



Leadership Accountability and Teacher Motivation in Islamic Junior High Schools: A Mixed Methods Study in Merangin Regency

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: This study aims to examine the leadership accountability within Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri (MTsN) under the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Merangin Regency and to analyze its relationship with teacher motivation.

Methodology: Employing a mixed methods approach with a sequential explanatory design, the study integrates quantitative and qualitative data to obtain a comprehensive understanding of accountability practices and their motivational implications. The quantitative phase involved a survey of 125 MTsN teachers using validated Likert-scale questionnaires measuring leadership accountability and teacher motivation, analyzed through descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis, for qualitative using Miles and Huberman.

Main Findings: The results reveal that leadership accountability is predominantly perceived as good, with 94.4% of respondents categorizing it as good or very good, while teacher motivation is similarly high, with 96.0% of teachers falling into these categories. Correlation analysis demonstrates a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between leadership accountability and teacher motivation ($r = 0.627$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that higher levels of perceived accountability are associated with increased teacher motivation. Qualitative findings further show that accountability practices are strongest in administrative, reporting, and regulatory dimensions, yet less optimal in affective and humanistic aspects such as recognition, professional support, and responsiveness to teachers' needs.

Novelty/Originality of this study: The novelty of this study lies in its integration of accountability theory with motivational perspectives within the specific context of Islamic secondary education, highlighting that accountability should extend beyond procedural compliance toward ethical, relational, and supportive leadership practices.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Accountability constitutes a fundamental principle in modern public governance, particularly within educational institutions, as it requires leaders to transparently justify their decisions, actions, and performance to

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stakeholders and the broader public [1]-[6]. In the education sector, accountability is not merely administrative compliance but reflects ethical responsibility, moral integrity, and professional commitment in managing public trust and educational outcomes [7]-[11]. Effective accountability mechanisms are therefore essential to ensuring organizational effectiveness, teacher motivation, and sustainable institutional performance.

Leadership plays a central role in operationalizing accountability within educational organizations. Leadership is commonly understood as the ability to influence others to work collaboratively toward shared goals [12]-[16]. Leaders possess distinct competencies moral authority, intellectual capacity, emotional maturity, and managerial skills that differentiate them from other organizational members and enable them to mobilize collective action effectively. Similarly, Vladić et al conceptualizes leadership as the capacity to mobilize and optimize organizational resources through directing, guiding, motivating, and supporting subordinates to achieve predetermined objectives [17]. These perspectives align with Musaigwa view that leadership fundamentally involves influencing behavior through guidance and example [18].

Beyond technical and managerial competencies, leadership effectiveness is strongly shaped by ethical orientation. Ethical leadership is defined as the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, as well as the promotion of such conduct among followers [19]-[24]. Ethical leaders exhibit integrity, honesty, fairness, empathy, and responsible use of authority, thereby fostering trust and commitment among subordinates [25]-[27]. In educational contexts, ethical leadership has been empirically linked to enhanced teacher motivation, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction. Leadership theory further identifies multiple leadership styles with distinct motivational implications. Ochieng, Koshal, & Bellows [28] categorizes leadership into directive, supportive, and achievement-oriented styles, each influencing subordinate behavior and performance differently. Complementing this typology, transformational leadership emphasizes inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and idealized influence, which have been shown to positively affect teacher motivation and performance. However, without accountability, even transformational leadership risks becoming symbolic rather than substantive.

From an Islamic ethical perspective, leadership accountability is deeply embedded in normative religious principles. The Qur'an explicitly emphasizes obedience to legitimate authority alongside moral responsibility and justice (Qur'an 4:59; 38:26). These verses underscore that leadership is a trust (*amanah*) that must be exercised with fairness, transparency, and restraint from personal interests. Such principles are particularly relevant to Islamic educational institutions under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, where leadership legitimacy is inseparable from moral accountability. Despite the extensive theoretical discourse on leadership and accountability, empirical evidence indicates a persistent gap between normative ideals and practical implementation, particularly within public educational institutions. Previous studies largely focus on leadership styles or managerial competence as predictors of teacher motivation [29]-[34] while the role of leadership accountability as an independent and systemic determinant of teacher motivation remains underexplored. Moreover, existing research often adopts quantitative survey designs, which tend to overlook contextual, structural, and cultural factors shaping accountability practices in bureaucratic educational systems [35].

In the context of Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs, especially at the regional level, limited empirical research has examined how leadership accountability influences teacher motivation in Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri (MTsN). Anecdotal and preliminary observations suggest challenges related to transparency in financial management, responsiveness to teachers' professional needs, and decisiveness in leadership practices, which collectively undermine teacher motivation and organizational trust. This reveals a critical research gap, particularly regarding how accountability failures manifest in daily administrative practices and how they affect teachers' motivational dynamics.

Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by examining the Ministry of Religious Affairs' leadership accountability in improving teacher motivation in Islamic Junior High Schools (MTs) in Merangin Regency. Specifically, this study aims to (1) how is the accountability of religious leadership and teacher motivation? 2) Is there a relationship in leadership accountability practices in motivating teachers? By adopting an in-depth qualitative approach, this study contributes to the literature on leadership and educational management by contextualizing accountability in Islamic educational governance and offering empirically based recommendations to strengthen ethical and accountable leadership practices.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods approach with a sequential explanatory design, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the accountability of Ministry of Religious Affairs leaders in improving teacher motivation at State Islamic Junior High Schools (Madrasah Tsanawiyah) in Merangin Regency. The quantitative approach was used to objectively measure leadership accountability and teacher motivation, while the qualitative approach was used to deepen, explain, and interpret the quantitative findings in light of empirical realities in the field.

In the first phase, this study employed a descriptive quantitative survey design. The second phase employed naturalistic qualitative research with a field study design to explore in depth the experiences, perceptions, and practices of Ministry of Religious Affairs leadership regarding accountability in a real-world context. The integration of the two approaches was carried out in the interpretation stage of the results. The study was conducted within the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Merangin Regency, focusing on three State Islamic Junior High Schools (Madrasah Tsanawiyah): MTs Negeri 1 Merangin, MTs Negeri 2 Merangin, and MTs Negeri Rantau Panjang. The quantitative research subjects were 125 MTs Negeri teachers. The qualitative research subjects included the Head of the Ministry of Religion of Merangin Regency, madrasah management officials, and MTs Negeri teachers who were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in teacher motivation policies and implementation.

Data Collection Techniques: Quantitative data were collected via a closed-ended Likert-scale questionnaire (1–5) that measured leadership accountability and teacher motivation. Qualitative data were collected through limited participant observation of leadership practices and service delivery at the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and in-depth interviews with leaders and teachers. Below is a category of Leadership Accountability and Teacher Motivation, among others: very good, good, not good, and very not good, as in Table 1.

Table 1. Categories of Leadership Accountability, and Teacher Motivation

Category	Leadership Accountability	Teacher Motivation
Very Not Good	13.0 – 22.7	17.0 – 29.7
Not Good	22.8 – 32.5	29.8 – 42.5
Good	32.6 – 42.2	42.6 – 55.2
Very Good	42.3 – 52.0	55.3 – 68.0

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages, means, and trend categories) to describe the level of leadership accountability and teacher motivation. A correlation analysis (Pearson Moment correlation) was conducted to determine the direction and strength of the relationship between leadership accountability and teacher motivation. Qualitative data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses were then integrated (data triangulation) to obtain a complete and mutually reinforcing understanding.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, we will examine the relationship between Leadership Accountability and teacher motivation at the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Merangin Regency, focusing on three State Islamic Junior High Schools (Madrasah Tsanawiyah). The results are as follows Table (2-4).

Table 2. Descriptive Results of Leadership Accountability

Classification			Mean	Min	Max	%
Interval	Category	Total				
13.0 – 22.7	Very Not Good	0	38	30	50	0.0
22.8 – 32.5	Not Good	7				5.6
32.6 – 42.2	Good	89				71.2
42.3 – 52.0	Very Good	29				23.2
TOTAL		125				100

The descriptive analysis results indicate that leadership accountability falls into the “Good” category. Seventy-one-two percent of respondents (89 out of 125 teachers) rated leadership accountability as good, while 23.2% rated it as very good. No respondents rated accountability as “Very Not Good,” and only 5.6% rated it as “Not Good.” Overall, 94.4% of respondents ranked leadership accountability as “Good” or “Very Good,” indicating that leadership accountability practices have been implemented adequately.

These findings indicate that leaders have generally performed their accountability functions well, particularly in formal and normative aspects, such as carrying out administrative tasks, complying with regulations, and fulfilling structural responsibilities. However, the small number of respondents in the “Not Good” category indicates that the quality and consistency of accountability are not yet fully distributed. These weaknesses are particularly evident in aspects of direct teacher support, reward provision, and attention to real needs in the field, which have not been optimally felt by all teachers.

Teacher interviews corroborate these descriptive findings. Teachers stated that leaders were relatively consistent in carrying out their supervisory functions and ensuring compliance with applicable regulations.

“In general, the leadership has carried out its duties well, especially in supervising and enforcing regulations.”

However, the interviews also revealed limitations in attention and appreciation, which explains why the “Very Good” category is not yet dominant and why some teachers still rate accountability as “Not Good.”

“The rules are clear, but attention to teachers' needs is not evenly distributed.”

Thus, the interview results provide a direct empirical explanation of the distribution of categories in the leadership accountability table and confirm that strengthening affective and supportive accountability is key to improving leadership quality to a higher level.

Table 3. Descriptive results of teacher motivation

Classification			Mean	Min	Max	%
Interval	Category	Total				
17.0 – 29.7	Very Not Good	0				0.0
29.8 – 42.5	Not Good	5				4.0
42.6 – 55.2	Good	93	52	41	65	74.4
55.3 – 68.0	Very Good	27				21.6
TOTAL		125				100

The descriptive analysis results indicate that teachers' motivation at State Islamic Junior High Schools (Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri) falls into the “Good” category, with 74.4% of respondents (93 teachers) in this category and 21.6% in the “Very Good” category. There were no respondents in the “Very Not Good” category, and only 4.0% fell into the “Not Good” category. Overall, these findings indicate a relatively high level of teacher work motivation, with 96.0% of teachers falling into the “Good” and “Very Good” categories.

This high level of teacher motivation is primarily driven by intrinsic factors, such as moral responsibility, a professional calling, and sincerity in fulfilling their duties as educators. This is reflected in teachers' statements, which emphasize that professional commitment is the primary foundation of their work.

“We continue to work diligently because we feel it is our responsibility as educators.”

However, the relatively lower proportion of those in the “Very Good” category indicates that teacher motivation is not yet fully optimal. Interview results revealed that limitations in extrinsic motivational factors, such as incentives, learning facilities, performance rewards, and professional development opportunities, hindered motivation from reaching higher levels.

“If facilities and rewards were improved, our motivation would certainly be better.”

Thus, the interview results not only corroborate the quantitative descriptive findings but also explain the distribution of teacher motivation scores, particularly the dominance of the “Good” category and the limited number of “Very Good” categories. The integration of these findings suggests that the relatively high level of teacher motivation currently relies more on intrinsic strengths, while optimizing motivation on a sustainable basis requires more adequate structural support and policies.

The correlation between Leadership Accountability and Teacher motivation is shown in Table 11.

Table 4. Correlation between Leadership Accountability and Teacher Motivation.

		Leadership Accountability	Teacher Motivation
Leadership Accountability	Pearson Correlation	1	0.627**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	125	125
Teacher Motivation	Pearson Correlation	0.627**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	-
	N	125	125

The Pearson correlation analysis showed an r value of 0.627 with a significance level of $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.01$). This finding indicates a strong and significant positive relationship between leadership accountability and teacher motivation. This means that increased leadership accountability is consistently followed by increased teacher work motivation.

This correlation value indicates that leadership accountability, as reflected in supervisory practices, responsibility, support, fairness, and role modeling, plays a significant role in shaping teacher motivation. The higher the level of accountability teachers perceive, the greater their drive to perform their duties optimally. Substantively, this finding reinforces the view that accountable leadership is a strategic factor in building teacher motivation, particularly in educational institutions facing limited resources and facilities.

Although teacher motivation is not solely determined by leadership, this correlation confirms that leadership accountability makes a significant contribution compared to other structural factors. This positive relationship is further strengthened by qualitative findings from interviews, in which teachers explicitly linked leadership accountability behavior to increased work enthusiasm.

"When leaders are responsible and fair, we feel appreciated and more motivated to work."

Conversely, when leadership accountability is more focused on administrative demands, without being balanced with support and rewards, teacher motivation tends to decline. This explains why the identified relationship has not yet reached the very strong category.

"Sometimes only obligations are emphasized, while support is lacking, which affects work enthusiasm."

From a leadership perspective, interview results indicate that leadership attitudes and behaviors directly influence teacher motivation. However, leaders also acknowledge structural limitations that limit the optimization of this accountability.

"Teacher motivation is indeed greatly influenced by leadership attitudes, but we are also limited by policies and budgets."

Thus, the qualitative findings provide strong empirical justification for the correlation coefficient $r = 0.627$ and explain the dynamics of the relationship between leadership accountability and teacher motivation. The integration of these quantitative and qualitative results confirms that improving the quality of leadership accountability, particularly in the affective and supportive aspects, has the potential to optimally enhance teacher motivation.

The research results show that leadership accountability at State Islamic Junior High Schools (Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri) is rated Good, with the majority of respondents (94.4%) rating it Good or Very Good. This finding indicates that leaders have generally fulfilled their accountability role adequately, particularly in formal and normative areas such as compliance with regulations, administrative tasks, and oversight functions. This condition aligns with educational leadership theory, which emphasizes that accountability is the primary foundation for building effective and trustworthy school governance [36]-[38].

However, the distribution of categories indicates that the proportion of Very Good teachers is not yet dominant, and a small proportion (5.6%) still rate accountability as Not Good. This indicates that accountability practices are not yet fully equitable and are stronger in the structural dimension than in the affective and supportive dimensions. Interview findings highlight this situation, where teachers perceive leaders as consistent in enforcing rules, but attention to their real needs and rewards is not yet optimal. This phenomenon supports the findings of Tosun and Bostancı [39], who stated :that overly administratively oriented leadership accountability can reduce teachers' perceptions of psychological support.

Regarding teacher motivation, descriptive results indicate that teacher work motivation is high, with 96.0% of teachers categorized as Good or Very Good. This high level of motivation is primarily driven by intrinsic factors, such as moral responsibility, professional commitment, and the value of service as educators. This finding is consistent with theories of teacher work motivation, which emphasize the role of intrinsic values and professional meaning in maintaining performance, particularly in the context of values-based educational institutions [40]-[43]. However, the relatively limited proportion of Very Good teachers indicates that teacher motivation is not yet fully optimal. Interview results revealed that limited extrinsic factors such as incentives, learning facilities, performance rewards, and professional development opportunities are obstacles to increasing motivation to higher levels. This finding supports Dodds et al [44] and Li et al [45] argument that intrinsic factors can maintain basic motivation, but sustainable motivational improvement requires adequate support from extrinsic factors.

The relationship between leadership accountability and teacher motivation is demonstrated by a Pearson correlation of $r = 0.627$ ($p < 0.01$), indicating a strong, significant positive relationship. This finding confirms that the higher the perceived leadership accountability of teachers, the higher their work motivation. Substantively, these results support previous research indicating that responsible, fair, and supportive leadership plays a strategic role in building teacher motivation and commitment [46]-[51]. However, the correlation value, which has not yet reached the very strong category, indicates that teacher motivation is not solely determined by leadership accountability but is also influenced by other structural and contextual factors, such as institutional policies, resource availability, and reward systems. Statements from Ministry of Religious Affairs leaders in interviews reinforce this, stating that policy and budget constraints limit the optimization of accountability practices. Thus, leadership accountability needs to be understood as a key factor, but not the sole determinant of teacher motivation. Overall, the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings indicates that current leadership accountability has supported teacher motivation at a good level, but still has room for improvement. Strengthening accountability in affective and supportive aspects such as attention to teacher well-being, performance rewards, and professional support has the potential to boost teacher motivation to a more optimal and sustainable level. These findings emphasize the importance of shifting the paradigm of leadership accountability from merely fulfilling administrative obligations to a more humanistic, empowering approach.

The novelty of this study lies in its explicit positioning of leadership accountability as a central and independent determinant of teacher motivation, rather than as a peripheral managerial function. Unlike previous studies that predominantly emphasize leadership styles or administrative competence, this research integrates accountability as an ethical, structural, and relational construct within the context of Islamic educational governance. Furthermore, the use of a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design enables a deeper exploration of the gap between normative accountability principles and their practical implementation, particularly in Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri under the Ministry of Religious Affairs at the regional level, a context that remains underrepresented in the existing empirical literature. The findings of this study have important theoretical, practical, and policy implications. Theoretically, the study contributes to the literature on educational leadership by reinforcing accountability as a key mechanism through which leadership influences teacher motivation, extending beyond administrative compliance to include ethical responsibility and relational support. In practice, the results highlight the need for educational leaders to strengthen affective and supportive accountability practices, such as recognition, fair treatment, and support for professional development, to sustainably enhance teacher motivation. From a policy perspective, the findings may inform leadership development programs and accountability frameworks within the Ministry of Religious Affairs by emphasizing humanistic and value-based accountability alongside formal administrative requirements.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The research was conducted in a limited geographical area involving only three Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri within one regency, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or educational contexts. Additionally, the quantitative data relied on self-reported perceptions, which may be subject to respondent bias. The study also did not include additional variables such as organizational culture, job satisfaction, or specific leadership styles that may interact with accountability and teacher motivation. Given these limitations, future research is recommended to involve broader, more diverse samples across different regions and types of madrasas to enhance external validity. Subsequent studies may also employ more advanced analytical models, such as structural equation modeling, to examine the mediating or moderating roles of other organizational variables. In practice, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and school leaders should strengthen accountability mechanisms to ensure transparency, recognition, and professional support, thereby fostering a more motivating and empowering work environment for teachers.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that leadership accountability in Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri in Merangin Regency is generally perceived as good and plays a significant role in shaping teacher motivation. The strong, positive relationship between leadership accountability and teacher motivation indicates that accountable leadership practices meaningfully contribute to teachers' willingness and commitment to perform their professional duties. However, the findings also suggest that accountability practices remain largely administrative in nature and require further development in affective and supportive dimensions. Strengthening leadership accountability toward a more humanistic and ethical orientation is, therefore, essential to achieving sustainable improvements in teacher motivation and overall educational quality within Islamic secondary education institutions.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

H was responsible for the research design, data collection, data analysis, and manuscript preparation. N & SM, contributed to conceptual development, research methodology guidance, and critical review of the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author(s) declare no conflict of interest.

USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGY

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the generation, analysis, or writing of this manuscript. All aspects of the research, including data collection, interpretation, and manuscript preparation, were carried out entirely by the authors without the assistance of AI-based technologies.

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