

THE INFLUENCE OF PRINCIPALS' INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION ON TEACHER PERFORMANCE IN INTEGRATED ISLAMIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Effective leadership in Islamic elementary schools is a crucial issue, as principals' interpersonal communication plays a central role in shaping teacher professionalism, motivation, and instructional performance. This study examines the influence of principals' interpersonal communication on teacher performance in Integrated Islamic elementary schools (IIES) in Indonesia. The research employed a quantitative approach using an ex-post facto survey design, with data analyzed through correlation and regression techniques. Questionnaires were administered to 78 teachers selected through random sampling, and the data were processed using SPSS version 25. The results demonstrate that principals' interpersonal communication has a significant, positive, and very strong effect on teacher performance, accounting for 79.3% of the variance, while the remaining 20.7% is influenced by other factors not explored in this study. The regression analysis produced the equation $Y = 16.111 + 1.845X$, indicating that improvements in interpersonal communication are associated with substantial increases in teacher performance. The findings also suggest that clear, supportive, and collaborative communication practices foster a more productive and professional teaching environment. These results imply that strengthening principals' interpersonal communication competencies is a strategic priority for improving teacher performance and enhancing the quality of Islamic education in elementary schools.

Keywords: Interpersonal Communication, Integrated Islamic Elementary Schools, Islamic Education Management, Principal Leadership, Teacher Performance

INTRODUCTION

In the global era marked by rapid technological change, educational competition, and increasing accountability, countries are required to develop human resources who are productive, adaptive, and morally grounded (Suyato et al., 2025). Education systems worldwide face growing pressure to improve learning outcomes, teacher effectiveness, and institutional performance as a foundation for national development (Sass et al., 2025; Fabelico & Afalla, 2023; Omal & Akala, 2018). In this context, teachers are widely recognized as a decisive factor in educational quality, as their performance directly influences student achievement and learning success (Childs et al., 2025; Greathouse et al., 2019; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010). Consequently, strengthening teacher performance has become a strategic priority in both developed and developing countries, including Indonesia, where educational quality continues to lag behind several neighboring nations (Renata et al., 2018; Erturk & Akgun, 2021).

Within Indonesia, the challenge of improving teacher performance is particularly salient in Islamic educational institutions, which carry a dual mandate: delivering academic excellence while cultivating moral and spiritual values (Walid et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2022). Teachers occupy a central position in the teaching and learning process and are expected to demonstrate professional competence, commitment, and responsibility in fulfilling their educational roles (Asvial et al., 2021; Ibrahim & Aljneibi, 2022; Rohim et al., 2023). Previous studies consistently show that teacher performance is closely linked not only to individual competence but also to institutional leadership and organizational conditions that support effective teaching (Kurniati et al., 2020; Tezer & Süt, 2017; Kultsum et al., 2022). This underscores the importance of leadership practices that are capable of fostering motivation, trust, and professionalism among teachers (Eranil et al., 2026).

School principals play a strategic role as leaders and decision-makers who shape school culture, organizational effectiveness, and teacher performance. Through managerial behavior, supervision, and leadership practices, principals influence instructional quality and school productivity (Agasisti et al., 2020; Kaya, 2023; Alyafei & Malkawi, 2024). Leadership in educational institutions is enacted largely through communication, as leaders rely on communication processes to convey vision, coordinate activities, and motivate subordinates (Nordin et al., 2014; Johansson, 2018; Chłopicki & Laineste, 2019). Interpersonal communication, in particular, is fundamental in school settings where collaboration, trust, and continuous interaction between principals and teachers are essential (DeVito, 2016; Stehle et al., 2020). Effective communication enables principals to listen to teachers' concerns, provide constructive feedback, and build supportive professional relationships.

A growing body of literature has examined the relationship between school leadership, organizational commitment, and teacher performance. Studies have explored leadership effectiveness, instructional leadership, and organizational commitment as predictors of teacher and school performance (Awonyi, 2021; Noor & Nawab, 2022; Tintoré et al., 2022; Meyer et al., 2019; Memduhoğlu & Karataş, 2017). Other research has highlighted the importance of communication climate, trust, and relational interaction in organizational settings (Brunetto & Farr-Wharton, 2004; Penley & Hawkins, 1985; Henttonen & Blomqvist, 2005). However, much of this research treats communication as a supporting element of leadership rather than as a distinct construct. In educational contexts, empirical studies that specifically examine principals' interpersonal communication as an independent variable influencing teacher performance remain limited.

This gap is particularly evident in Islamic elementary schools, where leadership is expected to integrate managerial effectiveness with Islamic values such as *amanah* (trustworthiness), *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), and *musyawarah* (consultation) (Chi, 1996; Karim et al., 2022; Hambali et al., 2024). Although prior studies on Islamic educational leadership have emphasized spiritual, charismatic, and managerial dimensions (Karim et al., 2020; Karim et al., 2023), limited attention has been paid to how principals' interpersonal communication practices directly influence teacher performance. Addressing this theoretical and empirical gap, the present study examines the effect of principals' interpersonal communication on teacher performance in IIES in Indonesia, positioning interpersonal communication as a strategic and independent leadership factor through which Islamic values are enacted in daily school practices, and contributing empirical evidence to inform leadership development and quality improvement in Islamic educational institutions.

METHOD

This study is grounded in an integrated theoretical framework combining interpersonal communication theory, leadership communication theory, and Islamic educational leadership

perspectives. Interpersonal communication theory, as articulated by Joseph A. DeVito, conceptualizes principals' communication as relational interactions characterized by openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality. This perspective is complemented by leadership communication theory, which emphasizes that leadership is enacted through communication and that leaders shape meaning, commitment, and performance through everyday communicative practices (Johansson, 2018; Tezer & Süt, 2017). To contextualize these theories within Islamic elementary schools, this study adopts an Islamic educational leadership framework that views leadership as value-based and ethically grounded in *amanah* (trustworthiness), *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), and *musyawarah* (consultation) (Karim et al., 2020, 2022, 2023). Together, these frameworks provide a coherent foundation for examining principals' interpersonal communication as a leadership mechanism influencing teacher performance.

Methodologically, the study employed a quantitative approach with an ex-post facto survey design, using correlation and regression analyses in line with John W. Creswell. The participants were 78 teachers purposively selected from a population of 345 teachers across 35 IIES in Cirebon Regency, Indonesia, using a 10% margin of error. Data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire consisting of 38 items measuring principals' interpersonal communication and teacher performance, presented in Likert-scale, multiple-choice, and dichotomous formats. Content validity was reviewed by a panel of school leaders, followed by a pilot study conducted via Google Forms from June to July 2022, which led to minor revisions to item wording. The main data collection was carried out between December 2021 and June 2022, with ethical procedures ensuring voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality (Eungoo & Hwang, 2023). Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 25 through descriptive statistics and regression analysis, while open-ended responses were analyzed through coding and interpretive procedures consistent with the research objectives (Creswell, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the study's findings based on statistical analyses examining the relationship between principals' interpersonal communication and teacher performance in IIES. The results include descriptive statistics, assumption testing, correlation, and regression analyses to assess the strength, direction, and predictive effect of principals' interpersonal communication on teacher performance, providing empirical evidence to address the research objectives and inform the subsequent discussion.

Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to provide an overview of the two principal variables examined in this study, namely principals' interpersonal communication and teacher performance in Integrated Islamic elementary schools. The results show that principals' interpersonal communication scores ranged from 46 to 60, with a mean of 51.84 and a standard deviation of 2.67, indicating that teachers generally perceived principals' communication practices to be at a relatively high and consistent level.

Teacher performance scores ranged from 99 to 130, with a mean score of 113.20 and a standard deviation of 6.10. This suggests that, overall, teacher performance was perceived to be high, with moderate variation among respondents. In addition, the close alignment of the mean, median, and mode values for both variables, together with acceptable skewness and kurtosis indices, indicates that the data were normally distributed. These descriptive results suggest a positive tendency in both principals' interpersonal communication and teacher performance, providing an empirical basis for subsequent inferential analyses.

Table 1. Summary of SPSS Analysis Results

Variable	Total Items	Valid Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Mean	Std. Dev	R-Square	Contribution (%)
Interpersonal Communication (X)	12	12	0.87	51.84	2.67	0.793	79.3
Teacher Performance (Y)	12	12	0.89	113.2	6.10	—	—

Table 1 summarizes the results of the instrument validation, reliability testing, and descriptive analysis for both research variables. All questionnaire items were found to be valid, and the reliability coefficients exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency for both principals' interpersonal communication ($\alpha = 0.87$) and teacher performance ($\alpha = 0.89$). The table also presents the mean and standard deviation values, which further confirm the stability and consistency of the measured variables. Collectively, these results demonstrate that the data are suitable for further analysis and support the use of correlation and regression techniques to examine the influence of principals' interpersonal communication on teacher performance.

Descriptive Analysis of Principals' Interpersonal Communication

Principals' interpersonal communication was examined descriptively to capture teachers' perceptions in IIES using 12 validated items covering openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality. Overall, teachers perceived principals' interpersonal communication positively, indicating that communication practices were generally effective and relational in nature.

Interpersonal communication scores ranged from 46 to 60, with a mean of 51.84 and a low standard deviation ($SD = 2.67$), suggesting consistent perceptions across respondents. Teachers reported clear and attentive communication, constructive responses, and consistent expressions of empathy, support, respect, and inclusiveness. The concentration of scores in the upper range indicates that principals' interpersonal communication was rated as good to very good, providing an important context for its strong association with teacher performance in subsequent analyses.

Descriptive Analysis of Teacher Performance

Teacher performance in IIES was analyzed descriptively using 12 validated items covering instructional competence, professional responsibility, work motivation, and task execution. It was found to be at a high level. Scores ranged from 99 to 130 ($M = 113.20$, $SD = 6.10$), indicating strong overall performance with moderate variability, while teachers were perceived as well prepared, professionally responsible, and actively engaged in instructional tasks. The close alignment of the mean, median, and mode values, along with acceptable skewness and kurtosis, indicates a normal data distribution and provides a solid foundation for subsequent analyses examining the influence of principals' interpersonal communication on teacher performance.

Prior to conducting correlation and regression analyses, statistical assumption testing was performed to ensure the suitability of the data for parametric analysis. The normality of both principals' interpersonal communication and teacher performance variables was confirmed by the close alignment of the mean, median, and mode, as well as acceptable skewness and kurtosis indices. In addition, the relationship between the two variables exhibited a linear pattern, and the residuals showed constant variance across levels of the independent variable,

indicating that the assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity were met. Overall, these results confirm that the data satisfied the necessary assumptions for correlation and regression analysis, supporting the validity of subsequent inferential findings.

Furthermore, A correlation analysis was conducted to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between principals' interpersonal communication and teacher performance in Integrated Islamic elementary schools. The results reveal a strong and positive association between the two variables, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of $R = 0.890$, indicating a robust relationship. This positive correlation suggests that higher levels of principals' interpersonal communication are associated with higher levels of teacher performance.

Likewise, the significance test confirmed that this relationship was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the observed association is unlikely to have occurred by chance. Overall, these findings provide empirical evidence that principals' interpersonal communication is closely linked to variations in teacher performance and support further regression analysis to examine its predictive effect.

Regression Analysis of the Effect of Principals' Interpersonal Communication on Teacher Performance

Regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive effect of principals' interpersonal communication on teacher performance in Integrated Islamic elementary schools. The results produced a statistically significant linear model, expressed by the regression equation $Y = 16.111 + 1.845X$, indicating that principals' interpersonal communication is a strong predictor of teacher performance. The positive regression coefficient ($\beta = 1.845$) indicates that each unit increase in interpersonal communication is associated with a 1.845-point increase in teacher performance, with the effect confirmed as statistically significant by the t-test results ($t = 13.553$; $p < 0.05$).

The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.793$) further indicates that principals' interpersonal communication explains 79.3% of the variance in teacher performance, while the remaining 20.7% is attributable to other factors not examined in this study. These findings demonstrate that principals' interpersonal communication is not only significantly related to teacher performance but also functions as a strong and reliable predictor of teacher performance in Integrated Islamic elementary schools.

The findings of this study provide strong empirical evidence that principals' interpersonal communication has a significant and positive influence on teacher performance in IIES in Indonesia. The regression results demonstrate that principals' interpersonal communication accounts for 79.3% of the variance in teacher performance, indicating that communication is not a peripheral leadership skill but a central mechanism shaping teachers' professional behavior. This result supports interpersonal and leadership communication theories, which emphasize that leaders influence motivation, commitment, and performance primarily through daily communicative interactions rather than formal authority alone (Bambacas & Patrickson, 2008; Penley & Hawkins, 1985; Tezer & Süt, 2017).

From a leadership communication perspective, these findings reinforce the view that leadership is enacted through communication rather than merely supported by it. Downs and Adrian's (2004) total environment model explains that communication processes are embedded within broader organizational, cultural, and interpersonal contexts. In Islamic educational settings, communication is further shaped by religious norms and moral expectations, positioning principals not only as instructional and managerial leaders but also as ethical and spiritual role models (Karim et al., 2022; Radhi et al., 2025). Clear, empathetic, and consistent communication, therefore, becomes essential for aligning teachers with institutional goals,

values, and responsibilities, which helps explain the strong predictive power observed in this study.

The statistical robustness of the findings strengthens this interpretation. High internal consistency values for both principals' interpersonal communication ($\alpha = 0.87$) and teacher performance ($\alpha = 0.89$) confirm the reliability of the measurement instruments. Descriptive statistics indicate stable, high mean scores across variables, and the normal distribution of the data supports the validity of the regression model. The regression equation ($Y = 16.111 + 1.845X$) suggests that even incremental improvements in principals' interpersonal communication lead to meaningful gains in teacher performance, consistent with prior quantitative evidence linking leadership behavior to instructional effectiveness and organizational outcomes (Agasisti et al., 2020; Quinn, 2002; Kaya, 2023).

Interpersonal communication theory provides a robust framework for explaining why principals' communication exerts a strong influence on teacher performance. DeVito (2016) identifies openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality as core relational dimensions that foster trust, cooperation, and mutual understanding in organizational settings. These dimensions help explain how communication functions not merely as information exchange but as a relational process that shapes teachers' emotional engagement and professional behavior. Complementing this view, Robbins and Hunsaker's framework distinguishes leadership-oriented communication, communication process skills, and motivational communication as key drivers of employee performance, suggesting that effective leadership is realized through the quality and intentionality of everyday interactions rather than formal authority alone.

Within the Integrated Islamic Elementary School (IIES) contexts, these communicative dimensions are reinforced by Islamic leadership values such as *amanah* (trustworthiness), *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), and *musyawarah* (consultation). These values align closely with the relational principles emphasized in interpersonal communication theory, creating a synergistic effect that strengthens teachers' affective commitment and sense of professional responsibility (Chi, 1996; Karim et al., 2023; Rekan & Mokhtar, 2025). Communication in IIES thus operates simultaneously as a managerial tool and a moral practice, enabling principals to transmit institutional goals while embodying ethical and spiritual leadership expected in Islamic educational environments.

The findings of this study are consistent with and extend prior research in both general and Islamic educational contexts. Previous studies have demonstrated that effective principal-teacher communication supports organizational commitment, conflict management, and human resource development (Brunetto & Farr-Wharton, 2004; Parakhina & Bannikov, 2022). Educational leadership research similarly reports that strong communication practices enhance instructional quality, teacher engagement, and overall school effectiveness (Rasmani et al., 2021; Khartha et al., 2022; Noor & Nawab, 2022). This study contributes additional contextual insight by showing that, in IIES, interpersonal communication also serves as a pedagogical and moral medium through which religious values are integrated into professional expectations and daily school practices (Masitah et al., 2024; Walid et al., 2025).

Specific interpersonal communication behaviors emerge as particularly influential in this setting. Active listening and reflective responses signal respect and attentiveness, fostering relational trust and psychological safety between principals and teachers (Schindler & Thomas, 1993; Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023). Openness and appropriate self-disclosure enhance empathy and reduce hierarchical distance, while clarity and consistency in messaging minimize ambiguity and align teachers' actions with institutional objectives (Genilloud & Wegmann, 2020; Garcia & Miranda, 2017). These behaviors strengthen teachers' confidence and willingness to engage proactively in instructional and organizational tasks.

The supportive communication climate created by these interpersonal practices encourages innovation, accountability, and sustained performance, particularly in contexts experiencing pedagogical and technological change. Studies on educational transformation highlight that clear, trust-based communication enables teachers to adapt to new instructional methods and digital tools without experiencing role ambiguity or resistance (Monteiro et al., 2023; Asvial et al., 2021). In IIES, such adaptability is further grounded in shared moral values, allowing communication to function as a stabilizing force that harmonizes professional growth with ethical and spiritual commitments. Together, these findings demonstrate that interpersonal communication is a central mechanism through which principals translate leadership values into effective and sustainable educational practice.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that principals' interpersonal communication is a decisive factor influencing teacher performance in IIES. By interpreting quantitative results through interpersonal communication theory, leadership communication frameworks, and Islamic educational leadership perspectives, this discussion moves beyond statistical significance to explain why communication operates as a powerful driver of educational effectiveness (Canatan et al., 2023; Johansson, 2018). In Islamic schools, interpersonal communication emerges not merely as a managerial technique but as a core element of value-based leadership, where moral, cultural, and professional dimensions are deeply intertwined.

This study makes an important contribution to the literature by empirically demonstrating that principals' interpersonal communication is a central mechanism influencing teacher performance, particularly within Islamic educational contexts where professional, moral, and spiritual dimensions are closely intertwined. By positioning interpersonal communication as a strategic leadership factor rather than a supplementary skill, the findings extend leadership and communication theory and offer practical guidance for leadership development in schools. The results suggest that effective leadership communication, characterized by clarity, empathy, consistency, and active listening, should be systematically incorporated into principal training and evaluation frameworks (Schindler & Thomas, 1993; Melhuish & Gardiner, 2019). At the policy level, the study underscores the need for sustained professional development through mentoring, collaborative learning communities, and communication-focused programs that strengthen relational leadership capacities (Hahl & Mikulec, 2018; Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023), particularly when aligned with religious values and cultural sensitivity in Islamic educational settings (Sulaiman & Ahmadi, 2020).

Despite these contributions, several limitations warrant consideration. The relatively small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings, while reliance on self-reported questionnaires may introduce social desirability bias (Bray et al., 2020; Eungoo & Hwang, 2023). In addition, the cross-sectional research design restricts causal inference by capturing relationships at a single point in time (Siagian & Artha, 2023). Future studies are therefore encouraged to employ larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal or experimental designs, and mixed-method approaches to better capture causal mechanisms and contextual dynamics. Further research may also explore mediating and moderating variables, such as organizational culture, teacher professional identity, and digital leadership practices, to deepen understanding of how interpersonal communication interacts with broader leadership processes to shape teacher performance.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that principals' interpersonal communication is a decisive determinant of teacher performance in Indonesian IIES. The findings demonstrate a strong positive influence, with interpersonal communication explaining 79.3% of the variance in teacher performance, indicating that communication functions not merely as a supportive skill but as a core leadership

mechanism shaping teacher competence and educational quality. Principals who communicate with clarity, consistency, empathy, and attentiveness are better positioned to build trust, foster teacher motivation, and enhance instructional outcomes. Interpreted through an integrated framework of interpersonal communication, leadership communication, and Islamic educational leadership, the results highlight that effective communication is deeply aligned with Islamic values such as *amanah*, *ukhuwah*, and *musyawarah*, which underpin ethical and relational leadership in Islamic schools. Practically, the study underscores the importance of strengthening principals' interpersonal communication competencies through leadership development programs and the formulation of structured communication guidelines to support consistent and effective practice.

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