

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AND PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENT OF VOCATIONAL SCHOOL TEACHERS: TESTING THE ROLE OF STRESS MANAGEMENT AS AN INTERVENING VARIABLE

Nurhayati¹, Rita Retnowari², Griet Helena Laihad³

^{1,2,3} Universitas Pakuan, Bogor, Indonesia

Email: nurhaypdg@gmail.com¹, ritaretnowati@unpak.ac.id²
griet102309@yahoo.com.au³

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji pengaruh komunikasi interpersonal terhadap komitmen profesional guru SMK, baik secara langsung maupun tidak langsung melalui manajemen stres sebagai variabel intervening. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan mixed method dengan desain explanatory sequential. Tahap kuantitatif dilakukan melalui survei terhadap 178 guru tetap yayasan di SMK swasta berakreditasi A di Kota Depok, Jawa Barat, yang dipilih menggunakan multistage random sampling dan proportional random sampling. Data kuantitatif dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner skala Likert dan dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif, uji prasyarat, analisis jalur, serta uji Sobel. Tahap kualitatif dilakukan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dan observasi terhadap guru, kepala sekolah, dan pengawas sekolah untuk memperdalam hasil kuantitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa komunikasi interpersonal berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap komitmen profesional guru, komunikasi interpersonal berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap manajemen stres, serta manajemen stres berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap komitmen profesional guru. Namun, hasil uji tes Sobel menunjukkan bahwa manajemen stres tidak memediasi hubungan antara komunikasi interpersonal dan komitmen profesional guru secara signifikan. Temuan kualitatif memperjelas bahwa komunikasi interpersonal menciptakan dukungan emosional dan kenyamanan kerja, tetapi tekanan guru lebih banyak dipengaruhi oleh beban administratif, tuntutan tugas, dan sistem kerja di sekolah. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa penguatan komitmen profesional guru SMK perlu dilakukan melalui budaya komunikasi yang suportif sekaligus pembenahan sistem kerja sekolah.

Kata kunci:

Komitmen Profesional; Komunikasi Interpersonal; Manajemen Stres; Guru SMK; Manajemen Pendidikan

Abstract: This study aims to examine the influence of interpersonal communication on the professional commitment of vocational high school teachers, both directly and indirectly through stress management as an intervening variable. The study used a mixed-methods approach with an explanatory sequential design. The quantitative stage was conducted through a survey of 178 permanent foundation teachers at A-accredited private vocational high schools in Depok City, West Java, who were selected using multistage random sampling and proportional random sampling. Quantitative data were collected through a Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics, prerequisite tests, path analysis, and the Sobel test. The qualitative stage was conducted through semi-structured interviews and observations of teachers, principals, and school supervisors to deepen the quantitative results. The results showed that interpersonal

communication had a positive and significant effect on teachers' professional commitment, interpersonal communication had a positive and significant effect on stress management, and stress management had a positive and significant effect on teachers' professional commitment. However, *the Sobel test results* showed that stress management did not significantly mediate the relationship between interpersonal communication and teachers' professional commitment. Qualitative findings indicate that interpersonal communication fosters emotional support and work comfort, whereas administrative burdens, task demands, and school work systems have a greater influence on teacher stress. This research confirms that strengthening the professional commitment of vocational school teachers requires a supportive communication culture and improvements to the school's work system.

Keywords:

Professional Commitment; Interpersonal Communication; Stress Management; Vocational High School Teachers; Educational Management

Introductions

Teachers play a central role in determining the quality of education, as their professional capacity directly influences learning processes, student development, and school improvement. In carrying out their responsibilities, teachers are not only expected to transfer knowledge, but also to guide students in developing skills, character, and moral values needed for future success (Sulistiani & Nugraheni, 2023). However, the increasing complexity of educational demands requires teachers to demonstrate strong pedagogical competence, professional responsibility, adaptability, and commitment. These demands include educating, teaching, guiding, directing, training, assessing, and evaluating students in accordance with professional standards (Supratman, dkk., 2020). Therefore, strengthening teachers' professional commitment is essential to ensure that they can perform their roles effectively and contribute to sustainable educational quality.

Amid rapid technological development, changing labor-market demands, and increasing expectations for closer alignment between vocational education and industry, the role of vocational teachers as professional educators has become increasingly complex. Vocational teachers are required not only to master pedagogical competencies but also to continuously update their technical knowledge, integrate digital technologies into instruction, adapt the curriculum to evolving workplace standards, and prepare students with relevant occupational and employability skills. These demands may increase teachers' workload and professional pressure. Therefore, teachers' professional commitment is essential not only for maintaining the quality of vocational education but also for preparing graduates who are competent, adaptable, and ready to respond to changing global and industrial challenges. Haider et al., (2020) revealed that " *Secondary School Teachers and their Professional Commitment: An Empirical Evidence from District Lasbela, Balochistan* ." The success of schools and the success of education depends on the level of commitment among school staff, especially teachers. Therefore, teachers can carry out their professional duties as professional educators if they have a good professional commitment. Haryanto, (2024) emphasized that teachers' professional commitment is reflected in their behavior toward their work and their willingness to sustain their professional role. This commitment enables teachers to remain engaged and responsible when facing various challenges in educational practice. Similarly, Meriç & Erdem, (2020), in their study "Prediction of Professional Commitment of Teachers by the Job Characteristics of the Teaching Profession," found that specific characteristics of the teaching profession significantly predicted teachers' professional commitment. Djuanda (2022) explains that a teacher's professional commitment reflects an individual's level of loyalty and belief in their profession. This loyalty is not only evident in their physical presence at school but also in their active involvement in activities that support their professional goals and values. Teachers with strong professional commitment tend to continuously improve their knowledge and competencies through professional development, reflective practice, and adaptation to changing educational demands (Wulandari et al., 2023). Therefore, teachers' professional commitment can be understood as their psychological and

professional attachment to the teaching profession, reflected in loyalty, dedication, active engagement, responsibility, and adherence to professional values and ethical standards.

Vocational High Schools (SMK) in Indonesia play a significant role in producing skilled graduates needed by the workforce. According to Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, vocational high schools (SMK) are a level of education intended to prepare students with skills and knowledge appropriate to the needs of the job market. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) survey, the open unemployment rate (TPT) in Indonesia in 2024, the largest contributor to unemployment in Indonesia is Vocational High School (SMK) graduates (Yulianti, 2024). This percentage is equivalent to 7.28 million people, the unemployment rate as of February 2025, while in August 2025 it increased to 8.63% compared to February 2025 (Yonatan, 2025). Although graduate unemployment is influenced by multiple economic, institutional, and labor-market factors, vocational teachers contribute to students' employability by ensuring that instruction remains relevant to technological developments and industry needs. Therefore, strengthening teachers' professional commitment is an important component of broader efforts to improve the quality and relevance of vocational education..

In practice, teachers' professional commitment is not formed in isolation but is influenced by social, psychological, and organizational conditions within the school environment. One important social factor is interpersonal communication, understood as a reciprocal relational process through which teachers and other school members exchange information, express thoughts and emotions, interpret messages, and develop mutual understanding. In the school context, effective interpersonal communication enables teachers to build trust, coordinate professional tasks, clarify roles and expectations, resolve misunderstandings, and establish supportive working relationships. In this study, interpersonal communication was operationalized through openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, equality, feedback, and message clarity. These communication qualities may also support teachers' stress management by providing opportunities to express work-related concerns, obtain emotional and practical support, reduce uncertainty, and collaboratively identify solutions to workplace problems. Such relational resources can help teachers interpret work demands more adaptively, regulate their emotional responses, and apply appropriate coping strategies. Referring to Colquitt et al., (2021), interpersonal communication can therefore be positioned as a relational resource that strengthens trust, collaboration, social support, and a sense of belonging, whereas stress management represents teachers' psychological capacity to regulate work pressure and maintain effective professional functioning. Within this conceptual framework, interpersonal communication and stress management are expected to strengthen teachers' professional commitment through different but related mechanisms: interpersonal communication through supportive professional relationships and stress management through adaptive responses to work demands.

Administrative demands, curriculum changes, performance pressures, interactions with students, and the complexity of instructional tasks constitute significant job demands for teachers. According to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory, excessive job demands may lead to work stress, emotional exhaustion, and burnout when they are not balanced by adequate job resources, such as social support, autonomy, supportive leadership, role clarity, and opportunities for professional development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). In the school context, these job resources can help teachers cope with work pressures, maintain their well-being, and continue performing their professional responsibilities effectively. Recent research further indicates that major changes in school work systems may intensify teachers' stress, whereas principal support and workplace buoyancy can reduce somatic burden, stress, and emotional exhaustion (Collie, 2021). Therefore, teachers' stress management should not be viewed solely as an individual capacity but as a process shaped by the interaction between personal coping resources, job demands, and organizational support within the school environment.

Previous research has addressed professional commitment, work stress, social support, and teacher well-being. Kim and Asbury (2020) emphasized the importance of interpersonal communication and social support, Collie (2021) demonstrated the role of supportive leadership in reducing teacher stress, and Bastian & Widodo (2024) examined the relationship between interpersonal communication and professional commitment. However, little research has examined stress management as a mediating variable between interpersonal communication and professional commitment, particularly among vocational high school teachers.

This gap is important because it can clarify whether interpersonal communication is directly related to professional commitment through trust, social support, and belonging, or indirectly through stress management. The results can help schools determine appropriate strategies, including strengthening communication, enhancing stress management skills, and improving workload, administration, and institutional support. Therefore, this study examines the direct and indirect effects between interpersonal communication, stress management, and professional commitment of vocational high school teachers..

The state-of-the-art studies indicate that teacher professional commitment has been examined through various perspectives, including leadership, motivation, self-efficacy, organizational support, and work-related factors. However, previous studies have not fully integrated social, psychological, and organizational factors in explaining how teachers' professional commitment can be strengthened. Therefore, this study extends the existing literature by examining interpersonal communication, servant leadership, stress management, and decision-making as interconnected factors that may contribute to teachers' professional commitment.

State-of-the-art studies indicate that teachers' professional commitment has been widely examined through various factors, such as leadership, motivation, organizational support, self-efficacy, and work-related conditions. However, these studies have not fully synthesized the interaction between social, psychological, and organizational factors in strengthening teachers' professional commitment. In particular, stress management has received limited attention as a psychological factor that may influence teachers' ability to remain committed amid increasing work demands. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by adopting a more integrative approach that examines interpersonal communication, servant leadership, stress management, and decision-making as interconnected factors contributing to teachers' professional commitment. Considering the above problems, a solution is needed. The formulation of the research problem is whether interpersonal communication influences teacher professional commitment through stress management. The purpose of this study is to empirically test the influence of interpersonal communication and stress management on teacher professional commitment. Based on this description, this study aims to examine the influence of interpersonal communication on the professional commitment of vocational high school teachers, both directly and indirectly through stress management as an intervening variable. The novelty of this study lies in two main aspects. First, it examines stress management as an intervening mechanism in the relationship between interpersonal communication and the professional commitment of vocational high school teachers. Second, it employs an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach to deepen the interpretation of quantitative findings through qualitative data. This study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of educational management studies, particularly in explaining how teachers' professional commitment can be strengthened through the integration of social and psychological factors. Practically, the findings may serve as a basis for schools to develop a supportive communication culture, manage teachers' work-related stress, and strengthen organizational systems that sustain teachers' professional commitment.

Method

This study used a *mixed methods approach* with an *explanatory sequential design*. This design was used because the study sought not only to statistically examine the relationships among interpersonal communication, stress management, and teachers' professional commitment, but also to understand how these relationships are experienced and interpreted in the actual context of vocational high schools. The quantitative phase provided evidence of the strength and significance of the relationships among variables, while the qualitative phase was used to explain the meaning behind the statistical findings through participants' experiences, perceptions, and contextual conditions in schools (Creswell & Clark,

2017). The quantitative stage was conducted first to examine the influence of interpersonal communication on the professional commitment of vocational high school teachers, both directly and indirectly through stress management as an intervening variable. The qualitative stage was conducted after the quantitative results were obtained to deepen the interpretation of the relationship between interpersonal communication, stress management, and teacher professional commitment. The integration of both types of data was carried out at the interpretation stage.

The study was conducted in 16 A-accredited private vocational high schools in Depok City, West Java. The target population consisted of 1,514 permanent foundation teachers employed in private vocational high schools across Depok City. The study sites and respondents were selected through a multistage random sampling procedure. In the first stage, five of the eleven subdistricts in Depok City – Sukmajaya, Cimanggis, Tapos, Cilodong, Beji and Cipayung – were selected through simple random sampling. In the second stage, eligible A-accredited private vocational high schools within the selected subdistricts were randomly selected, resulting in 16 participating schools. These schools comprised an accessible population of 321 permanent foundation teachers. The sample size was calculated using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error (Setyaningsih, 2020), resulting in 178 respondents. Respondents within each school were then selected through simple random sampling. The distribution of the accessible population and selected sample across the participating schools is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Number of Samples

No	Area	School Name	Accreditation	Number Of Teachers	Sample Calculation
1	Subdistrict Sukmajaya	SMKS Tirtajaya	A	17	$(17/321)*178= 9$
		SMKS Yapemri Depok	A	14	$(14/321)*178= 8$
		SMKS Yappa Depok	A	20	$(20/321)*178= 11$
		SMKS Ganesa Satria 1	A	12	$(12/321)*178= 7$
2	Subdistrict Tapos	SMKS Forward Nusantara	A	17	$(17/321)*178= 9$
3	Subdistrict Cimanggis	SMKS Taruna Bhakti	A	50	$(50/321)*178= 28$
		SMKS Assalam	A	20	$(20/321)*178= 11$
4	Subdistrict Cipayung	SMK Assalamah	A	29	$(29/321)*178= 16$
		SMK Al-Muhtadin	A	15	$(15/321)*178= 8$
		SMKS Izzata/ Arjuna	A	10	$(10/321)*178= 6$
5	Subdistrict Cilodong	SMK PGRI 1 Depok	A	28	$(28/321)*178= 16$
		SMK Madani	A	15	$(15/321)*178= 8$
6	Subdistrict Beji	SMKS Broadcast Mahardhika	A	7	$(7/321)*178= 4$
		SMKS Karya Muda	A	15	$(15/321)*178= 8$
		SMKS Putra Bangsa	A	40	$(40/321)*178= 22$
		SMKS Sari Farma	A	12	$(12/321)*178= 7$
Total				321	178

Quantitative data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26, including descriptive statistics, prerequisite analysis tests, path analysis, and the Sobel test. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the characteristics of the data, while prerequisite tests were conducted to ensure that the assumptions for further analysis were met. Path analysis was used to examine the direct relationships among variables, and the Sobel test was applied to assess the significance of the intervening effect. Qualitative data were analyzed through manual coding, including data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results of the qualitative analysis were then integrated

with the quantitative findings at the interpretation stage to explain the dynamics of the relationships between variables in the context of educational management in vocational schools.

Findings and Discussion

Quantitative findings

Respondent demographic results

This study involved 178 permanent foundation teachers at private vocational schools in Depok City, West Java. Respondent descriptions included age, gender, length of service, and education level. An overview of respondent characteristics is presented in Table 2:

Table 2
Respondent Demographic Results

Demographic	Amount	Percentage
Age		
25-35 years	81 teachers	46%
36-45 years	28 teachers	16%
46-55 years	53 teachers	30%
56-65 years	16 teachers	9%
Gender		
Man	57 teachers	32%
Woman	121 teachers	68%
Years of service		
< 2 years	16 teachers	9%
2-5 years	35 teachers	20%
6-10 years	40 teachers	22%
>10 years	87 teachers	49%
Level of education		
Senior High School	6 teachers	3%
D3	3 teachers	2%
S1	145 teachers	81%
S2	23 teachers	13%
S3	1 teacher	1%

Based on Table 2, the majority of respondents were in the 25–35 year age range, amounting to 81 teachers (45.5%). In terms of gender, respondents were predominantly female (121 teachers (68.0%)), while males numbered 57 teachers (32.0%). Based on length of service, the largest group was teachers with more than 10 years of service, amounting to 87 teachers (48.9%). Meanwhile, based on education level, the majority of respondents had a bachelor's degree (145 teachers (81.5%)). This composition indicates that the study respondents were dominated by teachers with a bachelor's degree and relatively long work experience.

Next, a descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to obtain a general overview of the scores for teachers' professional commitment, interpersonal communication, and stress management. The results of the descriptive analysis are presented in Table 2.

Descriptive Data Results

Table 3
Descriptive Data Results

	Teacher Professional Commitment	Interpersonal Communication	Stress Management
N	178	178	178
Mean	151.66	151.56	153.24

Standard Deviation	15,469	14,979	16,231
Minimum	114	112	112
Maximum	185	180	184

Based on Table 3, all variables had the same number of respondents, namely 178 teachers. The stress management variable obtained the highest average value of 153.24 with a standard deviation of 16.231. Teacher professional commitment had an average value of 151.66 with a standard deviation of 15.469, while interpersonal communication had an average value of 151.56 with a standard deviation of 14.979. In general, the three variables showed a fairly wide range of scores, so the data showed variations in teacher responses to interpersonal communication, stress management, and professional commitment.

Data requirements test results

Prior to hypothesis testing, the data were examined using a prerequisite analysis test. The normality test showed that all three variables had a significance value of 0.200. Since the significance value was greater than 0.05, the data on the variables of teacher professional commitment, interpersonal communication, and stress management were declared normally distributed. The results of the normality test are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Normality test results

No	Variables	Sig Value	α	Conclusion
1	Teacher Professional Commitment	0.200	0.05	Normally distributed data
2	Interpersonal Communication	0.200	0.05	Normally distributed data
3	Stress management	0.200	0.05	Normally distributed data

In addition to the normality test, a linearity test was conducted to ensure that the relationship between the analyzed variables met the linearity assumption. The results of the linearity test indicate that the relationship between teacher professional commitment and interpersonal communication has a significance value of 0.122, while the relationship between stress management and interpersonal communication has a significance value of 0.350. Both values are greater than 0.05, so the relationship between the variables is stated as a linear relationship. The results of the linearity test are presented in Table 4.

Table 5
Linearity Test Results

No	Relationship between variables	F _{count}	F _{table}	Sig	α	Test Results
1	Y over X1	1293	1.44	0.122	0.05	Linear
2	X3 over X1	1,010	1.44	0.350	0.05	Linear

From Table 3 above, the regression equations of Y against X1 and X3 against X1 show a Sig value > 0.05 (5%), which means that the regression equation model of Y against X1 and X3 against X1 is linear and the linearity requirements are met.

Hypothesis Test Results

After all data requirements are met, we continue to conduct research hypothesis testing, the results of the hypothesis test calculations are as follows:

Table 6
Hypothesis Test Results

Path of Influence	B	SE	β	t	Sig.	Conclusion
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Interpersonal communication → Teachers' professional commitment	0.409	0.071	0.396	5,715	0.001	Significant
Interpersonal communication → Stress management	0.261	0.078	0.241	3,329	0.001	Significant
Stress management → Teachers' professional commitment	0.158	0.070	0.165	2,245	0.026	Significant

Based on Table 5, interpersonal communication has a positive and significant effect on teachers' professional commitment with a path coefficient of $\beta = 0.396$, t -value = 5.715, and $p < 0.001$. These results indicate that the better the interpersonal communication built by teachers in the school environment, the higher the teachers' professional commitment. Thus, the first hypothesis is accepted.

Interpersonal communication also had a positive and significant effect on stress management, with a path coefficient of $\beta = 0.241$, t -value = 3.329, and $p = 0.001$. These findings indicate that better interpersonal communication is related to teachers' ability to manage work stress. Thus, the second hypothesis is accepted.

Furthermore, stress management had a positive and significant effect on teachers' professional commitment, with a path coefficient of $\beta = 0.165$, t -value = 2.245, and $p = 0.026$. These results indicate that the better a teacher's ability to manage stress, the higher their tendency to maintain their professional commitment. Thus, the third hypothesis is accepted.

To test the indirect effect of interpersonal communication on teachers' professional commitment through stress management, a *Sobel test* was conducted. The results of the mediation test are presented in Table 6.

Table 7
Results of Indirect Effect Test Using Sobel Test

Indirect Path	Indirect Effect	Z Sobel	Sig.	Criteria	Conclusion
Interpersonal communication → Stress management → Teachers' professional commitment	0.034	1.87	0.061	$Z < 1.96$ and $p > 0.05$	Not significant

Based on Table 6, the *Sobel test* results show a Z value of 1.87 with a significance value of 0.061. This Z value is smaller than 1.96 and the significance value is greater than 0.05. Thus, stress management is not proven to significantly mediate the effect of interpersonal communication on teacher professional commitment. This means that interpersonal communication does have a direct influence on teacher professional commitment, but this influence is not strongly explained by stress management as an intervening variable in teacher professional commitment. The pathway through stress management is relatively weak and insignificant.

Overall, the quantitative results indicate that interpersonal communication and stress management both have significant direct effects on teachers' professional commitment. However, the indirect effect of interpersonal communication on teachers' professional commitment through stress management was not statistically significant, with an indirect effect coefficient of $\beta = 0.034$ and a Sobel test value of $Z = 1.75$, which was below the critical value of 1.96 at the 5% significance level. This finding suggests that interpersonal communication contributes more directly to teachers' professional commitment rather than indirectly through stress management mechanisms.

Qualitative findings

Overall, the quantitative results indicate that interpersonal communication and stress management both have a significant direct influence on teachers' professional commitment. However, the indirect pathway through stress management was not significant. This finding suggests that stronger interpersonal communication is more directly related to teachers' professional commitment than through stress management mechanisms.

Theme 1: Interpersonal communication provides emotional and social support, but its role in reducing work-related stress is limited when structural and administrative demands remain high

Several teachers stated that positive interpersonal communication with colleagues and school

leaders created a more comfortable, open, and supportive work environment. However, their experiences varied regarding its role in reducing work stress. Teacher A explained that “interpersonal communication is not the primary factor in increasing teachers’ professional commitment through stress management because teacher professionalism and stress are influenced by various internal and external factors” (Interview, Teacher A). In contrast, another teacher acknowledged that communication helped provide emotional relief, although it did not eliminate stress caused by administrative duties and excessive workloads (Interview, Teacher B). A school leader similarly emphasized that workload distribution, institutional policies, and administrative demands were more influential in determining teachers’ stress levels than communication alone (Interview, School Leader A). Thus, the qualitative findings indicate that interpersonal communication provides emotional and social support, but it is insufficient to mediate professional commitment when teachers continue to face substantial structural and administrative pressures.

This statement suggests that interpersonal communication helps create positive work relationships, but it isn't always a key factor in stress management. Another teacher also stated, "Even if you communicate well with your friends, if the workload piles up, it's still stressful. So it's not just about communication, but how we manage ourselves." (Interview, Teacher B)

This qualitative finding helps interpret the quantitative result that interpersonal communication was significantly associated with teachers’ stress management. However, the mediation analysis did not provide sufficient statistical evidence that stress management mediated the relationship between interpersonal communication and teachers’ professional commitment.

Theme 2: Teachers' work pressure is more influenced by the administrative burden and school work systems.

The interview findings indicated that several participants perceived job demands, administrative burdens, time pressure, and the school work system as more prominent sources of teacher stress than interpersonal relationships. This view was also supported by the school supervisor, who stated, “From the field, good communication does contribute to a more comfortable work environment. However, when it comes to teacher stress and professional commitment, communication alone is insufficient. Many teachers communicate well but still feel burdened by excessive workloads. Therefore, the issue is not only communication but also the work system and teachers’ personal readiness” (Interview, School Supervisor). Although interpersonal communication contributed to a more supportive work environment, participants’ accounts suggested that structural and individual factors continued to play a substantial role in shaping teacher stress.

This statement suggests that while interpersonal communication does help create a more conducive work environment, teacher stress persists when the workload, administrative demands, and school work systems are not managed appropriately. Therefore, teacher stress cannot be explained solely by the quality of interpersonal communication; it also needs to be examined in terms of work structure and institutional support.

Theme 3: Teachers' professional commitment is understood as professional responsibility and discipline.

In addition to interpersonal communication and work-related stress, the interview findings showed that teachers’ professional commitment was reflected in responsibility, discipline, and awareness of professional duties. One principal stated, “A teacher’s commitment is more visible in their responsibility and discipline than in how well they communicate with colleagues” (Interview, Principal). This view complements the quantitative finding that interpersonal communication was significantly associated with teachers’ professional commitment. It suggests that communication functions as an important relational resource by strengthening trust, cooperation, and social support, whereas responsibility, discipline, and professional awareness represent behavioral expressions of commitment. Therefore, interpersonal communication is associated with professional commitment, but it is not the only factor involved, and its relationship with commitment is not sufficiently explained through stress management alone.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The integration of the quantitative and qualitative findings indicates that interpersonal communication plays an important role in strengthening social support, creating a more open work environment, and improving teachers' work comfort. Quantitatively, interpersonal communication was positively and significantly associated with teachers' professional commitment and stress management. However, the mediation analysis did not provide sufficient statistical evidence that stress management mediated the relationship between interpersonal communication and teachers' professional commitment, as indicated by an indirect effect coefficient of $\beta = 0.034$ and a Sobel test value of $Z = 1.75$, which was below the critical value of 1.96. The qualitative findings help interpret this statistically non-significant indirect pathway by showing that positive communication provides emotional and social support but may be insufficient to reduce stress arising from heavy workloads, administrative demands, time pressures, and school work systems. Thus, the findings suggest that, in the context of this study, interpersonal communication was more strongly associated with teachers' professional commitment through direct relational processes than through stress-management mechanisms.

Qualitative findings explain these results by showing that interpersonal communication does help create a more comfortable work environment, but it is not sufficient to reduce work stress stemming from administrative burdens, task demands and school work systems. Furthermore, teachers' professional commitment is also influenced by responsibility, discipline, and awareness of professional values. Thus, the influence of interpersonal communication on teachers' professional commitment is stronger directly through social support, a sense of appreciation, and strengthening of professional identity, rather than primarily through reducing work stress.

Discussion

The research results show that interpersonal communication has a positive and significant effect on teachers' professional commitment. This finding confirms that the better the quality of interpersonal communication teachers build in the school environment, the greater the tendency for teachers to maintain engagement, responsibility, and loyalty to their profession.

The quality of social interactions developed by teachers within the school environment contributes significantly to fostering loyalty, responsibility, professional engagement, and commitment to the teaching profession. Teachers who establish open, empathetic, and supportive communication are more likely to demonstrate active involvement in instructional duties and institutional responsibilities. This finding is consistent with organizational behavior theory, which explains that positive social interactions can shape favorable work attitudes and strengthen individuals' engagement with both their organization and profession (Colquitt et al., 2021). In the educational context, interpersonal communication functions not merely as a mechanism for exchanging information, but as a relational resource through which trust, emotional support, professional identity, and a sense of belonging are developed. Therefore, this study extends the understanding of interpersonal communication by positioning it as an important social mechanism that directly strengthens teachers' professional commitment.

The relationship between interpersonal communication and teachers' professional commitment can be explained through social exchange theory. This theory suggests that individuals are more likely to demonstrate loyalty, responsibility, and active engagement when they perceive their social relationships as supportive, fair, and reciprocal. In the school context, open and empathetic communication allows teachers to feel valued, heard, respected, and accepted by colleagues and school leaders. These positive interactions foster trust, a sense of belonging, and perceived organizational support. In return, teachers may feel a psychological obligation to reciprocate the support they receive by demonstrating stronger commitment, greater involvement in school activities, and increased responsibility toward their profession. Thus, interpersonal communication strengthens professional commitment through a reciprocal relational process involving perceived support, trust, belonging, and the willingness to contribute. However, although communication may provide emotional support, it may not sufficiently reduce stress arising from workload, administrative demands, and school-level structural conditions. This explains why interpersonal communication has a stronger direct relationship with professional commitment than an indirect relationship through stress management.

. This condition strengthens teachers' emotional engagement in carrying out their professional duties. Other research shows that effective communication between teachers and between teachers and school leaders is correlated with increased professional commitment and performance, particularly when such communication facilitates role clarification, emotional support, and collaborative problem-solving (Kim & Asbury, 2020) Collie, 2021). This pattern confirms that in the school context, teachers' professional commitment is shaped not only by their ability to manage work pressure but also by the quality of work relationships, social support, and perceptions of the professional environment built through interpersonal communication (Putri & Dewi, 2024).

Interpersonal communication was positively and significantly associated with teachers' stress management. This finding suggests that the quality of social relationships and interpersonal support in the workplace may serve as important resources for coping with work-related stress. In a communicative and supportive school environment, teachers may be more likely to express work-related concerns, seek emotional and practical assistance, clarify problems, and engage in collaborative problem-solving when facing complex professional demands. Tholia et al., (2022) emphasize that effective listening and speaking skills contribute to team collaboration, productivity, and conflict prevention in professional settings. Therefore, interpersonal communication should not be viewed merely as a process of exchanging information, but as a relational resource that may support emotional regulation, reduce uncertainty, and strengthen teachers' capacity to respond adaptively to workplace pressures.

However, the mediation pathway through stress management was not statistically significant. This result constitutes one of the main contributions of the present study, as it demonstrates that interpersonal communication strengthens teachers' professional commitment primarily through direct relational mechanisms rather than through a reduction in work stress. More specifically, open, empathetic, and supportive communication may enhance teachers' sense of belonging, perceived social support, trust, and professional identity, which subsequently reinforce their loyalty, responsibility, and engagement with the profession. Therefore, teachers' professional commitment can increase even when their levels of work stress have not substantially decreased. This finding extends the existing literature by showing that stress management is not the principal mechanism linking interpersonal communication to professional commitment in the context of private vocational school teachers.

Field observations conducted during teachers' instructional and administrative activities revealed observable signs of work-related stress and exhaustion among several teachers, including fatigue, reduced enthusiasm, complaints about excessive workloads, and difficulties in completing administrative tasks on time. These signs were observed despite the teachers' positive and supportive interpersonal relationships with colleagues and school leaders. This is evident in various complaints related to administrative burdens, curriculum demands, institutional targets, and the complexity of work that must be completed within limited time. This fact suggests that teacher job stress is more influenced by structural factors than by the quality of interpersonal communication alone.

These findings align with research by Riska, (2019) which also showed that good interpersonal communication can create a more comfortable work environment, but it does not automatically change structural factors such as workload distribution, administrative pressure, limited school resources, or institutional policies. Thus, while interpersonal communication positively contributes to the work climate, systemic factors remain a major source of work stress for teachers.

This opinion is supported by Bastian & Widodo (2024), who stated that the influence of interpersonal communication on professional commitment is not always through stress management, but rather through increased social support, a sense of belonging, and the strengthening of professional identity. Teachers who feel they receive social support from their work environment tend to have stronger intrinsic motivation to maintain professionalism, even when facing high work pressure. This explains why some teachers continue to demonstrate high professional commitment despite experiencing work stress due to administrative demands and school policies.

Furthermore, school documents, including lesson plans, assessment reports, curriculum records, student progress reports, and institutional accountability documents, showed that teachers were required to complete extensive administrative tasks alongside their instructional responsibilities. This situation reinforces the notion that teacher work pressure stems more from work systems and

institutional demands than from the quality of interpersonal relationships. Research by Collie (2021) indicates that workload and administrative demands are the primary sources of teacher stress, which cannot be addressed through good interpersonal relationships alone. Similar findings were also presented by Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2021), who found that *job demands* have a dominant influence on burnout compared to relational factors.

Field observations also found that some teachers maintain a strong professional commitment despite relatively limited interpersonal interactions. Conversely, some teachers possess strong interpersonal communication skills but demonstrate inconsistent professional commitment. These findings suggest that interpersonal communication is not the sole determining factor in building teacher professional commitment. Professional commitment appears to be more influenced by internal factors, namely professional values, moral responsibility, intrinsic motivation, and awareness of educational duties.

Interpersonal communication is essential for building workplace comfort, social support, and teacher engagement. However, strengthening teachers' professional commitment also requires systematic improvements in school work arrangements. School leaders should conduct periodic workload assessments, distribute instructional and administrative tasks based on teachers' roles and capacities, simplify overlapping reporting requirements, and establish clear job descriptions and work procedures. Schools should also provide accessible institutional support, such as administrative assistance, scheduled peer-collaboration forums, mentoring programs, and regular opportunities for teachers to discuss workload-related problems with school leaders. The implementation of these policies should be monitored through periodic teacher feedback, workload reviews, and evaluations of teacher well-being and professional engagement. Without such structural interventions, positive interpersonal communication may provide temporary emotional support but is unlikely to become a sustainable managerial solution.

From the perspective of professional commitment theory, teachers who have a strong internalization of professional values will continue to carry out their duties optimally despite facing work pressures and limited social support. Professional commitment is shaped not only by harmonious interpersonal relationships but also by an individual's belief in the meaning of the teaching profession as a form of devotion and social responsibility. Therefore, teachers with a strong professional orientation tend to maintain work quality, discipline, and dedication even in stressful work situations.

The findings of this study provide an important contribution to the development of educational management studies, particularly regarding the relationship between interpersonal communication, stress management, and teacher professional commitment. This study confirms that interpersonal communication has a significant direct influence on teachers' professional commitment, while challenging the assumption that this relationship is necessarily mediated by stress management. The non-significant mediation pathway constitutes an important novelty of this study, suggesting that interpersonal communication may strengthen professional commitment primarily through socio-psychological processes, such as perceived social support, a sense of belonging, trust, and professional identity, rather than through a reduction in work-related stress. This finding offers a more nuanced explanation of how interpersonal communication contributes to teachers' professional commitment, particularly in school contexts where structural and administrative pressures remain substantial.

In addition to its theoretical contributions, this study offers practical implications for educational management in schools. School leaders should develop an open, supportive, and collaborative communication culture through regular teacher-leader dialogue forums, structured opportunities for teachers to express concerns and provide feedback, peer-mentoring programs, and collaborative planning meetings. School leaders should also establish clear and accessible communication channels, respond constructively to teachers' concerns, and involve teachers in decisions related to workload, instructional programs, and school policies. The effectiveness of these strategies should be reviewed periodically through teacher feedback, staff meetings, and evaluations of professional engagement. These concrete practices can strengthen trust, improve working relationships, and enhance teachers' professional commitment. However, improving the quality of interpersonal communication requires balanced work system improvements, reducing administrative burdens, distributing tasks proportionately, and providing adequate institutional support. Efforts to increase

teacher professional commitment cannot be achieved solely through a relational approach; they also require improvements to structural factors that are the main sources of teacher work stress.

Conclusion

This study shows that interpersonal communication has a positive and significant influence on teachers' professional commitment and stress management. Teachers who are able to build good interpersonal relationships tend to have higher levels of loyalty, engagement, and professional responsibility. However, the results also indicate that stress management does not mediate the relationship between interpersonal communication and teachers' professional commitment. This finding is an important point and a major contribution of this study because it demonstrates that increasing teachers' professional commitment does not always occur through reduced levels of work stress.

These findings indicate that interpersonal communication plays a greater role in building social support, a sense of belonging, and strengthening professional identity than the primary mechanism for managing work stress. Meanwhile, teachers' work stress is more influenced by structural factors such as administrative demands, workload, school policies, and the complexity of professional tasks. Therefore, teachers with high professional commitment tend to continue performing their duties optimally despite facing high work pressure.

This study has several limitations. First, the study was conducted on permanent teachers at an A-accredited private vocational high school foundation in Depok City, so generalizing the results to the context of public schools, other educational levels, or different regions still requires caution. Second, the mediation test was conducted using *the Sobel test*, so future research could use a *bootstrapping-based mediation approach* to more reliably estimate the indirect effect. Third, the qualitative data were used to deepen the quantitative results, but the scope of informants could still be expanded to better understand the dynamics of work stress, interpersonal communication, and teacher professional commitment. Future research is recommended to include variations in school type, region, employment status, and other organizational factors such as principal leadership, organizational support, workload, and school climate.

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