
The Influence of Ethical Environment on Employee Performance with Optimism as a Mediator

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji pengaruh lingkungan etis terhadap kinerja karyawan dengan optimisme sebagai mediasi. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain penelitian cross-sectional survei untuk mengumpulkan data primer dari 187 responden yang bekerja di SMP Negeri berakreditasi A di Kota Bandar Lampung. Uji validitas dan reliabilitas dilakukan untuk menguji tingkat validitas dan reliabilitas instrumen penelitian yang digunakan. Kemudian, uji normalitas menggunakan kolmogorov-smirnov dilakukan untuk menguji distribusi data yang telah dikumpulkan. Analisis statistik deskriptif dan process macro hayes digunakan untuk menguji hipotesis. Hasil pengujian mendukung hipotesis 1, yang menyatakan bahwa lingkungan etis berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap kinerja karyawan. Selanjutnya, hasil penelitian mendukung hipotesis 2 yang menyatakan bahwa lingkungan etis berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap optimisme. Kemudian, hipotesis 3 yang menyatakan optimisme berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap kinerja karyawan. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga mendukung hipotesis 4 yang menyatakan bahwa optimisme memediasi pengaruh lingkungan etis terhadap kinerja karyawan. Oleh karena itu, penting bagi organisasi untuk menjaga lingkungan organisasi tetap etis dan menjaga optimisme untuk menjaga dan meningkatkan kinerja karyawan.

Kata Kunci: *Lingkungan etis; Optimisme; Kinerja karyawan*

Abstract

This research investigates the impact of the ethical environment on employee performance, with optimism serving as a mediating variable. This research employs a cross-sectional survey design to gather primary data from 187 participants employed in A-accredited junior high schools in Bandar Lampung City. Validity and reliability assessments were performed to evaluate the extent of validity and reliability of the research instruments employed. A Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was performed to assess the normality of the collected data distribution. Descriptive statistical analysis and the Hayes process macro were employed to test the hypothesis. The test results confirm hypothesis 1, indicating that the ethical environment positively and significantly influences employee performance. The study's results confirm hypothesis 2, indicating that the ethical environment positively and significantly influences optimism. Hypothesis 3 posits that optimism exerts a positive and significant influence on employee performance. This study further supports hypothesis 4, which posits that optimism mediates the relationship between ethical environment and employee performance. It is essential for organisations to foster an ethical environment and cultivate optimism to enhance employee performance.

Keywords: *Ethical environment; Optimism; Employee performance*

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INTRODUCTION

Employee performance is a critical determinant of an organization's success, as it directly influences productivity, organizational commitment, and collaboration among individuals to achieve institutional goals. Organizations function as structured entities comprising individuals who collectively pursue shared objectives (Risambessy et al., 2023). These institutions are characterized by several key attributes, including the presence of conscious and voluntary membership, shared goals, collaborative efforts, defined rules and regulations, and role specialization based on expertise (Risambessy et al., 2023). High employee performance is essential not only in profit-oriented organizations but also in service-oriented institutions, such as educational organizations. The quality of educators' and administrative staff's performance directly impacts the quality of education received by students, influencing both academic and character development. Therefore, concerted efforts are required to enhance the performance of employees in educational institutions.

One of the fundamental factors influencing employee performance is the work environment. A positive work environment has been found to enhance employee performance, as it fosters ethical behavior, reduces unethical conduct, and encourages employees to report concerns (Zhenjing et al., 2022; Treviño & Weaver, 2001). An ethical environment is characterized by shared ethical values and standards, merit-based promotions, fairness, and an atmosphere where employees feel comfortable expressing their opinions without fear of repercussions (Hijal-Moghrabi et al., 2017). In the educational sector, the ethical environment is reinforced through stringent regulations, such as national education laws and ethical codes for educators established by professional organizations like the Indonesian Teachers Association (PGRI). The ethical conduct of educators and administrative staff plays a crucial role in shaping students' behavior, as they serve as role models within the school environment. Consequently, adherence to ethical standards and regulations in educational institutions is essential for instilling ethical values and discipline in students.

Furthermore, educators and administrative staff must possess qualifications that align with their roles, as such alignment enhances their optimism regarding their ability to fulfill their responsibilities. When employees perceive that their competencies match their job demands, they are more likely to exhibit confidence in completing tasks, particularly those requiring teamwork. Optimism, defined as an individual's tendency to maintain favorable expectations about future outcomes (Carver et al., 2010), has been linked to increased creativity and positive emotions (Rego et al., 2012). Additionally, optimism fosters organizational commitment and enhances employee performance by promoting hope and perseverance (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). Empirical research has demonstrated a significant relationship between optimism and employee performance, as optimism has been positively associated with supervisor-rated job performance (Luthans et al., 2008). Similarly,

optimism has been shown to enhance individual performance outcomes (Green et al., 2004).

Employee performance is commonly assessed by comparing work outcomes with established standards (Dessler, 2006, as cited in Udin et al., 2022). It is also defined as the quality and quantity of work achieved by an employee in fulfilling assigned responsibilities (Hermina & Yosepha, 2019). Thus, high-performing employees effectively manage organizational resources, thereby contributing to overall institutional efficiency. Given the critical role of employee performance, organizations must implement strategies to enhance it. Prior studies have confirmed that a positive work environment significantly improves employee performance (Zhenjing et al., 2022). Additionally, leadership style, organizational culture, work ethics, ethical climate, ethical leadership, and perceived fairness have been identified as influential factors affecting employee performance (Hasibuan & Azmy, 2022; Leung, 2008; Mo & Shi, 2017; Colquitt et al., 2001, as cited in Cropanzano et al., 2007). However, conflicting findings exist regarding the impact of an ethical environment on employee performance. While some studies have found a direct relationship, others suggest that the effect is mediated by workplace optimism (Hough et al., 2020). Moreover, although optimism has been generally linked to improved employee performance (Hough et al., 2020; Luthans et al., 2008; Youssef & Luthans, 2007; Green et al., 2004), some research has found no significant effect (Tenney et al., 2015).

The inconsistencies in previous research findings highlight the need for further investigation. This study aims to examine the influence of an ethical environment on employee performance, with optimism as a mediating variable. The study will be conducted among educators and administrative staff in accredited public junior high schools (SMP Negeri) in Bandar Lampung, Indonesia. In accordance with Indonesia's National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003, the country's education system consists of primary, secondary, and higher education levels. The study population comprises educators and administrative staff working in SMP Negeri schools that have received accreditation grade A. According to the 2024 Education Data Center (DAPODIK), Bandar Lampung has 28 SMP Negeri schools with this accreditation status, employing a total of 1,775 educators and administrative personnel. These schools have demonstrated a high level of quality based on national accreditation criteria, which assess teacher performance, school leadership, learning environment climate, and student competency outcomes (Ministerial Decree No. 246/O/2024 on Accreditation Instruments for Early Childhood, Primary, and Secondary Education).

SMP Negeri have been selected as the study setting because they are formal public institutions that emphasize ethical behavior and service to society. Moreover, junior high school students are at a developmental stage where they are highly susceptible to environmental influences, necessitating strong ethical guidance. In this context, educators and administrative staff play a crucial role in establishing an

ethical school environment and demonstrating optimism, as students at this level tend to imitate their surroundings without fully discerning whether certain behaviors are appropriate. Given the existing inconsistencies in previous research regarding the relationship between an ethical environment, optimism, and employee performance, this study seeks to provide further empirical evidence on the mediating role of optimism in the relationship between an ethical environment and employee performance in the educational sector.

METHODOLOGY

Type of Research & Data Source

This study employs a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey approach. Quantitative research analyzes social phenomena numerically (Martono, 2015, as cited in Sudaryono, 2021). Cross-sectional surveys collect data at a single point in time (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Primary data is obtained through questionnaires using a Likert scale (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016; Sudaryono, 2021). Secondary data is previously available data obtained from indirect sources (Hardani et al., 2020), which in this study were obtained from books, journal articles, and online sources. Data collection instruments are used as tools used by researchers to collect data to make it more systematic and easier (Suharsimi, 2004, as cited in Sudaryono, 2021).

Operational Definition

A variable is an attribute, characteristic, or value that varies and is studied to draw conclusions (Sudaryono, 2021). Independent variables influence dependent variables (Sahir, 2021), with this study using ethical environment (X) as the independent variable. Dependent variables are affected by independent variables (Sudaryono, 2021), with employee performance (Y) as the dependent variable. Mediating variables link independent and dependent variables (Sudaryono, 2021), with optimism (M) serving as mediation. Ethical environment indicators include ethical guidelines and employee involvement (McDaniel, 1997). Optimism involves efficacy and engagement (Medlin & Green, 2009), while performance includes goal achievement and evaluation (Green et al., 2004).

Population and Sample

The population comprises all elements sharing specific characteristics (Hair et al., 2019). It includes educators and educational staff in accredited A public junior high schools in Bandar Lampung, as ethical environments are emphasized by national laws and teachers' codes of ethics. The sample is selected using probability sampling, ensuring equal selection chances (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Cluster sampling is applied by randomly choosing schools (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The required sample size is 170 respondents, calculated using the 5:1 ratio rule for 34 questionnaire items (Hair et al., 2019).

Data Analysis

Instrument testing includes validity and reliability assessments. Validity is evaluated using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), requiring a loading factor >0.5 , ideally 0.7 (Hair et al., 2019). Reliability is measured using Cronbach's Alpha, with a threshold of 0.60–0.70 (Hair et al., 2019). Normality testing employs the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, with $p > 0.05$ indicating normal distribution (Sahir, 2021). Descriptive statistics summarize data, while Pearson's correlation assesses relationships (Schober & Schwarte, 2018). Hypothesis testing utilizes bootstrapping via PROCESS Macro in SPSS, analyzing direct and indirect effects (Hair et al., 2019; Hayes, 2022; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

Between the dates of December 2 and December 12, 2024, the distribution of the questionnaire was carried out physically by personally delivering physical copies to the individuals who responded to the survey. The total number of questionnaires that were handed out was 200, and 187 of them were eventually returned, resulting in a response rate of 93.5%. It was mostly because of the academic holiday, which made it difficult for respondents to participate, that the other thirteen were not returned.

When it comes to the characteristics of the respondents, the bulk of them were female (75.4%). 52.94 percent have permanent civil servant (PNS) status. The majority of participants work as educators (81.8%). The respondents who were between the ages of 41 and 50 made up the least number (19.78%), whereas the age groups that comprised 21–30, 31–40, and 51–60 each made up 26.73% of the total. The bulk of the individuals had a bachelor's degree, which accounted for 77% of the total. Over sixty-two percent of the workforce had been employed for more than five years. The results of this study emphasise the fact that the majority of the sample is comprised of experienced educators who have strong academic degrees. This may be a factor that contributes to the dependability of the study's conclusions.

Description of Respondent Statements

The analysis of respondents' statements reveals significant insights into ethical environments, optimism, and employee performance. The findings indicate that respondents perceive their organization as fostering a strong ethical culture, as evidenced by a mean score of 4.21. Administrators are actively engaged in establishing ethical practices, ethical accountability is upheld, and ethical concerns are acknowledged. Moreover, respondents believe that ethical dilemmas are addressed through established procedures, and communication regarding ethical issues remains transparent.

In terms of optimism, respondents demonstrate a moderate level of confidence, responsibility, and problem-solving abilities, with an average score of 3.97. While they exhibit accountability for failures, a slight uncertainty exists

regarding their ability to accomplish tasks effectively. Nonetheless, they actively seek solutions to workplace challenges, signifying a proactive approach.

Regarding employee performance, the overall assessment suggests a high level of effectiveness, with a mean score of 4.10. Respondents affirm that their colleagues consistently achieve organizational goals, and their individual objectives align with institutional targets. Although the alignment of colleagues’ personal goals with organizational objectives requires further reinforcement, there is notable improvement in performance over the past year. These findings highlight an overall positive workplace environment, albeit with areas for potential enhancement.

Results of Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Critical insights into the variables that are being investigated can be obtained through descriptive statistical analysis. The ethical environment is represented by the letter X, which has a minimum value of 31 and a maximum value of 62, an average value of 54.70, and a standard deviation of 7.24. Three is the lowest possible number for optimism (M), while fifteen is the highest possible value. There is a standard deviation of 2.85 that corresponds to the average value of optimism (M), which is 11.91. Regarding employee performance (Y), the standard deviation is 4.69, the average is 20.50, the minimum value is 5, and the highest value is 25. Through the use of correlation analysis, it has been determined that there is a strong connection between performance (0.893), ethical environment (0.870), and optimism (0.789).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistical Analysis

	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	1	2	3
X	31	62	54,70	7,24			
M	3	15	11,91	2,85	0.789**		
Y	5	25	20,50	4,69	0.870**	0.893**	

Results of Hypothesis Testing

The bootstrapping approach was employed for the hypothesis testing, and the PROCESS Macro Hayes extension in SPSS was utilised for the application. It may be concluded that the data provide evidence in favour of all three hypotheses (H1, H2, and H3) is presented in Table 2. As evidenced by a β coefficient of 0.2844, and a p-value of 0.0000, the original hypothesis (H1) indicates that the ethical environment influences employee performance in a manner that is both positive and significant. A positive and significant influence of the ethical environment on optimism is shown by the second hypothesis (H2), which has a beta coefficient of 0.3108, and a p-value of 0.0000. A considerable positive influence on employee performance is shown by the third hypothesis (H3), which states that optimism has a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.9000$, p-value= 0.0000). The result of the mediation impact of optimism on the connection between the ethical environment and employee performance (H4) is presented in Table 3.

Table 2. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Correlation	β Coefficient	p-value	Result
H1	Ethical Environment \rightarrow Employee Performance	0.2844	0.0000	Supported
H2	Ethical Environment \rightarrow Optimism	0.3108	0.0000	Supported
H3	Optimism \rightarrow Employee Performance	0.9000	0.0000	Supported

Source: Processed primary data, 2025.

The hypothesis testing results for H4 indicate that optimism mediates the relationship between the ethical environment and employee performance, with a lower interval of 0.1995 and an upper interval of 0.3332, supporting the hypothesis. This aligns with Hayes (2022), who states that a bootstrap confidence interval above zero confirms a significant indirect effect.

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Correlation	Effect	BootLLCI	BootULCI	Result
H4	Ethical Environment > Optimism > Employee Performance	0,2797	0,1995	0,3332	Supported

Ethical Environment Has a Positive and Significant Influence on Employee Performance of Educators and Education Personnel in A-Accredited Junior High Schools in Bandar Lampung City

The results of hypothesis testing indicate that an ethical environment has a direct and significant positive effect on employee performance, with a significance value (p-value) of 0.0000 and a beta coefficient (β) of 0.2844. The beta coefficient represents an estimate derived from regression analysis, commonly utilized to compare the relative effects of independent variables on dependent variables (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). This finding suggests that an ethical environment contributes 28% to employee performance. Respondents perceived that personnel policies within their work units align with ethical standards (mean = 4.18) and that personnel decisions reflect ethical considerations (mean = 4.17). Such a work environment fosters employee commitment, and encourage employees to work harder to achieve success (Zhenjing et al., 2022). Furthermore, ethical decision-making and personnel policies reinforce employees' perception of organizational support, fostering trust and fairness, which improves commitment and performance (Meyer et al., 1989; Brown et al., 2015; Wu & Wang, 2008).

Ethical Environment Has a Positive and Significant Influence on Optimism of Educators and Education Personnel in A-Accredited Junior High Schools in Bandar Lampung City

The hypothesis testing results indicate that an ethical environment has a direct and significant positive influence on optimism, with a significance value (p-value) of 0.0000 and a beta coefficient (β) of 0.3108. This suggests that an ethical environment contributes 31% to employees' optimism. Respondents reported that they feel supported by the organization when facing ethical dilemmas (mean = 4.09), fostering trust in the organization's commitment to ethical practices. Furthermore, respondents believe that administrators at all levels work to establish shared ethical practices (mean = 4.27), reinforcing their confidence that ethical violations are minimized in the workplace. Research indicates that ethical workplace climates enhance employee trust, which in turn boosts optimism (Agrawal, 2017; Hough et al., 2020). This trust strengthens employees' confidence in their ability to perform tasks effectively (mean = 3.87), as they perceive organizational practices as ethical and rule-compliant, ultimately fostering higher levels of workplace optimism (Hough et al., 2020).

Optimism Has a Positive and Significant Influence on Employee Performance of Educators and Education Personnel in A-Accredited Junior High Schools in Bandar Lampung City

The results of hypothesis testing indicate that optimism has a direct and significant positive impact on employee performance, with a significance value (p-value) of 0.0000 and a beta coefficient (β) of 0.9000. This finding suggests that optimism contributes 90% to variations in employee performance. Respondents expressed strong confidence in their ability to successfully complete their tasks and responsibilities (mean = 3.87). Research indicates that employee optimism enhances overall well-being, fosters individual growth, strengthens interpersonal relationships, instills pride in achievements, and promotes workplace happiness (Burns & Gunderman, 2008). Consequently, employees experience greater comfort and focus at work, reducing stress and ultimately improving performance. Furthermore, optimism—characterized by self-confidence and belief in one's abilities—encourages employee engagement (MacHe et al., 2014), facilitating the development of skills and expertise. Enhanced competencies align with organizational goals, as organizations seek skilled employees to optimize efficiency. Thus, employees' personal objectives are directly aligned with the organization's objectives (mean = 4.2).

Optimism Mediates the Influence of Ethical Environment on Employee Performance of Educators and Education Personnel in A-Accredited Junior High Schools in Bandar Lampung City

The hypothesis testing results indicate that optimism mediates the relationship between an ethical environment and employee performance, with a lower interval value of 0.1995, an upper interval value of 0.3332, and an effect size of 0.2797. This finding suggests that optimism significantly mediates the positive

influence of an ethical environment on employee performance. Respondents reported active participation in ethical decision-making discussions at their workplace (mean = 4.48), indicating a perception of fairness and transparency within the organization. Additionally, they acknowledged that administrators at all levels work collaboratively to establish ethical practices (mean = 4.27), which enhances trust in the organization and subsequently increases optimism (Hough et al., 2020). Confidence in ethical workplace practices allows employees to focus on their tasks without ethical concerns, thereby improving well-being, personal growth, relationships, and job satisfaction (Burns & Gunderman, 2008). This ultimately enhances employees' efficiency, skills, and experience, aligning their personal goals with organizational objectives (mean = 4.2).

CONCLUSION

This study investigates the influence of an ethical environment on employee performance, with optimism as a mediating factor among educators and educational staff in A-accredited public junior high schools (SMP Negeri) in Bandar Lampung. The findings support all hypotheses, demonstrating that an ethical environment positively and significantly impacts employee performance both directly and indirectly through optimism. Employees in organizations with strong ethical climates exhibit higher levels of trust, which fosters optimism and enhances their ability to perform effectively. Furthermore, optimism itself significantly contributes to improved employee performance, highlighting its essential role in organizational success.

Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed. SMP Negeri should strengthen ethical issue resolution mechanisms by ensuring follow-up actions on reported concerns. Additionally, experienced employees should provide mentorship to colleagues who lack confidence in completing their tasks. Organizations must also enhance goal clarity and individual role significance through effective communication strategies such as regular meetings, policy dissemination, and performance indicator development. However, this study has limitations, including potential sampling bias due to cluster sampling, the inability to observe behavioral changes over time with a cross-sectional design, and response bias from self-reported data. Lastly, the study's findings may not be generalizable beyond the research context due to cultural and policy differences across different institutions.

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