

The Influence of Democratic Leadership on The Work Motivation of Educational Personnel at Yasni Bungo Islamic University

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Abstract

This research examines the profile of democratic leadership, the work motivation of educational personnel, and the extent to which democratic leadership is associated with their work motivation at Yasni Bungo Islamic University. A quantitative method was employed through an ex post facto descriptive design with a causal-associative orientation. The study involved 50 educational personnel, selected through saturated sampling. Information was obtained by means of a Likert-scale questionnaire and subsequently processed using descriptive statistics and simple linear regression. The findings place democratic leadership in the high category, reflected by a mean score of 3.99. Work motivation likewise falls within the high category, with a mean of 3.97. The regression analysis demonstrates a positive and statistically significant relationship between democratic leadership and work motivation, indicated by a value of 6.478 and a significance value of $0.000 < 0.05$. The R^2 reaches 0.468, signifying that democratic leadership accounts for 46.8% of the variation in educational personnel's work motivation, while the remaining 53.2% stems from factors not examined in this research. These results suggest that leadership practices characterized by participation, candid communication, freedom to convey viewpoints, mutual trust, and recognition may contribute to sustaining and strengthening employees' motivation at work.

Keywords: Democratic Leadership, Work Motivation, Educational Personnel, Higher Education

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions rely fundamentally on educational staff to execute the administrative, managerial, and technical functions essential for institutional success and quality assurance (Permendikbudristek No. 53 of 2023). The effectiveness of these staff members is heavily driven by their work motivation, which is significantly shaped by organizational leadership (Robbins & Judge, 2024). In educational contexts, democratic leadership characterized by active member involvement in decision-making, two-way communication, and the appreciation of employee contributions has been identified as a critical mechanism for fostering engagement and sustaining work motivation (Northouse, 2021). By allowing organizational members to participate, express ideas, and be involved in work-related processes, democratic leadership theoretically creates a sense of ownership that drives employees to achieve institutional goals.

Despite the theoretical advantages of democratic leadership, preliminary observations and interviews at Yasni Bungo Islamic University revealed significant organizational discrepancies. Field observations indicated that educational staff often lacked proactive initiative, frequently waiting for top-down directives, and exhibited inconsistent discipline in task completion. Furthermore, staff involvement in decision-making and work-related discussions was highly inequitable; while some employees were active contributors, others remained passive. Initial interviews corroborated these findings, with staff reporting unequal opportunities to express opinions or provide strategic input to management. These symptoms indicate a misalignment between

the ideal participatory environment and the actual work experience. If left unaddressed, this suboptimal motivation can degrade the quality of administrative services, hinder operational efficiency, and ultimately impede the achievement of the university's strategic goals.

Although earlier research generally points toward a favorable connection between democratic leadership and employees' work motivation, several portions of the discussion remain insufficiently explored. Satria and Nurwulandari (2025), for example, restricted their investigation to lecturers serving on PPKS/PPKPT Task Forces at private universities under LLDIKTI Region III. Meanwhile, Misriyatun and Rosidah (2025) studied educational personnel at Yogyakarta State University by emphasizing workload and workplace conditions, without placing leadership style at the center of the analysis. Research concerning democratic leadership in Islamic educational settings has also tended to examine lecturers and teachers, leaving educational support personnel comparatively underrepresented. This situation leaves an empirical void concerning the way participatory leadership practices shape the motivation of educational staff within the organizational and socio-cultural circumstances of Islamic higher education in regional Indonesia.

The present study is designed to fill that void by examining the relationship between democratic leadership and the work motivation of educational staff at Yasni Bungo Islamic University. Its distinctive contribution lies in two aspects. The first is the change in the unit of attention, from lecturers to educational staff whose administrative, technical, and service functions form an important part of higher education operations. The second concerns the setting: the research is situated in an Islamic higher education institution in Bungo, Jambi, thereby bringing forward local patterns of organizational interaction that may remain obscured in studies conducted at a broader national level.

A saturated sample involving 50 educational staff members was employed, with simple linear regression used to ascertain the degree to which democratic leadership is associated with work motivation. The resulting evidence is expected to enrich theoretical discussion concerning organizational behavior in Islamic higher education while also providing an applied basis for institutional leaders in refining communication, employee participation, and human-resource management practices.

METHOD

Research Design and Approach

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design with a correlational approach. The study was designed to examine the statistical relationship between democratic leadership and the work motivation of educational staff at Yasni Bungo Islamic University, Jambi, Indonesia. A quantitative approach was selected because the study involved the measurement of predefined constructs using structured instruments and the statistical analysis of numerical data (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

The correlational design was used to determine the direction and magnitude of the relationship between democratic leadership as the predictor variable (X) and work motivation as the criterion variable (Y). Because the data were collected at a single point within the study period and the research did not involve experimental manipulation or random assignment, the findings are interpreted as associations rather than causal effects.

Research Setting and Period

The study was conducted at Yasni Bungo Islamic University, Bungo Regency, Jambi, Indonesia. Data collection was carried out from January to March 2026, during the 2025–2026 academic year. The study population and data collection procedures were defined according to the institutional conditions during the period of investigation.

Population and Sampling

The target population comprised all active educational staff members employed at Yasni Bungo Islamic University during the study period. The accessible population consisted of 50 educational staff members.

Because the population was relatively small and all eligible members could be reached, the study employed a census (total or saturated sampling) approach, in which all 50 members of the accessible population were invited to participate. Consequently, the sample size was 50 respondents. This approach was selected to maximize population coverage and avoid the loss of potentially relevant information that could occur through sampling from a small accessible population (Sugiyono, 2022).

Eligibility was based on active employment as educational staff at the university during the data-collection period. Respondents who completed the questionnaire were included in the final dataset.

Variables and Operational Definitions

The study examined two variables: democratic leadership as the predictor variable (X) and work motivation as the criterion variable (Y).

Democratic Leadership (X)

Democratic leadership was operationally defined as a leadership pattern characterized by employee participation, openness in communication, opportunities for expressing opinions, involvement in work-related processes, recognition of employee capabilities, and appreciation of employee contributions.

The construct was operationalized through six dimensions:

1. participation in decision-making;
2. open and transparent communication;
3. opportunities to express opinions;
4. employee involvement in work processes;
5. trust in employee capabilities; and
6. appreciation of employee contributions.

Each dimension was represented by questionnaire items developed from the operational definition of democratic leadership.

Work Motivation (Y)

Work motivation was operationally defined as the degree to which employees experience an internal drive that energizes, directs, and sustains their work-related behavior toward the achievement of organizational objectives.

The construct was operationalized through seven dimensions:

1. work enthusiasm;
2. perseverance in task completion;
3. sense of responsibility;
4. achievement orientation;
5. initiative in work execution;
6. commitment to self-development; and
7. organizational commitment.

The indicators were translated into measurable questionnaire statements and assessed using the same response scale across the construct.

Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire. All questionnaire items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Higher scores indicated stronger perceptions of democratic leadership and higher levels of work motivation, respectively.

The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section measured democratic leadership (X), while the second measured work motivation (Y). Prior to the main data collection, the questionnaire underwent content evaluation and empirical item analysis to establish its measurement quality.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

Instrument quality was assessed through content validity, construct validity, and internal consistency reliability.

Content Validity

Content validity was established through expert judgment. Three academics with expertise in organizational behavior and/or human resource management reviewed the questionnaire items in terms of their relevance to the intended construct, clarity of wording, and appropriateness for the research context. Items identified as ambiguous or insufficiently representative of the construct were revised before empirical administration.

Construct Validity

Following the expert review, empirical item validity was examined using the Pearson Product–Moment correlation coefficient. Each item score was correlated with the corresponding total construct score. An item was retained when its correlation coefficient met the predetermined significance criterion at $\alpha = 0.05$. Items that failed to demonstrate an adequate empirical relationship with the construct were considered for revision or exclusion prior to the final analysis.

Reliability

Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha (α). A coefficient of $\alpha \geq 0.70$ was considered indicative of acceptable internal consistency for the research instruments (Ghozali, 2021; Hair et al., 2022). Reliability analysis was performed separately for the democratic leadership and work motivation scales.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25. Data analysis was conducted in sequential stages consisting of data screening, descriptive analysis, assumption testing, and hypothesis testing.

Data Screening and Descriptive Analysis

The dataset was first examined for completeness and consistency of responses. Descriptive statistics were then calculated to summarize the characteristics of the respondents and the distribution of the study variables. For the principal variables, the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values were reported.

Assumption Testing

Before estimating the regression model, the data were examined to determine whether the assumptions required for parametric regression analysis were reasonably satisfied.

Normality. The normality of the regression residuals was examined using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test. A significance value greater than 0.05 was interpreted as indicating no statistically significant departure from normality. Because regression analysis concerns the distribution of residuals rather than the raw scores of individual variables, the normality assessment focused on the model residuals.

Linearity. The linearity of the relationship between democratic leadership and work motivation was assessed using an analysis of deviation from linearity. A non-significant deviation from linearity was interpreted as evidence that the relationship could reasonably be represented by a linear function.

Because the study involved a single predictor, the regression model did not require an assessment of multicollinearity among independent variables.

Simple Linear Regression

A simple linear regression analysis was performed to estimate the statistical association between democratic leadership (X) and work motivation (Y). The regression model was specified as:

$$Y = a + bX + \varepsilon Y = a + bX + \varepsilon$$

where:

Y = work motivation;

a = regression intercept;

b = unstandardized regression coefficient for democratic leadership;

X = democratic leadership; and

ε = error term.

The regression coefficient b was used to indicate the direction and magnitude of the expected change in work motivation associated with a one-unit increase in the democratic leadership score.

Hypothesis Testing

The statistical significance of the regression coefficient was evaluated using a two-tailed t-test at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. The null hypothesis stated that the regression coefficient for democratic leadership was equal to zero, indicating no statistically significant linear association between democratic leadership and work motivation in the study population.

The null hypothesis was rejected when the p-value was below 0.05. The direction of the association was determined from the sign of the regression coefficient. Statistical significance was interpreted as evidence of an association and not as evidence of a causal effect, given the non-experimental cross-sectional design.

Coefficient of Determination

The coefficient of determination (R^2) was reported to quantify the proportion of variance in work motivation statistically accounted for by democratic leadership within the fitted regression model. The R^2 value was interpreted in conjunction with the regression coefficient and its confidence interval rather than as evidence that democratic leadership alone caused the observed variation in work motivation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Analysis of Democratic Leadership

Democratic leadership was operationalized through six facets, namely involvement in decision-making, transparent communication, freedom to convey views, employee participation, mutual trust, and recognition of individual contributions. A descriptive summary of the scores obtained for each indicator is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1 *Descriptive Statistics of Democratic Leadership Indicators*

Indicator	Mean	Category
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Participation in decision-making	4.02	High
Open communication	4.11	High
Opportunity to express opinions	3.94	High
Involvement of educational staff	3.88	High
Trust	4.05	High
Appreciation for contributions	3.96	High
Overall Mean	3.99	High

Table 1 records an overall mean of 3.99 for democratic leadership at Yasni Bungo Islamic University, placing the variable within the “High” category. This score suggests that, from the perspective of educational staff, leadership practices generally reflect democratic principles. Among the measured dimensions, open communication registers the highest mean at 4.11, indicating that exchanges of information and the transparency maintained between leaders and staff are perceived as particularly strong.

However, a critical observation reveals a discrepancy between communication and actual participation. The indicator for the *involvement of educational staff* recorded the lowest mean score (3.88). Theoretically, this suggests that while leaders are highly communicative, the actual delegation of decision-making authority remains somewhat constrained. The leadership style, therefore, leans more towards a “consultative” democratic approach rather than a fully “participative” or “delegative” one (Northouse, 2021). Leaders share information effectively but may retain final decision-making power, which limits the depth of structural staff involvement.

Descriptive Analysis of Work Motivation

Work motivation was mapped through seven facets: enthusiasm in carrying out duties, persistence, sense of responsibility, achievement drive, initiative, personal growth, and commitment to work. The descriptive findings for each of these indicators are provided in Table 2.

Table 2 *Descriptive Statistics of Work Motivation Indicators*

Indicator	Mean	Category
Work enthusiasm	4.08	High
Perseverance	4.02	High
Responsibility	4.18	High
Drive to achieve	3.87	High
Initiative	3.79	High
Self-development	3.72	High
Work commitment	4.15	High
Overall Mean	3.97	High

The figures in Table 2 place the overall work motivation of educational staff in the “High” category, with a mean score of 3.97. Of the seven indicators, responsibility records the largest mean at 4.18, pointing to a pronounced sense of duty, professional conduct, and dedication in carrying out the tasks entrusted to them.

Conversely, *self-development* yielded the lowest score (3.72). From an organizational behavior perspective, this indicates that while staff possess strong duty-driven motivation (fulfilling job requirements), their intrinsic motivation for continuous professional growth and self-actualization requires further stimulation (Robbins & Judge, 2024). This gap suggests that staff may be highly focused on operational execution but lack sufficient organizational support, structured career pathways, or intrinsic drive for capacity building.

Inferential Analysis: The Influence of Democratic Leadership on Work Motivation

The dataset was first examined against the classical assumptions before the hypothesis was evaluated. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov procedure returned an Asymptotic Significance of 0.200, indicating that the data conformed to a normal distribution. The linearity assessment likewise showed a *Deviation from Linearity* significance of 0.317, supporting the presence of a linear association between the two variables.

Once these prerequisites had been met, simple linear regression was applied to examine the effect of democratic leadership (X) on work motivation (Y). The resulting analysis is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Simple Linear Regression and Hypothesis Testing Results

Model / Variable	R	R Square	t-value	Sig. (p)
Democratic Leadership → Work Motivation	0.684	0.468	6.478	0.000

The statistical output shows an *R* coefficient of 0.684, reflecting a pronounced positive association between the two variables. Meanwhile, the *R*² value reaches 0.468, which signifies that democratic leadership explains 46.8% of the variation observed in educational staff's work motivation. The other 53.2% is linked to influences that fall outside the variables incorporated into this model.

The *t*-test further produced a value of 6.478, accompanied by $p < 0.001$. Because this probability value is substantially lower than the 0.05 criterion, *H*₀ is discarded and *H*_a is retained. The findings therefore point to a statistically meaningful positive influence of democratic leadership on the work motivation of educational staff.

The fitted regression model is $Y = 18.742 + 0.672X$. Here, 18.742 represents the constant, while 0.672 denotes the regression coefficient attached to democratic leadership. In practical terms, a one-point rise in the democratic leadership score corresponds to an expected increase of 0.672 points in work motivation, provided that other outside influences are held unchanged.

DISCUSSION

This study was undertaken to determine, on empirical grounds, whether democratic leadership bears upon the work motivation of educational staff at Yasni Bungo Islamic University. The statistical evidence points to a meaningful positive association. From a theoretical standpoint, this pattern can be viewed through SDT and LMX theory. SDT suggests that participatory leadership can nurture employees' needs for autonomy and social connectedness, particularly when leaders maintain candid communication and make room for employees to voice their views (Deci & Ryan, 2020). When staff members sense that their ideas carry weight and that their leaders place confidence in them, their inner willingness to perform their responsibilities can become stronger.

Within an Islamic higher education setting, this leadership pattern also fits with the principle of *shura*, or collective consultation. Leaders who genuinely bring staff into deliberations and acknowledge their input can foster a workplace marked by cohesion, psychological security, and stronger motivation. The present finding is in line with Satria and Nurwulandari (2025), who likewise reported a positive connection between democratic leadership and work motivation in higher education. Their investigation, however, centered on lecturers serving in a particular task force, whereas this study turns attention to educational staff at a regional Islamic university. This broader role coverage suggests that the motivational relevance of democratic leadership can be observed beyond a single academic position or institutional setting.

The *R*² value of 0.468 also shows that leadership is not the sole ingredient shaping work motivation. In other words, 53.2% of the variation remains outside the explanatory reach of the present model. Robbins and Judge (2024) note that motivation may also be molded by external and situational conditions, including remuneration, workload, workplace facilities, organizational culture, prospects for career advancement, and

relationships among colleagues. Democratic leadership therefore represents an important influence, but its effect operates alongside a wider constellation of human-resource conditions.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The study carries several practical ramifications for university leadership and human resource management. With democratic leadership accounting for 46.8% of the fluctuation in educational staff motivation, leadership practices warrant a central place in institutional strategy. At the same time, the residual 53.2% makes clear that motivation is also shaped by influences lying beyond the scope of this model.

Practically, the relatively lower score for staff involvement (3.88) suggests that university leadership must transition from a merely "consultative" approach to a more genuinely "participative" one. Leaders should institutionalize mechanisms that guarantee staff participation in work-related discussions and strategic decision-making. Likewise, the lower score for self-development motivation (3.72) indicates a pressing need for the institution to strengthen capacity-building programs, provide clear career progression pathways, and allocate resources for continuous professional development. These implications should be interpreted as actionable areas for organizational improvement rather than mere statistical observations.

LIMITATIONS

Several constraints should be kept in mind when interpreting these findings. First, the investigation was confined to one higher education institution and covered 50 educational staff through saturated sampling, making the results strongly tied to that particular organizational setting and not readily transferable to universities with different cultures. Second, the use of self-assessed Likert questionnaires leaves room for subjective perception and social-desirability distortion. Third, although the *ex post facto* causal-associative design detects statistical influence within the proposed model, it cannot establish causality in the strict experimental sense. Finally, democratic leadership was treated as the only predictor, even though work motivation may also be shaped by remuneration, workload, workplace conditions, and individual characteristics. Accordingly, the findings should be read with appropriate restraint.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should broaden the empirical evidence by involving educational staff from multiple higher education institutions to allow for comparative analyses across different institutional and cultural contexts. Subsequent studies could employ Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) or multiple regression to include additional predictors such as compensation, workload, organizational culture, and career development to explain the 53.2% of motivation variance not accounted for in the present model.

Furthermore, mixed-method or longitudinal designs are recommended to explore how participation, communication, trust, and staff development are experienced over time, and how these practices dynamically relate to changes in work motivation. Finally, future studies should investigate whether specific dimensions of democratic leadership (e.g., trust vs. involvement) have differential impacts on specific aspects of motivation, particularly targeting the enhancement of initiative and self-development, which recorded the lowest scores in this study.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, democratic leadership and work motivation among educational staff at Yasni Bungo Islamic University were both found to be relatively high, with mean scores of 3.99 and 3.97, respectively. The findings indicate that respondents generally perceived the leadership practices within the institution as participatory and supportive, while also reporting relatively strong levels of work motivation.

The simple linear regression analysis revealed a positive and statistically significant association between democratic leadership and work motivation. The regression coefficient was statistically significant (t

= 6.478, $p < 0.05$), indicating that higher levels of perceived democratic leadership were associated with higher levels of work motivation among the educational staff included in the study. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.468$) indicates that democratic leadership statistically accounted for 46.8% of the variance in work motivation, while the remaining 53.2% was attributable to other factors not included in the present model.

These findings suggest that participatory decision-making, open communication, opportunities for staff to express their views, employee involvement, trust, and recognition of contributions are relevant leadership dimensions in understanding work motivation in the institutional context examined. However, given the cross-sectional and non-experimental design, the observed relationship should be interpreted as a statistical association rather than a causal effect.

The findings also provide a practical implication for institutional leadership. Efforts to maintain participatory leadership practices, strengthen two-way communication, involve educational staff in relevant decision-making processes, and provide opportunities for professional development may be considered as part of broader organizational efforts to support employee motivation. Further studies involving larger and more diverse samples, additional organizational and individual predictors, and longitudinal or mixed-method designs are recommended to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors associated with work motivation among educational staff.

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