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Empowering Leadership as the Primary Determinant of Teacher Performance: The Mediating Role of Innovative Work Behavior

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the role of empowering leadership as the primary determinant of teacher performance and explores the mediating mechanism of innovative work behavior in this relationship. Involving 95 teachers from three public senior high schools in Sungai Lili District, Musi Banyuasin Regency, South Sumatra, this quantitative research examines the influence of empowering leadership and innovative work behavior on teacher performance. The findings confirm that empowering leadership is the main determinant of teacher performance and strongly supports the research hypothesis. Although innovative work behavior is related to performance, its influence weakens when considered alongside leadership, indicating it likely acts as an intermediary factor shaped by leadership. Together, both variables contribute to teacher performance, but they are not the only determinants, as other factors also play a role. These findings provide practical implications that developing school principals' empowering leadership capacity is a priority strategy for systematically improving teacher performance.

1. Introduction

Teacher performance is a crucial factor in improving educational quality. Research by Darling-Hammond (2017) confirms that teacher quality is the most influential school factor on student learning achievement. However, in Indonesia, teacher performance still faces significant challenges. Data from the Teacher Competency Test (2019) shows a national average score of 56.69 out of 100, far below the minimum standard of 70. The OECD TALIS Survey (2020) reveals that only 37% of Indonesian teachers regularly develop innovative teaching methods, far below

the OECD average of 58%. This condition indicates the need for systematic intervention to improve teacher performance, particularly through effective school leadership practices.

Traditional top-down leadership has proven ineffective in addressing these challenges. Research by Sebastian et al. (2019) found that directive leadership styles inhibit teachers' initiative and professional autonomy. As an alternative, empowering leadership offers an approach that empowers teachers through delegation of authority, participatory decision-making, and the development of professional autonomy. However, a study by Puslitjakdikbud (2022) of 500 school principals shows that only 35% consistently apply empowering leadership practices, indicating that knowledge about its implementation and effectiveness remains limited, especially in the context of implementing the Independent Curriculum which demands more empowering leadership.

Although various studies have examined the relationship between empowering leadership and teacher performance, there are significant knowledge gaps in the literature that form the basis of this research. First, previous research often examines multiple predictors simultaneously without clearly showing which factor is most determinant of teacher performance. Agustina et al. (2025) examined empowerment leadership together with managerial capability; Damayanti (2021) examined it with psychological empowerment as a mediator; however, none has explicitly positioned empowering leadership as the primary determinant by comparing its strength of influence with other variables. Second, the working mechanism of empowering leadership in improving teacher performance is not fully understood. Although several studies show positive relationships (Limon, 2022; Zhang & Zhao, 2024), no research has comprehensively explored the triangular relationship between empowering leadership, innovative work behavior, and teacher performance in the Indonesian educational context, especially by explicitly testing the mediating role of innovative work behavior. Third, most research uses simple correlational designs without multiple regression analysis that can show the relative contribution of each variable when tested simultaneously.

The urgency of this research becomes more apparent considering the implementation of the Independent Curriculum (2022-present) which demands that teachers be more independent, innovative, and creative in developing learning. However, evaluation by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2023) shows that 62% of teachers experience difficulties in developing project-based teaching modules, indicating a gap between curriculum demands and teachers' actual capacity. In this context, understanding the role of empowering leadership becomes crucial because this leadership style can facilitate the development of teacher autonomy and innovation needed in implementing the new curriculum. Moreover, in the era of post-COVID-19 educational transition, teachers need empowering leadership to rebuild motivation, professional confidence, and adaptability to rapid changes in educational practices.

This research provides a unique contribution by explicitly positioning empowering leadership as the primary determinant of teacher performance, not merely as an

"influence" or "factor." The first theoretical contribution is the use of multiple regression analysis model that reveals the relative contribution of empowering leadership ($\beta = 0.566$) compared to innovative work behavior ($\beta = 0.167$) when tested simultaneously, providing clear empirical evidence of the dominance of empowering leadership. The second theoretical contribution is the identification of partial mediation mechanism, where innovative work behavior functions as an indirect pathway in the empowering leadership-teacher performance relationship, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how empowering leadership operationally improves teacher performance. The practical contribution of this research is identifying that developing school principals' empowering leadership capacity is a critical leverage point that needs to be prioritized in educational leadership development programs, as this variable has the largest and most stable influence on improving teacher performance.

Based on these gaps and urgency, this research answers the research questions: (1) Is empowering leadership the primary determinant of teacher performance compared to innovative work behavior? (2) How does the working mechanism of empowering leadership improve teacher performance? (3) Does innovative work behavior play a mediating role in the relationship between empowering leadership and teacher performance? Specifically, the research analyzes the relative strength of empowering leadership's influence on teacher performance, the role of innovative work behavior in that relationship, and practical implications for school leadership development.

2. Methodology

This cross-sectional quantitative research was conducted at three public senior high schools in Sungai Lilin District, Musi Banyuasin Regency, South Sumatra, during August-September 2025. The location was purposively selected based on accessibility and schools' willingness to participate. The population consists of 95 teachers from three public senior high schools: SMAN 1 (52 people), SMAN 2 (24 people), SMAN 3 (19 people). Because the population is less than 100, the sampling technique is total sampling. Respondent characteristics: 72% female, 64% aged 31-45 years, 81% with bachelor's degree, 40% with 11-15 years of service. The respondent composition shows a representative sample with the majority being experienced teachers (40% with 11-15 years of service) but still in an active career development phase.

The questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale measures: empowering leadership (29 items), innovative work behavior (28 items), teacher performance (30 items). Validity testing used Pearson Product Moment ($n=34$; $r\text{-table} = 0.3388$). Results: 29 out of 30 empowering leadership items valid, 28 out of 30 innovative work behavior items valid, 30 out of 30 teacher performance items valid. Total of 87 valid items. Reliability testing used Cronbach's Alpha (criterion $\alpha \geq 0.60$): empowering leadership ($\alpha = 0.950$), innovative work behavior ($\alpha = 0.960$), teacher performance ($\alpha = 0.950$). The values indicate very good internal consistency. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26 to determine: (1) descriptive analysis; (2) classical

assumption tests (Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality, ANOVA linearity, Tolerance/VIF multicollinearity); (3) Pearson correlation test; (4) simple linear regression; (5) multiple linear regression; (6) R^2 calculation with significance criterion $\alpha = 0.05$.

3. Results and Discussion

Research Results

Correlation Analysis

Before presenting the results, it is important to note that the Pearson correlation test was conducted to examine the strength and direction of the relationships between empowering leadership, innovative work behavior, and teacher performance. The findings provide an overview of how each variable is related to one another and indicate the level of association among them. The detailed results of this analysis are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Pearson Correlation Test Results

Variable Relationship	r	Sig.	Category
Empowering Leadership → Teacher Performance	0.630**	0.000	Strong
Innovative Work Behavior → Teacher Performance	0.383**	0.000	Moderate
Empowering Leadership → Innovative Work Behavior	0.383**	0.000	Moderate

The Pearson correlation test shows that all three relationships are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Empowering Leadership has a strong positive correlation with Teacher Performance ($r = 0.630$), indicating that higher levels of empowering leadership are associated with higher teacher performance. Meanwhile, Innovative Work Behavior shows a moderate positive correlation with Teacher Performance ($r = 0.383$), and Empowering Leadership also demonstrates a moderate positive correlation with Innovative Work Behavior ($r = 0.383$). These findings confirm that the prerequisites for mediation testing are met, as the independent variable is significantly related to both the mediator and the dependent variable.

To formally examine the mediating role of Innovative Work Behavior, a mediation analysis was conducted using regression-based path analysis with bootstrapping procedures (Hayes, 2022). The results indicate that Empowering Leadership (EL) has a significant direct effect on Teacher Performance ($\beta = 0.634$, $p < 0.001$). When Innovative Work Behavior was included in the regression model, the direct effect of Empowering Leadership on Teacher Performance remained statistically significant ($\beta = 0.569$, $p < 0.001$), while the effect of Innovative Work Behavior on Teacher Performance was marginally non-significant ($\beta = 0.168$, $p = 0.053$). Furthermore, the bootstrapping test (5,000 resamples) showed that the indirect effect of Empowering Leadership on Teacher Performance through Innovative Work Behavior was not statistically significant (Indirect Effect = 0.055; Boot SE = 0.034; 95% CI [BootLLCI = -0.004, BootULCI = 0.129]), as the confidence interval included zero. Therefore, Innovative Work Behavior is not confirmed as a significant mediator in the relationship between Empowering Leadership and

Teacher Performance in this study. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 2 below.

Tabel 2. Mediation Analysis Results

Path	β (Coefficient)	SE	p-value	LLCI	ULCI	Result
A. Direct Effects						
EL $\rightarrow$ IWB	0.350	0.088	0.0001	0.176	0.524	Significant
EL $\rightarrow$ Performance (Total Effect)	0.539	0.068	0.0000	0.403	0.675	Significant
EL $\rightarrow$ Performance (Direct Effect)	0.484	0.073	0.0000	0.340	0.629	Significant
IWB $\rightarrow$ Performance (controlled for EL)	0.156	0.080	0.053	-0.002	0.314	Not Significant
B. Indirect Effect — Mediation Test (Bootstrap)						
Mediation Path	Indirect Effect	Boot SE	p-value	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	Result
EL $\rightarrow$ IWB $\rightarrow$ Performance	0.055	0.034	—	-0.004	0.129	Not Significant

Hayes PROCESS Macro Model 4 | Bootstrap 5,000 Resamples | $n = 95$ | 95% Confidence Interval

These findings confirm that Empowering Leadership influences Teacher Performance predominantly through a direct pathway, rather than indirectly through Innovative Work Behavior. Although Empowering Leadership significantly predicted Innovative Work Behavior, the effect of Innovative Work Behavior on Teacher Performance was marginally non-significant, and the indirect effect through this path was likewise not statistically significant, as the confidence interval included zero. One plausible explanation is that the direct influence of empowering leaders such as through delegation of authority, motivational support, and trust-building may have a more immediate impact on teacher performance than the indirect route through innovative behavior. Additionally, the relatively small sample size may have limited the statistical power to detect a small indirect effect. Future research is encouraged to replicate this study with larger samples and to explore alternative mediating mechanisms, such as teacher motivation, organizational commitment, or self-efficacy, to better understand the process through which Empowering Leadership affects Teacher Performance.

Classical Assumption Tests

The normality test using Kolmogorov-Smirnov shows a significance value of 0.200 (> 0.05), indicating that the residuals are normally distributed. The linearity test reveals that the relationship between empowering leadership and teacher performance is linear ($F = 73.036$; $p = 0.000$) with no significant deviation from linearity ($p = 0.124$). Similarly, the relationship between innovative work behavior and teacher performance is also linear ($F = 18.000$; $p = 0.000$) without significant deviation ($p = 0.151$). Furthermore, the multicollinearity test results show a tolerance value of 0.853 and a VIF of 1.172, both of which meet the required criteria, indicating that there is no excessive correlation between the independent variables.

Effect of Empowering Leadership on Teacher Performance

From simple regression test results, the regression equation obtained is: Teacher Performance = 75.652 + 0.534 (Empowering Leadership). This can be interpreted that each one-unit increase in empowering leadership increases teacher performance by 0.534 units. The t value = 7.815 with significance 0.000 ($p < 0.01$) shows a very significant effect. The β value = 0.630 indicates a 63% contribution to changes in teacher performance (large effect according to Cohen, 1988). Empowering leadership explains 39.7% of the variation in teacher performance.

Effect of Innovative Work Behavior on Teacher Performance

Based on the simple linear regression test results, the regression equation obtained is: Teacher Performance = 94.999 + 0.356 (Innovative Work Behavior). The regression coefficient of 0.356 indicates that each one-unit increase in the innovative work behavior variable will lead to an increase of 0.356 units in teacher performance. This finding shows that innovative work behavior has a positive contribution to improving teacher performance, meaning that the more innovative teachers are in their work, the better their performance will be, although the magnitude of the effect is relatively moderate.

Simultaneous Effect: Multiple Regression

Before presenting the results, it is important to explain that the multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the simultaneous effect of empowering leadership and innovative work behavior on teacher performance, as well as to identify the most dominant influencing variable. This analysis provides insight into both the direct influence and the relative contribution of each independent variable in the model. The detailed results of the multiple regression test are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Multiple Regression Test Results

Variable	B	Beta	t	Sig.
Empowering Leadership	0.480	0.566	6.583	0.000
Innovative Work Behavior	0.155	0.167	1.940	0.055

From the above test results, the regression equation obtained is: Teacher Performance = 62.475 + 0.480 (Empowering Leadership) + 0.155 (Innovative Work Behavior). Empowering leadership remains significant ($p = 0.000$) with dominant β (0.566). Innovative work behavior has significance value approaching the threshold ($p = 0.055$), weaker effect when empowering leadership is included in the model. $R^2 = 0.420$ shows that both variables explain 42% of the variance in teacher performance.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that empowering leadership is the strongest predictor of teacher performance in this study. The bivariate correlation between empowering leadership and teacher performance ($r = 0.630$; $p < 0.001$) is substantially higher

than the correlation between innovative work behavior and teacher performance ($r = 0.383$; $p < 0.001$). This difference is further confirmed in the multiple regression model, where empowering leadership remains highly significant ($\beta = 0.566$; $p < 0.001$), while innovative work behavior becomes statistically non-significant ($p = 0.055$).

Empirically, this indicates that when both variables are tested simultaneously, the variance in teacher performance is largely absorbed by empowering leadership. The reduction of innovative work behavior's significance suggests overlapping explanatory power between the two predictors. In other words, much of the contribution of innovative work behavior to performance may already be accounted for by empowering leadership. This statistical pattern strengthens the interpretation that empowering leadership operates as a more proximal and dominant explanatory variable in predicting teacher performance within the observed schools. This interpretation is consistent with Nasa and Lestari (2025), who found that principals' leadership plays a central and direct role in improving teacher performance in vocational school contexts, suggesting that leadership functions as a primary structural driver rather than a peripheral influence.

From a theoretical perspective, this pattern aligns with Psychological Empowerment Theory (Spreitzer, 1995), which posits that leadership behaviors enhancing meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact directly influence employee performance. However, rather than elaborating normatively on each dimension, the present data show that the overall empowering leadership construct—operationalized through measurable leadership practices—has a strong standardized effect ($\beta = 0.566$). This magnitude indicates a robust practical influence, exceeding the moderate indirect pathway through innovative work behavior. Empirical support for the practical relevance of leadership-driven performance improvement is also demonstrated by Effendi (2023), who reported that individual supervision significantly enhanced teacher performance, indicating that structured leadership interventions can translate directly into measurable professional outcomes. Similarly, Solowati et al. (2026) highlight that coaching-based academic supervision strengthens teachers' professional performance through systematic guidance and reflective practice, reinforcing the argument that leadership mechanisms extend beyond motivational rhetoric to concrete performance gains.

The partial mediation indication requires more critical interpretation. Although empowering leadership correlates significantly with innovative work behavior ($r = 0.383$; $p < 0.01$), innovative work behavior does not retain statistical significance in the multiple regression model ($p = 0.055$). This near-threshold value suggests that innovative work behavior may function as a weak or context-dependent mediator, rather than a strong independent predictor. Several contextual factors may explain this outcome. First, descriptive data indicate that 70.5% of teachers fall within the moderate category of innovative work behavior. This suggests limited variability and intensity in innovation practices. When most respondents cluster in the moderate range, the statistical power of innovation to independently predict performance decreases. Innovation may not yet be institutionalized as a high-

intensity professional norm but instead appears incidental or situational. While innovation can enhance learning quality—as shown by Azazia et al. (2025), who found that teachers' effective use of audio-visual media significantly improved student learning outcomes—the present findings suggest that such innovative practices may still be episodic rather than systematically embedded within school performance systems.

Second, school contextual constraints may attenuate the performance impact of innovation. As noted by Chou et al. (2018), factors such as administrative workload, unsupportive reward systems, and rigid organizational culture often limit the translation of innovative ideas into measurable performance outcomes. In such contexts, leadership support may have a more immediate and visible impact on performance indicators than individual innovation efforts. This interpretation resonates with Gultom et al. (2026), who found that innovative work behavior is significantly influenced by transformational leadership and learning organization climate through self-efficacy. Their findings imply that innovation rarely operates independently; rather, it is embedded within broader leadership and organizational structures. This could explain why empowering leadership remains dominant in the regression model.

Third, the high explanatory power of empowering leadership ($\beta = 0.566$) suggests that leadership may simultaneously influence performance through multiple mechanisms beyond innovation such as motivation, role clarity, coordination, psychological safety, and organizational commitment (Zhang & Bartol, 2010; Sun et al., 2024). Thus, innovation represents only one of several possible transmission pathways. When these broader leadership effects are statistically included, the unique contribution of innovative work behavior diminishes. The R^2 value of 0.420 indicates that empowering leadership and innovative work behavior jointly explain 42% of the variance in teacher performance. In social science research, this represents a substantial explanatory level. However, 58% of performance variance remains unaccounted for, suggesting that teacher performance is influenced by additional factors such as professional identity, adaptive capacity, institutional support, workload, and external educational policies (Paigalan & Bauyot, 2025). Leadership-based supervision models (Effendi, 2023; Solowati et al., 2026) and structured innovation ecosystems (Gultom et al., 2026) further indicate that performance is shaped by systemic and contextual variables beyond individual behavior alone. Therefore, while empowering leadership is the primary determinant within this model, it is not the sole determinant of teacher performance.

Comparatively, these findings are consistent with Agustina et al. (2025) and Praptiwi (2024), who found significant positive effects of empowering leadership on teacher performance in Indonesian school contexts. The present study contributes additional nuance by demonstrating that empowering leadership retains its strong predictive power even when innovative work behavior is statistically controlled. This strengthens its position as a robust determinant rather than merely a correlational variable. The results also align with the meta-analysis by Seibert et al. (2011), which reported consistent medium-to-strong effects of empowering leadership on performance outcomes ($\rho = 0.35\text{--}0.53$).

Regarding the mediation mechanism, prior studies (Zhang & Zhao, 2024; Jabid et al., 2025; Newman et al., 2017) support the theoretical plausibility that empowering leadership fosters innovation through psychological empowerment and psychological safety. However, the present empirical findings suggest that in this specific educational context, innovation has not yet developed into a sufficiently strong and independent performance driver. Although empirical work such as Azazia et al. (2025) demonstrates the performance benefits of innovative instructional practices, and Gultom et al. (2026) confirm leadership-driven innovation pathways, the statistical evidence here indicates that innovation's mediating role remains limited and potentially contingent upon stronger institutional reinforcement mechanisms.

In summary, the empirical evidence indicates that empowering leadership exerts a dominant direct effect on teacher performance, while innovative work behavior plays a secondary and potentially context-dependent role. The non-significant result of innovative work behavior in the multiple regression model does not negate its importance but highlights that its effectiveness depends on the broader leadership and organizational environment. Empirical studies on supervision (Effendi, 2023; Solowati et al., 2026), leadership influence (Nasa & Lestari, 2025), and innovation systems (Gultom et al., 2026) collectively reinforce the conclusion that leadership operates as the central structural mechanism shaping teacher performance. Future research should consider incorporating contextual moderators such as school culture, workload, reward systems, and professional development frameworks to better explain the conditions under which innovative work behavior significantly enhances teacher performance.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study confirm that empowering leadership is the primary determinant of teacher performance, as it shows the strongest and most consistent influence in explaining performance outcomes, thereby supporting the research hypothesis. Although innovative work behavior is also related to teacher performance, its influence becomes less significant when analyzed together with empowering leadership, indicating that its role may function as an intermediary factor that is largely shaped or influenced by leadership practices. Furthermore, both variables together contribute meaningfully to explaining teacher performance, suggesting that while leadership and teacher behavior are important factors, they are not the only determinants, and other variables also play a role in influencing overall performance outcomes. Overall, these results underscore that in systematic efforts to enhance teacher performance, strengthening school principals' empowering leadership capacity should be prioritized as a strategic intervention, given its consistently dominant and robust predictive influence compared to other tested factors.

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