

Research Article

Beyond Intrinsic Drives: The Synergistic Role of Work Environment in Enhancing Employee Performance in Higher Education

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Abstract: This study examines employee performance in higher education, focusing on the role of work motivation and the work environment at STISIP Bina Putera Banjar. The research is driven by the gap between stakeholder expectations and institutional performance, as well as limited empirical evidence on the combined effects of motivational and environmental factors in Indonesian private higher education. This study aims to analyze the individual and simultaneous influence of these variables on employee performance. A quantitative approach with a census method was applied to 65 employees. Data were collected through validated Likert-scale questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression. The results show that work motivation has a strong and significant effect ($r = 0.630$; 39.7%), while the work environment has a weaker but significant effect ($r = 0.227$; 5.2%). Together, both variables have a substantial combined influence ($R = 0.790$), explaining 62.4% of performance variance. In conclusion, employee performance is shaped by both intrinsic and contextual factors, with motivation as the dominant driver. This study highlights their synergistic role and suggests integrated human resource strategies to enhance sustainable performance.

Keywords: Employee Performance; Higher Education; Self-Determination Theory; Work Environment; Work Motivation

1. Introduction

The pursuit of equitable and high-quality education is a cornerstone of national development, yet its realization is profoundly dependent on the operational excellence of higher education institutions. Recent international studies highlight that institutional performance in higher education is increasingly evaluated not only through administrative compliance, but also through service quality, stakeholder satisfaction, and employee effectiveness (Atiku & Van Wyk, 2024; Wang et al., 2021). Within Indonesia's higher education landscape, a persistent challenge emerges from the dissonance between stakeholder expectations, such as responsiveness, comfort, and service experience, and internal performance indicators rooted in procedural standards. This gap has been shown to erode stakeholder trust and institutional legitimacy, ultimately affecting organizational performance (Lesener et al., 2019; Van den Broeck et al., 2021).

At the core of institutional effectiveness are employees, both academic and administrative, whose performance determines the institution's capacity to deliver educational and social value. Contemporary organizational research emphasizes that employee performance in knowledge-intensive sectors is shaped by the interaction between internal motivational processes and external work conditions rather than by structural rules alone (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Schaufeli, 2021). Empirical evidence from higher education institutions confirms that performance deterioration often occurs when motivational resources are unsupported by a conducive work environment, or when environmental demands suppress intrinsic drive (Sharif et al., 2024; Skaalvik, 2020).

Received: November 17, 2025

Revised: January 12, 2026

Accepted: March 09, 2026

Published: April 06, 2026

Curr. Ver.: April 06, 2026



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Work motivation has long been recognized as a critical determinant of employee performance. Classical theories, such as McClelland's Theory of Needs and Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory, explain how achievement, recognition, and personal growth shape work behavior. However, recent Scopus-indexed literature increasingly adopts Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to explain the quality of motivation in professional contexts. SDT emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness as essential psychological needs that foster sustainable performance (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Meta-analytic and empirical studies demonstrate that autonomous motivation is positively associated with engagement, persistence, and task performance, particularly in higher education and public-sector organizations (Howard et al., 2017; Schaufeli, 2021; Van den Broeck et al., 2021).

Beyond individual motivation, the work environment constitutes a crucial contextual resource that enables or constrains performance. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model conceptualizes the work environment as a balance between job demands that generate strain and job resources that stimulate motivation and performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Recent empirical findings indicate that psychosocial resources, such as leadership support, collegial relationships, and communication quality, play a dominant role in sustaining employee performance in higher education institutions (Kartali & Gkliati, 2024; Lesener et al., 2019; Skaalvik, 2020). Moreover, post-pandemic studies show that environmental support has become increasingly critical as workload complexity and emotional demands continue to rise (Bakker et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2021).

Despite the growing body of international literature, empirical studies examining the combined influence of work motivation and work environment on employee performance in Indonesian private higher education institutions remain limited. Existing studies often address motivational or environmental factors in isolation, leaving their synergistic effects underexplored. Addressing this gap is essential for advancing organizational behavior research and for developing evidence-based human resource strategies tailored to higher education contexts.

Accordingly, this study aims to empirically examine the individual and combined effects of work motivation and work environment on employee performance at STISIP Bina Putera Banjar. By integrating classical motivational theories with recent Scopus-indexed empirical research, this study seeks to contribute to contemporary organizational behavior literature while offering practical insights for higher education management.

2. Literature Review

Work Motivation and Employee Performance

Work motivation is widely recognized as a fundamental driver of employee performance, particularly in knowledge-intensive sectors such as higher education. Contemporary studies emphasize that intrinsic motivation plays a crucial role in enhancing employee engagement, persistence, and task effectiveness. Employees with higher motivation levels tend to demonstrate stronger commitment and improved performance outcomes (Nusraningrum et al., 2024).

Recent empirical research confirms that work motivation has a direct and significant effect on employee performance across various sectors. For instance, Nurhidayat and Mariam (2025) found that work motivation significantly improves employee performance both directly and indirectly through employee engagement (Nurhidayat & Siti Mariam, 2025). In higher education contexts, motivational factors are often more influential than structural or administrative mechanisms, reinforcing the relevance of internal psychological drivers in shaping performance.

Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Work motivation has a positive and significant effect on employee performance

Work Environment and Employee Performance

The work environment is a critical contextual factor influencing employee performance, encompassing both physical conditions and psychosocial aspects such as leadership, communication, and interpersonal relationships. A supportive work environment enables employees to perform effectively by providing necessary resources and reducing job-related stress (Dewi et al., 2023).

Empirical studies demonstrate that a conducive work environment positively influences employee productivity and performance. For example, Nusraningrum et al. (2024) highlight that a supportive work environment not only directly affects performance but also enhances motivation and engagement (Nusraningrum et al., 2024). Similarly, recent research shows that

improvements in work environment conditions contribute significantly to employee productivity and overall organizational outcomes (Ichdan, 2024). These findings indicate that employees are more likely to achieve optimal performance when supported by a favorable work environment.

Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Work environment has a positive and significant effect on employee performance

The Synergistic Role of Work Motivation and Work Environment

Recent organizational research emphasizes that employee performance is shaped by the interaction between individual (motivation) and contextual (environment) factors. Motivation alone may not produce optimal performance if it is not supported by a conducive work environment, and conversely, a supportive environment may not yield maximum outcomes without sufficient motivation.

Empirical evidence supports this integrative perspective. Dewi et al. (2023) found that the work environment strengthens the role of motivation in improving employee performance through indirect mechanisms such as engagement (Dewi et al., 2023). In addition, Nurhidayat and Mariam (2025) demonstrate that combining motivational and contextual factors results in stronger explanatory power for performance compared to single-factor models (Nurhidayat & Mariam, 2025).

Despite these findings, studies examining the simultaneous effects of motivation and work environment particularly in Indonesian private higher education remain limited. This gap underscores the importance of analyzing their combined influence.

Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Work motivation and work environment simultaneously have a positive and significant effect on employee performance.

3. Research Method

This research employs a quantitative approach, utilizing a survey method to systematically investigate the influence of work motivation and the work environment on employee performance at STISIP Bina Putera Banjar. A descriptive-correlational design is adopted to both describe the current state of the variables and to analyze the relationships between them. This design is appropriate as it aims to describe phenomena and examine predictive relationships between variables, which aligns with contemporary quantitative research practices in organizational studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Hair, 2009). The approach emphasizes objectivity through the use of numerical data and statistical analysis.

Population and Sample

The population of this study comprised all employees of STISIP Bina Putera Banjar, including academic and administrative staff, totaling 65 respondents. Given the relatively small and accessible population, a census (saturated sampling) technique was applied, whereby all members of the population were included as research respondents. This approach enhances representativeness and minimizes sampling bias (Etikan et al., 2016).

Research Variables and Measurement

The study examined three main variables: Work Motivation (X1): Operationalized as the internal drive that creates enthusiasm for employees to work cooperatively and effectively. Its dimensions are informed by McClelland's (1991) framework, comprising motive, expectancy, and incentive, and are contextualized within modern self-determination theory (Van den Broeck et al., 2021). Work Environment (X2): Operationalized as all physical and non-physical conditions surrounding employees during work. Following established frameworks (Sedarmayanti, 2009), it is categorized into the physical environment (e.g., lighting, temperature, workspace design) and the non-physical (psychosocial) environment (e.g., relationships, leadership, communication), consistent with the Job Demands-Resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Employee Performance (Y): Operationalized as the measurable output, in terms of both quality and quantity, achieved by employees in carrying out their assigned responsibilities within a specific period, a definition supported in contemporary performance management literature (Aguinis, 2023).

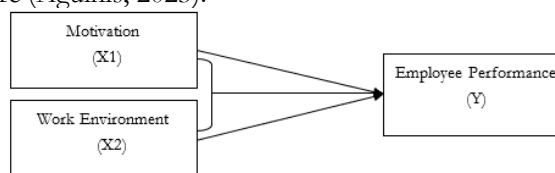


Figure 1. Research Model

Data Collection

Data was obtained from two primary sources. Primary data were collected directly from respondents through a structured questionnaire, the standard instrument for measuring perceptions in behavioral research (Saunders et al., 2019). Secondary data were gathered from institutional documents and related literature to provide contextual support. The main data collection instrument was a closed-ended questionnaire employing a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Agree" (score 5) to "Strongly Disagree" (score 1). This scaling method is validated for measuring attitudes and perceptions in organizational research (Taherdoost, 2019). The questionnaire items were constructed based on the operational definitions and indicators of each variable, derived from the theoretical framework.

Data Testing and Analysis

Prior to full deployment, the questionnaire underwent pilot testing to assess its validity and reliability, a critical step to ensure the quality and accuracy of measurement (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021). Validity Test: Construct validity was assessed using Pearson's Product Moment correlation. Each item's correlation coefficient was evaluated against a critical value to ensure it measured the intended construct. Items failing to meet the threshold were revised or discarded to enhance content validity (Hair et al., 2019). Reliability Test: Internal consistency reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha. A coefficient (α) of 0.70 or higher is generally considered acceptable for demonstrating scale reliability in social science research (Taber, 2018).

Data analysis was conducted using statistical software and proceeded in stages. First, descriptive statistics summarized respondent characteristics and variable distributions. Second, assumption tests were performed to ensure the suitability of parametric analyses. Normality was examined using Kolmogorov–Smirnov tests and graphical inspection; multicollinearity was assessed using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance values; and homoscedasticity was inspected via residual plots (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012). Because multicollinearity can bias coefficient estimates, we followed recommended diagnostic and remedial procedures from recent methodological reviews (Dormann et al., 2013).

Hypothesis testing used simple linear regression for individual predictors and multiple linear regression for simultaneous effects. The choice of regression techniques and reporting standards follows contemporary guidance for organizational research (Field, 2024; Hair et al., 2019). Statistical significance was evaluated at the 5% level ($p < .05$). The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to assess explanatory power, and standardized coefficients (β) were reported to compare relative effects.

Following Dormann et al. (2013) and O'Brien (2007), VIF values exceeding conservative thresholds (e.g., $VIF > 5$) would prompt additional diagnostics (variable centering, combining correlated indicators, or principal components) before interpreting regression coefficients. Reporting adhered to recommendations by Hair et al. (2019) for transparent presentation of model fit, assumption checks, and effect sizes.

4. Results and Discussion

Profile of Respondents

This study involved 65 employees of STISIP Bina Putera Banjar, representing the entire population (census sampling). The demographic characteristics of respondents are as follows.

Table 1. Profil of Respondents

Attributes		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	35	53.85
	Female	30	46.15
Age	20-30	20	30.77
	30-40	31	47.69
	40-50	14	21.54
Education Level	Bachelor's degrees (S1)	9	13.85
	Master's degrees (S2)	52	80.00
	Doctor's degrees (S3)	4	6.15
Length of Service	< 2 years	2	3.08
	2-4 years	4	6.15
	> 4 years	59	90.77

Source: own work (2025)

These characteristics indicate that the majority of respondents are experienced, well-educated professionals, providing reliable insights into organizational dynamics (Saunders et al., 2019).

Validity and Reliability Testing

Prior to data analysis, the research instrument was tested for validity and reliability to ensure measurement quality. Construct validity was assessed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, comparing each item's correlation coefficient with the total score. All 37 questionnaire items (13 for motivation, 8 for work environment, and 16 for performance) showed correlation coefficients above the critical value ($r\text{-table} = 0.250$ at $\alpha = 0.05$). The lowest correlation coefficient was 0.312, and the highest was 0.789, indicating all items are valid measures of their respective constructs (Hair et al., 2019).

Internal consistency was measured using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The results showed:

Table 2. Reliability Test

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Motivation	0.832
Work Environmen	0.781
Performance	0.856

Source: own work (2025)

All scales exceed the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating high reliability (Taber, 2018). These results confirm that the instrument consistently measures the intended constructs across all respondents.

Hypothesis Testing

Path analysis was conducted to test the hypothesized relationships. The results of correlation and significance tests are summarized below:

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	Correlation (r)	R2	t/F-statistic	p-value	Decision
H1	X1 → Y	0.630	0.397 (39.7%)	t = 6.370	0.000	Supported
H2	X2 → Y	0.227	0.052 (5.2%)	t = 2.293	0.025	Supported
H3	X1,X2 → Y	0.790	0.624 (62.4%)	F = 51.312	0.000	Supported

Source: own work (2025)

The Influence of Work Motivation on Performance (H1):

The analysis revealed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.630$, $p < 0.001$) between work motivation and performance. Motivation explains approximately 39.7% of performance variance. The significant t-value (6.370) confirms H1 is accepted: Work motivation positively and significantly influences employee performance.

The Influence of Work Environment Perceptions on Performance (H2): A moderate but significant correlation was found ($r = 0.227$, $p = 0.025$), with work environment explaining 5.2% of performance variance. H2 is accepted: Employee perceptions of the work environment positively and significantly influence performance, though with less explanatory power than motivation.

The Combined Influence of Motivation and Environment on Performance (H3): The simultaneous analysis showed a very strong relationship ($R = 0.790$), with both variables collectively explaining 62.4% of performance variance. The highly significant F-value (51.312, $p < 0.001$) confirms H3 is accepted: Work motivation and work environment perceptions together have a substantial positive influence on employee performance.

Discussion

The findings align with contemporary organizational theories while extending their application to Indonesian higher education contexts. The strong influence of motivation supports Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000b), suggesting that intrinsic motivational factors (autonomy, competence, relatedness) are particularly relevant in academic settings. The significant role of the work environment corroborates the Job Demands-Resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), where psychosocial resources (supervisor support, positive climate) buffer against work stress and enhance engagement. The differential impact of motivation (39.7%) versus environment (5.2%) suggests that in professional knowledge-work settings like higher education, internal drives may outweigh contextual factors in determining performance outcomes. However, their combined effect (62.4%) underscores the importance of considering both personal and situational factors in performance management frameworks (Aguinis, 2023).

The findings of this study offer several actionable implications for enhancing employee performance at STISIP Bina Putera Banjar. Firstly, to address the substantial influence of work motivation (39.7%), the institution should implement targeted motivational strategies. These could include developing a competency-based career progression system that clearly links performance achievements to promotion opportunities, thereby addressing employees' need for achievement and recognition (Van den Broeck et al., 2021). Furthermore, instituting regular, formal recognition programs, such as "Employee of the Month" awards or team-based acknowledgments, can publicly validate contributions and reinforce positive behaviors. Enhancing professional autonomy by involving staff in decision-making processes related to their work and departmental goals would also address intrinsic motivational drivers such as competence and self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000b).

Secondly, to optimize the work environment, which showed a significant, though smaller, direct influence, management should focus on strengthening the psychosocial climate. This can be achieved by investing in leadership development programs for supervisors to cultivate supportive, communicative, and empathetic management styles (Malinda et al., 2018). Fostering a collaborative culture through structured inter-departmental projects and regular team-building activities can improve coordination and reduce silos. Additionally, conducting periodic assessments of the physical workspace (e.g., lighting, noise, ergonomics) and acting on employee feedback will demonstrate institutional care for staff well-being, indirectly boosting morale and performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Finally, an integrated approach is recommended, given the powerful combined effect of both factors (62.4% of the variance explained). The human resources department should revise the performance management system to holistically evaluate and develop employees, taking into account both their motivational profiles and the quality of their work environment. Establishing simple, regular feedback mechanisms, such as quarterly pulse surveys or suggestion boxes, can help management continuously monitor and respond to employee concerns regarding both motivational and environmental issues. Creating cross-functional committees tasked with developing initiatives that simultaneously enhance job resources (environment) and personal growth opportunities (motivation) would ensure that performance improvement strategies are synergistic and sustainable (Aguinis, 2023). By implementing these evidence-based recommendations, STISIP Bina Putera Banjar can create a more stimulating and supportive workplace that maximizes employee potential and institutional effectiveness.

While providing valuable insights, this study has limitations. The cross-sectional design prevents causal inferences. Future research could employ longitudinal designs to examine temporal dynamics. Additionally, incorporating qualitative methods could provide deeper understanding of motivational mechanisms and environmental perceptions. The moderate explanatory power of environmental factors suggests other variables (leadership style, organizational culture, compensation systems) might play significant roles. Future studies should explore these additional factors within the Indonesian higher education context. The findings demonstrate that both work motivation and environmental perceptions significantly influence employee performance, with their combined effect being particularly substantial. These results highlight the need for comprehensive human resource strategies that address both individual motivational needs and organizational environmental factors to optimize performance in higher education institutions.

5. Conclusion

Based on this study's results, both work motivation and perceptions of the work environment significantly influence employee performance at STISIP Bina Putera Banjar. Work motivation exerts a strong impact, while environmental perceptions also play a significant role, and together, these two factors contribute substantially to shaping overall work performance. These findings strengthen theories of organizational behavior in higher education in Indonesia and provide an empirical basis for human resource managers to develop strategies that integrate increased motivation with the creation of a more supportive work environment. Consequently, leaders and managers need to adopt a holistic approach, focusing not only on strengthening employees' internal drive through recognition and career development, but also actively fostering a cooperative and communicative work climate to achieve sustainable performance improvement.

While providing valuable insights, this study has limitations related to its cross-sectional design, reliance on self-reported data, and limited sample size within a single institution. Therefore, generalizations of the findings should be made with caution. For future research,

it is recommended to use a longitudinal or mixed-methods design, incorporate more objective performance data, and expand the sample across several universities to enhance the validity and applicability of the research results. Exploring moderating factors such as leadership style, organizational culture, or flexible work policies could also enrich our understanding of performance dynamics in academic environments.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper. The research was conducted independently without any financial, commercial, or personal relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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