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Final revision:
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license**LEADERSHIP STYLES, COMPETENCY, AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT: EVIDENCE FROM A SUB-DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION IN INDONESIA**Elmiati^{1*}, Fajar Pasaribu¹¹Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara, Jalan Kapten Mughtar Basri No. 3, Medan 20238, Sumatera Utara, Indonesia*Correspondence E-Mail: elmiati378@gmail.comDOI: <https://doi.org/10.30598/baileofisipvol3iss3pp807-828>**ABSTRACT**

This study examines the influence of leadership styles and employee competency on employee performance within a sub-district government office in Indonesia. It responds to persistent challenges in local public service delivery, including procedural inefficiencies, low timeliness, limited employee initiative, and inadequate adoption of participatory leadership and digital competencies. Employing a quantitative associative design, the study uses a saturated sampling technique involving all 25 employees. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using multiple linear regression, supported by validity, reliability, and classical assumption tests. The findings indicate that leadership style has a positive and significant effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.511$; $p < 0.05$), while employee competency exerts a stronger and more significant influence ($\beta = 0.618$; $p < 0.05$). Simultaneously, both variables significantly predict performance, with a coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.757, suggesting substantial explanatory power. These results highlight the critical role of competency, particularly technical and digital skills, in shaping performance within stable bureaucratic contexts. This study contributes to public administration literature by integrating leadership and competency perspectives within a micro-level governance setting and providing empirical evidence from an underexplored sub-district context in a developing country.

Keywords: Competency, Employee Performance, Leadership Styles, Local Government, Public Administration

INTRODUCTION

The performance of public sector organizations is inseparable from the quality of their human resources and the capacity of employees to translate institutional mandates into effective public services. In decentralized governance systems, sub-district administrations represent the closest interface between the state and citizens, positioning them as critical actors in ensuring service accessibility, responsiveness, and accountability. Employee performance, commonly understood as the extent to which individuals accomplish assigned tasks in terms of quality and quantity, constitutes a central indicator of organizational effectiveness (Aulia. M et al., 2024; Netti & Erianjoni, 2023; Santoso et al., 2022). Recent studies in public administration have emphasized that individual performance in government organizations is not merely a function of

formal structures, but is strongly shaped by leadership dynamics and employee capacity (Hidayat & Silitonga, 2025; Saverius Susanto et al., 2026; Subroto & Indriati, 2024). Despite ongoing administrative reforms and the expansion of local autonomy, empirical realities in many developing contexts reveal persistent inefficiencies in public service delivery at the grassroots level.

In practical terms, these inefficiencies manifest in the form of convoluted administrative procedures, delays in task completion, and limited initiative among civil servants. Such conditions are not merely technical shortcomings but reflect deeper organizational issues, particularly in relation to leadership practices and competency development. Observations within sub-district offices indicate that leadership styles often remain hierarchical and directive, leaving limited room for participatory decision-making and innovation among employees. This condition potentially weakens motivation and reduces a sense of ownership toward organizational goals. Empirical evidence suggests that participatory and transformational leadership styles are positively associated with higher levels of employee engagement and affective commitment in public organizations (Rahim et al., 2025; Riani & Indraswari, 2021; Wiyono et al., 2025). In parallel, the rapid digitalization of public administration has exposed significant competency gaps among employees, particularly in the domains of information technology and modern administrative systems. These gaps hinder not only efficiency but also the broader transition toward digital governance. As highlighted by Ardiyanto et al. (2025) and Guswari et al. (2025), insufficient digital competency remains one of the primary barriers to the successful implementation of electronic government initiatives in local administrations.

From a theoretical standpoint, leadership style and competency have long been recognized as two central determinants of employee performance. Leadership style refers to consistent patterns of behavior exhibited by leaders in influencing subordinates and shaping organizational climates (Heluka et al., 2025; Rifai & Lumbanraja, 2023; Setianto et al., 2021). Contemporary leadership theories have moved beyond transactional models to emphasize ethical, authentic, and servant leadership as key drivers of performance outcomes. A meta-analysis by Halim et al. (2025) and Munawar et al. (2024) demonstrates that these value-based leadership approaches exert stronger predictive power on employee performance compared to traditional transformational leadership models. On the other hand, competency encompasses a set of underlying characteristics, including knowledge, skills, attitudes, and personal attributes, that enable individuals to perform effectively in their roles (Aji Nugroho et al., 2023; Dahlila & Frinaldi, 2021; Puspitawati et al., 2022). The competency-based approach in human resource management underscores that sustainable performance improvements require not only structural reforms but also continuous investment in individual capacity building (Tammubua et al., 2025; Tere et al., 2023).

A growing body of literature has explored the relationship between leadership, competency, and performance within public sector settings. Brumadyadisty (2025) and Safenda et al. (2025) find that public service leadership significantly enhances innovative work behavior

among civil servants, suggesting that leadership plays a crucial role in fostering adaptive capacities in bureaucratic environments. Similarly, Kawedar & Sri Handayani (2025) and Utomo (2022) reports that evidence-based competency development programs can improve organizational performance by up to 23 percent, highlighting the tangible benefits of structured capacity-building initiatives. Usman et al. (2024) and Widyantara & Sunarya (2025) further demonstrate that the interaction between adaptive leadership and managerial competency is pivotal in driving successful bureaucratic reforms in developing countries. These findings collectively point to the importance of integrating leadership and competency perspectives in understanding performance dynamics within public organizations.

Beyond these studies, additional research continues to reinforce the centrality of leadership and competency in shaping organizational outcomes. For instance, Kendy et al. (2025) and Ramadhan & Castrawijaya (2023) emphasizes that leadership behaviors oriented toward public values significantly influence employee motivation and performance in government institutions. Astuti et al. (2023) and Rahmawati et al. (2026) argue that leadership effectiveness in the public sector is contingent upon the alignment between leadership style and organizational context. In the realm of competency, Abdi et al. (2024) and Makatita et al. (2024) highlight that human capital development remains a critical determinant of organizational resilience and adaptability. Furthermore, research by Meiyenti et al. (2026) and Umar et al. (2022) underscores the importance of continuous learning and skill development in enhancing employee effectiveness in complex work environments.

Nevertheless, while the existing literature provides substantial insights, much of it is concentrated on higher levels of government or large-scale public organizations, often relying on secondary data or conceptual approaches. Empirical investigations grounded in primary data at the micro-level of governance, such as sub-district administrations, remain relatively scarce (Johor et al., 2023; Saleh et al., 2023; Sulantara et al., 2020). Moreover, many studies tend to examine leadership and competency as separate constructs, rather than exploring their combined and potentially interactive effects on employee performance. This tendency may overlook the complex and intertwined nature of organizational dynamics, particularly in smaller administrative units where leadership practices and individual capacities are closely interdependent.

Within this landscape, there appears to be an underexplored dimension concerning how leadership style and competency jointly shape employee performance in localized governance contexts characterized by limited resources, entrenched bureaucratic routines, and emerging demands for digital transformation. The subtle interplay between these variables becomes even more intriguing when considering employees with long tenure, whose performance may be influenced not only by leadership direction but also by accumulated experience and adaptive competencies. In such contexts, competency, especially technical and digital competency, may quietly assume a more decisive role than traditionally acknowledged, inviting a reconsideration of dominant assumptions in public administration literature.

Building on these considerations, this study advances an integrative perspective that brings together leadership style and competency within a single analytical framework, applied to a sub-district government office in Indonesia. By employing a saturated sampling approach that includes the entire population of employees, the study offers a comprehensive and context-sensitive understanding of performance dynamics at the grassroots level of governance. The focus on real-world administrative settings, combined with the incorporation of digital competency as part of the broader competency construct, allows this research to illuminate dimensions that are often overlooked in mainstream studies. In doing so, it contributes not only to the refinement of theoretical models but also to the enrichment of empirical evidence from underrepresented contexts.

Accordingly, the primary objective of this study is to examine the extent to which leadership style and employee competency influence employee performance, both individually and collectively, within a local government setting. In addition, the study seeks to identify which of these factors exerts a more dominant effect, thereby providing a nuanced understanding of performance determinants in sub-district administrations. Through this inquiry, the research aims to offer practical insights for strengthening human resource management and leadership practices in public organizations, while simultaneously contributing to broader scholarly discussions on governance, capacity building, and institutional effectiveness in developing and transitional societies.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a quantitative approach with an associative design to examine the relationship between leadership style, employee competency, and employee performance within a local government setting. The choice of a quantitative approach is grounded in the objective of the study, which seeks to measure the magnitude and direction of relationships among variables in a systematic and statistically verifiable manner. Quantitative methods are particularly suitable for testing hypotheses and identifying causal patterns through numerical data, allowing for generalizable conclusions within the studied population (Indrawan & Saputra, 2025; Nurhasanah & Wahyuningsih, 2023; Wasiman & Wangdra, 2023). In this context, the associative design enables the analysis of both partial and simultaneous effects of leadership style and competency on employee performance, aligning with the study's intention to uncover not only individual contributions but also their combined influence.

The research was conducted at the Sub-District Office of Perbaungan, located in Serdang Bedagai Regency, North Sumatra, between April and May 2026. This location was deliberately selected due to its strategic administrative and socio-economic position. As a sub-district that functions as a gateway area and a center of economic and administrative activities, Perbaungan presents a dynamic governance environment with relatively high public service demands. Such conditions make it a relevant and meaningful site for examining employee performance in

relation to leadership and competency. Furthermore, preliminary observations indicated the presence of organizational challenges, including procedural inefficiencies and uneven employee capacity, which provided a strong empirical basis for conducting this research.

The population of this study consists of all 25 employees working at the Sub-District Office of Perbaungan. Given the relatively small and manageable size of the population, a saturated sampling technique was employed, in which all members of the population were included as respondents. This approach ensures comprehensive data coverage and eliminates sampling bias, thereby enhancing the internal validity of the study (Mustopa et al., 2024; Susita et al., 2023; Tiong et al., 2024). The inclusion of all employees, ranging from top-level administrators to operational staff, allows for a holistic understanding of organizational dynamics, as each individual contributes uniquely to the overall performance of the institution.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The use of questionnaires was considered appropriate due to their efficiency in capturing perceptions, attitudes, and self-reported behaviors across multiple variables simultaneously (Fiernaningsih et al., 2022; Nurmasari & Abadiyah, 2022). The instrument was carefully developed to reflect established theoretical constructs. Leadership style was measured through indicators such as decision-making, motivation, communication, supervision, and responsibility. Competency was operationalized through dimensions including knowledge, skills, attitudes, motives, and self-concept. Meanwhile, employee performance was assessed based on quality, quantity, timeliness, cost-effectiveness, independence, and interpersonal impact. The structured nature of the questionnaire enabled consistency in responses while also facilitating statistical analysis.

To ensure the quality of the data, validity and reliability tests were conducted prior to the main analysis. Instrument validity was assessed using the Product Moment correlation technique, which examines the extent to which each item correlates with the total score, indicating its ability to measure the intended construct (Inombi et al., 2024; Rika et al., 2025). Items with correlation coefficients exceeding the critical value were considered valid. Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha, with a threshold of 0.70 indicating acceptable internal consistency (Syafri et al., 2025; Wahib, 2023). These procedures are essential in quantitative research to ensure that the instrument produces stable and accurate measurements.

The data analysis process involved multiple stages, beginning with classical assumption tests to ensure that the regression model met the necessary statistical requirements. These included tests for normality, heteroscedasticity, and multicollinearity. Subsequently, multiple linear regression analysis was employed to estimate the influence of leadership style and competency on employee performance. Hypothesis testing was conducted using the t-test to examine partial effects and the F-test to assess simultaneous effects. Additionally, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was calculated to determine the proportion of variance in employee performance explained by the independent variables. All analyses were performed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25, which is widely recognized for its

robustness in handling social science data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics of Respondents and Variables

The descriptive analysis begins by situating the empirical context of the study through a detailed profile of respondents and an overview of the main research variables. Given that this study employs a saturated sampling technique, all 25 employees of the Perbaungan Sub-District Office were included as respondents. This approach ensures that the findings reflect the full organizational reality rather than a partial representation, thereby strengthening internal validity and minimizing sampling bias. The dataset, as presented in Table 1, reveals a workforce composition that is structurally diverse in terms of position, tenure, and demographic background, which is particularly relevant for understanding variations in perception related to leadership, competency, and performance.

Table 1. Demographic and Occupational Profile of Employees at Perbaungan Sub-District Office

Variable	Category	Frequency (n=25)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	16	64.0
	Female	9	36.0
Position Level	Structural (Head & Section Heads)	8	32.0
	Functional (Analysts/Officers)	7	28.0
	Administrative Staff	10	40.0
Years of Service	≤ 5 years	4	16.0
	6–10 years	4	16.0
	11–20 years	13	52.0
	> 20 years	4	16.0

Source: Research data processed (2026)

A closer reading of the demographic distribution indicates that male employees dominate the organizational structure, accounting for 64% of the workforce, while female employees represent 36%. This composition reflects a moderately gender-imbalanced bureaucratic environment, which may subtly shape interaction patterns, communication styles, and leadership perceptions within the organization. In terms of age distribution, the data shows a strong concentration in the 41–50 age group (60%), followed by employees aged above 50 (16%). Only a small proportion falls within the younger age brackets, with 20% aged 31–40 and just 4% aged 20–30. This pattern suggests that the organization is largely composed of mid- to late-career civil servants, which has important implications for both adaptability and institutional memory. As noted by Ibrahim & Lamuda (2024) and Stepvia et al. (2025), organizations with a more mature workforce often benefit from accumulated experience but may face challenges in adapting to rapid technological change.

Educational attainment further reinforces this interpretation. The majority of respondents hold undergraduate degrees (56%), followed by postgraduate qualifications (24%), while 20% have completed secondary education. This relatively high level of formal education suggests a foundational capacity for administrative work; however, formal education alone does not necessarily translate into practical or digital competencies required in contemporary governance settings (Hartoko et al., 2021; Suryanto et al., 2023). Thus, the descriptive profile already hints at a potential gap between educational background and applied competencies, particularly in the context of digital administration.

Moving beyond demographics, the descriptive statistics of the main variables provide deeper insight into how employees perceive leadership style, their own competency, and their performance levels.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Leadership Style	3.42	0.58	Moderately participative
Competency	3.65	0.52	Relatively high
Employee Performance	3.51	0.55	Moderate to high

Source: Research data processed (2026)

The mean score for leadership style (3.42) suggests that employees perceive leadership practices as moderately participatory but not yet fully inclusive. This indicates that while some elements of communication and involvement are present, leadership may still lean toward administrative or directive tendencies. Such a pattern is not uncommon in local bureaucratic settings where hierarchical traditions remain influential (Hindriyani et al., 2026; Patimbangi & Kasmah, 2022; Wulansari & Said, 2026). The relatively moderate standard deviation also implies a consistent perception among employees, suggesting that leadership practices are experienced in a fairly uniform manner across the organization.

In contrast, the competency variable records a higher mean score (3.65), indicating that employees generally perceive themselves as possessing adequate knowledge, skills, and attitudes to perform their tasks. However, when examined more closely through item-level responses, a nuanced pattern emerges: competencies related to routine administrative tasks are rated higher than those associated with digital systems and modern information technologies. This finding resonates with prior research highlighting that digital competency often lags behind traditional administrative skills in public sector organizations (Mursalin et al., 2026; Susita et al., 2023). In this sense, the relatively high overall competency score should be interpreted with caution, as it may mask internal disparities between conventional and emerging skill sets.

Employee performance, with a mean of 3.51, falls within the moderate to high category, indicating that most employees perceive themselves as performing adequately in terms of quality, quantity, and timeliness. However, the descriptive data also suggests variability in specific dimensions of performance, particularly in areas requiring initiative and efficiency. This

aligns with earlier observations regarding procedural delays and limited proactive behavior, reinforcing the idea that performance is not merely a function of task completion but also of responsiveness and adaptability.

Instrument Testing and Classical Assumption Results

The robustness of quantitative findings is fundamentally dependent on the quality of the measurement instrument and the extent to which the data meet the assumptions required for statistical modeling. In this study, instrument testing and classical assumption diagnostics were conducted as an integral step prior to regression analysis, ensuring that the relationships identified among leadership style, competency, and employee performance are empirically reliable and analytically sound. These procedures follow established methodological standards in social science research, where validity, reliability, and assumption testing are considered essential prerequisites for inferential analysis (Fahlevi et al., 2022; Gracea Venice et al., 2026; Saputra & Ariyanto, 2022).

The validity test was performed using the Product Moment correlation, which examines the correlation between each item score and the total construct score. The results indicate that all questionnaire items met the validity threshold, with correlation coefficients ranging from 0.683 to 0.756, exceeding the critical r-table value of 0.396. This finding suggests that each item is capable of accurately capturing the intended construct, whether leadership style, competency, or employee performance. In practical terms, this means that respondents were able to interpret and respond to the questionnaire items consistently with the conceptual definitions underlying the study. The relatively high correlation values also indicate that the indicators used in this research are well-aligned with established theoretical dimensions, reinforcing construct validity (Jayadi & Ekawati, 2023a; Maharani & Tamara, 2024; Suprayitno, 2024).

Reliability testing further confirms the internal consistency of the instrument. Using Cronbach's Alpha, all variables recorded values above 0.85, significantly surpassing the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70. This indicates that the measurement items within each variable are highly consistent and stable in capturing the same underlying concept. High reliability is particularly important in organizational research, where perceptual data can be influenced by individual biases or contextual factors. In this case, the strong reliability scores suggest that such variability is minimized, allowing the data to serve as a dependable basis for further analysis (Hermawan, 2021; Simbolon et al., 2023; Supriyati & Wijono, 2021).

Table 3. Summary of Validity and Reliability Test Results

Variable	Validity Range (r-count)	r-table	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Leadership Style	0.683 – 0.742	0.396	0.872	Valid & Reliable
Competency	0.701 – 0.756	0.396	0.889	Valid & Reliable
Employee Performance	0.689 – 0.748	0.396	0.861	Valid & Reliable

Source: Research data processed (2026)

Beyond instrument testing, classical assumption tests were conducted to ensure that the regression model meets the statistical requirements necessary for unbiased estimation. The normality test, conducted using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov method, yielded a significance value of 0.187, which is greater than the 0.05 threshold. This indicates that the residuals are normally distributed, satisfying one of the key assumptions of linear regression. Normal distribution of residuals is crucial because it ensures that parameter estimates are efficient and hypothesis testing remains valid (Arham et al., 2026; Iman, 2024; Jayadi & Ekawati, 2023b). In the context of this study, the normality result suggests that employee responses, despite being perceptual in nature, are distributed in a way that allows for meaningful statistical interpretation.

The heteroskedasticity test, using the Glejser method, produced significance values of 0.342 and 0.278 for the independent variables, both exceeding the 0.05 threshold. This indicates the absence of heteroskedasticity, meaning that the variance of residuals remains constant across levels of the independent variables. In practical terms, this implies that the predictive power of leadership style and competency is stable across different levels of employee performance, and that the model does not suffer from systematic bias in error variance (Luthfiani et al., 2026; Pajrudin & Wahyuningtyas, 2024; Priyanto et al., 2025). This stability is particularly important in organizational studies where heterogeneity among respondents can often distort regression estimates.

Multicollinearity testing further strengthens the credibility of the model. The tolerance value of 0.567, which is well above the minimum threshold of 0.10, and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) of 1.764, which is far below the critical value of 10.00, both indicate that there is no significant multicollinearity between leadership style and competency. This finding is theoretically meaningful, as it confirms that the two variables, while related, represent distinct constructs that independently contribute to employee performance. The absence of multicollinearity ensures that the regression coefficients can be interpreted clearly without distortion caused by overlapping explanatory power (Agustinus Wardi et al., 2024; Halik et al., 2025; Mundzir & Marlina, 2025).

Table 4. Classical Assumption Test Results

Test Type	Indicator	Result	Threshold	Interpretation
Normality	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Sig.	0.187	> 0.05	Normal distribution
Heteroskedasticity	Glejser Sig.	0.342; 0.278	> 0.05	No heteroskedasticity
Multicollinearity	Tolerance	0.567	> 0.10	No multicollinearity

Source: Research data processed (2026)

These results demonstrate that both the measurement instrument and the dataset meet the methodological standards required for regression analysis. More importantly, they provide a strong empirical foundation for interpreting the relationships among leadership style, competency, and employee performance. Rather than being treated as a mere procedural step, the rigorous testing of validity, reliability, and statistical assumptions ensures that the

subsequent findings genuinely reflect the organizational dynamics under study. In this sense, the credibility of the analytical model is not only a technical achievement but also a necessary condition for producing meaningful and actionable insights in public sector research.

Simultaneous Effect of Leadership Style and Competency on Employee Performance

The analysis of the partial effect of leadership style on employee performance reveals a statistically significant and substantively meaningful relationship within the organizational context under study. Based on the multiple linear regression results, leadership style (X1) demonstrates a positive coefficient of 0.511, indicating that any incremental improvement in leadership practices is associated with a corresponding increase in employee performance. The regression equation, expressed as $Y = -6.88 + 0.511X1 + 0.618X2 + e$, further illustrates that leadership constitutes an important explanatory factor, even when controlling for competency. While the negative constant suggests that performance would deteriorate significantly in the absence of both leadership and competency, the positive coefficient of leadership highlights its role as a stabilizing and enabling force in organizational functioning.

This statistical relationship is reinforced by the results of the t-test, which confirms that leadership style has a significant effect on employee performance ($t = 2.114 > t\text{-table} = 2.074$; $p = 0.043 < 0.05$). These findings provide empirical support for the acceptance of the first hypothesis, indicating that leadership is not merely a symbolic or structural component, but an active determinant of how employees perform their duties.

Table 5. Partial Test (t-test) Results

Variable	Coefficient	t-value	t-table	Significance	Interpretation
Leadership Style (X1)	0.511	2.114	2.074	0.043	Significant effect
Competency (X2)	0.618	2.489	2.074	0.020	Significant effect

Source: Research data processed (2026)

Beyond the statistical confirmation, the meaning of this relationship becomes more evident when interpreted within the organizational reality of the sub-district office. Leadership in this context operates not only through formal authority but also through daily interactions, communication patterns, and the degree to which employees are invited to participate in decision-making processes. The moderate coefficient value suggests that leadership contributes to performance, yet not in an overwhelming or dominant manner. This nuance is important, as it reflects the hybrid nature of local bureaucratic leadership, which often combines administrative rigidity with emerging participatory practices.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings resonate strongly with recent developments in adaptive and participatory leadership frameworks. Muqtada et al. (2024) and Triyani et al. (2024) argue that leadership effectiveness in public organizations increasingly depends on the ability of leaders to foster inclusivity, responsiveness, and contextual sensitivity. In such models, leaders are not merely decision-makers but facilitators who create space for employee

engagement and initiative. The empirical evidence from this study suggests that even incremental shifts toward more communicative and participatory leadership can generate measurable improvements in employee performance.

At a more practical level, the findings indicate that employees respond positively to leadership behaviors that emphasize clarity, motivation, and relational engagement. In organizations where formal hierarchies are deeply embedded, the presence of participatory leadership elements, such as open communication, feedback mechanisms, and shared responsibility, can significantly enhance employee motivation. This aligns with broader organizational behavior literature, which emphasizes that leadership influences not only task execution but also psychological states such as commitment and job satisfaction (Maulina et al., 2024; Nurniawan & Amalia, 2025; Purba et al., 2026).

However, it is equally important to recognize the contextual limitations of leadership influence as observed in this study. The coefficient value of 0.511, while significant, is lower than that of competency (0.618), suggesting that leadership alone is insufficient to drive optimal performance. This reflects a structural reality in many public sector organizations, where established routines, long tenure, and institutional norms may limit the transformative capacity of leadership. In such environments, leadership tends to operate within existing constraints rather than fundamentally reshaping them. Consequently, its impact, although positive, is moderated by other organizational factors, particularly employee competency.

Another important insight emerging from this finding is the role of leadership as a mediating rather than dominating force. Leadership appears to function as an enabler that enhances the utilization of existing competencies rather than as the primary source of performance itself. This interpretation is consistent with contemporary views in public management, which position leadership as part of a broader ecosystem of performance determinants, including human capital, organizational culture, and institutional capacity (Handoko et al., 2023; Iqbal et al., 2025; Susanti et al., 2022).

In the specific context of the Perbaungan Sub-District Office, the significance of leadership style suggests that efforts to improve performance should not overlook the relational and behavioral dimensions of management. While structural reforms and technical training remain essential, the way leaders interact with employees, how they communicate expectations, provide support, and involve staff in decision-making, continues to shape performance outcomes in meaningful ways. This becomes particularly relevant in environments undergoing gradual digital transformation, where uncertainty and adaptation require not only technical solutions but also leadership that is responsive and inclusive.

Rethinking Performance Determinants in Local Bureaucracy

The findings of this study invite a broader reflection on how performance determinants are conceptualized within local bureaucratic settings, particularly in developing contexts where institutional structures, workforce composition, and reform pressures intersect in complex ways.

Traditionally, leadership has been positioned as the central driver of employee performance, grounded in the assumption that hierarchical authority and managerial direction shape organizational outcomes. However, the empirical evidence generated in this study suggests a more nuanced configuration, where competency, especially in its technical and digital dimensions, emerges as a more dominant explanatory factor than leadership. This shift does not negate the importance of leadership, but rather reframes it within a more distributed and capacity-oriented understanding of performance.

Table 6. Comparison with Previous Studies

Aspect	Previous Studies	This Study Findings	Distinctiveness
Dominance	Varies (often leadership-led)	Competency > Leadership	Long-tenured employees
Context	Large urban settings	Semi-urban sub-district	Underexplored governance level
Method	Random sampling	Saturated sampling	No sampling error, full population

Source: Research data processed (2026)

As shown in Table 6, this study diverges from much of the existing literature in three key respects. First, while previous studies often report varying dominance between leadership and competency, this study finds a consistent pattern where competency exerts a stronger influence than leadership. Second, the empirical setting, a semi-urban sub-district administration, differs from the more commonly studied urban or national-level institutions, thereby offering insights from a relatively underrepresented governance scale. Third, the use of saturated sampling ensures that the findings are grounded in the complete population, eliminating sampling error and enhancing the internal consistency of the results.

The positive and significant effect of leadership style ($\beta = 0.511$; $p = 0.043$) confirms that leadership remains an important determinant of employee performance. This aligns with contemporary leadership theory, which emphasizes the role of leaders in fostering motivation, engagement, and organizational alignment (Darwis et al., 2025; Murtanto et al., 2022; Setyaningrum et al., 2025). In the context of this study, leadership operates through communicative and participatory practices that encourage employee involvement. However, the relatively moderate coefficient and significance level suggest that leadership influence is present but not overwhelmingly dominant. This can be understood in light of the workforce profile, where the majority of employees have long tenure, often exceeding 16 years. Such employees tend to develop a high degree of task familiarity and autonomy, reducing their reliance on direct supervision. As Dakir & Umiarso (2023) and Widyawati et al. (2022) note, in mature bureaucratic environments, leadership effects are often mediated by individual capacity and organizational routines, rather than exerting direct control over performance outcomes.

In contrast, competency demonstrates a stronger and more decisive influence on performance ($\beta = 0.618$; $p = 0.020$), indicating that the ability of employees to effectively perform

their tasks is increasingly grounded in their individual capacities. This finding reinforces the competency-based perspective in public management, which posits that performance is largely driven by the alignment between job demands and individual capabilities (Gunawan, 2024; Putra et al., 2024; Setyaningrum et al., 2023). In the case of the Perbaungan Sub-District Office, competency is not limited to general administrative knowledge but extends to technical and digital skills required for modern public service delivery. The relatively higher coefficient suggests that improvements in competency yield more substantial gains in performance compared to changes in leadership style.

This pattern becomes particularly significant when viewed in the context of ongoing bureaucratic reform and digital transformation. Public organizations in developing countries are increasingly required to deliver services that are not only efficient but also technologically integrated. As highlighted by Hartanto et al. (2024) and Wibowo et al. (2025), gaps in digital competency remain a critical barrier to effective e-government implementation. The findings of this study suggest that in environments where such transformation is underway, employees' ability to adapt to new systems and processes becomes a key differentiator of performance. In this sense, competency, especially digital competency, acts as a form of adaptive capital that enables employees to navigate changing administrative demands.

The simultaneous effect of leadership style and competency further underscores the integrative nature of performance determinants. With a coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.757, the model explains a substantial proportion of the variance in employee performance, indicating that both variables together form a robust explanatory framework. This supports the integrative model proposed by Masruri (2024) and Musriha & Rosyafah (2022), which conceptualizes leadership and employee capacity as complementary rather than competing factors. Leadership provides direction and coordination, while competency enables execution and adaptation. The high R^2 value also suggests that, within this specific organizational context, performance is largely shaped by internal factors rather than external conditions.

At a more conceptual level, these findings invite a reconsideration of how performance is understood in local bureaucracies. Rather than viewing leadership as the primary driver, it may be more appropriate to conceptualize performance as emerging from the interaction between structural guidance and individual capacity. In relatively stable organizations with experienced personnel, such as the one examined in this study, competency appears to take on a more prominent role, particularly when administrative tasks become increasingly complex and technology-dependent. This does not diminish the importance of leadership, but rather situates it within a broader ecosystem where its effectiveness depends on the capacity of employees to respond and adapt.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that employee performance within local government settings is shaped by the interplay between leadership practices and individual capacity, yet not in equal measure. While leadership style remains a significant factor in fostering direction, communication, and organizational cohesion, its influence appears to be more facilitative than determinative in contexts characterized by experienced and relatively autonomous personnel. In contrast, employee competency, particularly in its technical and digital dimensions, emerges as the more decisive factor in explaining variations in performance. This indicates that, within stable bureaucratic environments such as sub-district administrations, the ability of employees to adapt to evolving administrative demands and technological systems plays a more central role than previously assumed. The findings further suggest that performance is best understood as the outcome of a complementary relationship, where leadership provides the enabling environment while competency drives execution. By situating this analysis at the micro-level of governance and employing a full-population approach, the study offers a more grounded and context-sensitive perspective that extends beyond dominant assumptions in public administration literature. In doing so, it subtly reorients the focus of performance improvement strategies toward strengthening employee capacity, without diminishing the importance of adaptive and participatory leadership, as a more immediate and sustainable pathway for enhancing public service delivery in developing and transitional contexts.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article.

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