore, when teachers' motivation increases, their performance is also expected to improve (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

In line with this finding, Hakim (2015) stated that one of the factors affecting an individual's performance is work motivation. Teacher motivation plays a crucial role in education. Motivated teachers tend to be more enthusiastic in teaching, more

innovative in selecting instructional methods, and more concerned about students' development. High work motivation also contributes to improving the quality of learning because motivated teachers are more willing to seek new ways to inspire students and help them achieve their full potential. Furthermore, teacher motivation has a direct influence on students' well-being because motivated teachers provide greater attention and support, enabling students to achieve better academic performance (Lackéus, 2020). Therefore, teacher motivation is not only essential for improving educational quality but also plays an important role in shaping future generations (Tlili et al., 2022).

Teacher work motivation plays a vital role in improving the quality of education. Teachers with high motivation tend to be more dedicated to teaching and interacting with students (Licorish et al., 2018). They are more willing to make additional efforts to improve students' learning outcomes, create a positive learning environment, and encourage students to achieve their full potential. Therefore, teachers' work motivation is one of the key factors in developing a high-quality education system and fostering competent and high-potential graduates (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

Numerous previous studies have demonstrated that motivation has a significant effect on teacher performance. Rahman et al. (2021) found that work motivation positively affected teacher performance among public elementary school teachers in the Medan Area District, Medan City. Likewise, Ahmad et al. (2019) reported that motivation contributed 73.5% to teacher performance, while the remaining 26.5% was explained by other factors. Similarly, Wartulas et al. (2022) found that work motivation had a positive and significant effect on the performance of RA teachers in Pekalongan City. These findings indicate that improvements in teacher work motivation are likely to be followed by improvements in teacher performance.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding: This study found that the work motivation of teachers at vocational high schools in East Padang after the COVID-19 pandemic reached an achievement level of 78%, indicating a fairly high level of motivation. However, continuous efforts are still needed to strengthen teachers' responsibility, perseverance, independence, and work enthusiasm to improve educational quality in support of SDG 4 (Quality Education). **Implication:** These findings imply that school principals and educational stakeholders should strengthen teacher motivation through supportive leadership, adequate facilities, professional development, and appropriate incentive systems to improve teacher performance and learning quality. **Limitation :** This study was limited to vocational high schools in East Padang and employed a descriptive quantitative approach, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts. **Future Research :** Future studies are recommended to involve broader research settings and examine additional factors influencing teacher motivation, such as leadership, organizational culture, job satisfaction, and teacher well-being using more comprehensive research designs.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Syahril contributed to the conceptualization, research design, data collection, formal analysis, interpretation of the findings, and drafting of the manuscript. **Ahmad Sabandi** contributed to the methodology development, validation process, supervision, critical review, and manuscript editing. **Sulastri** contributed to the literature review, data

management, project administration, and manuscript revision. All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of this manuscript prior to submission.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors confirm that there are no conflicts of interest, either financial or personal, that may have influenced the content or outcome of this study.

ETHICAL COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

This manuscript complies with research and publication ethics. The authors affirm that the work is original, conducted with academic integrity, and free from any unethical practices, including plagiarism.

STATEMENT ON THE USE OF AI OR DIGITAL TOOLS IN WRITING

The authors acknowledge the use of digital tools, including AI-based technologies, as support during the research and writing stages of this article. Specifically, OpenAI was used to assist with language editing, improving academic writing quality, and enhancing the clarity and readability of the manuscript, while Grammarly was used for grammar, spelling, punctuation, and writing style checks. All outputs generated with digital assistance were critically evaluated, verified, and revised by the authors to ensure academic rigor, accuracy, and compliance with ethical publishing standards. The final responsibility for the content, interpretation, and conclusions presented in this manuscript rests entirely with the authors.

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