

From democratic leadership to member performance: Examining their relationship in student organizations in Surabaya

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Abstract

Student member performance is an important aspect of organizational effectiveness, including the implementation of democratic leadership. This study aimed to examine the relationship between democratic leadership style and the performance of student organization members in Surabaya. A quantitative correlational design was employed, involving 65 students selected through purposive sampling. Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation with IBM SPSS Statistics 32. The findings revealed a positive, statistically significant, moderate relationship between democratic leadership style and member performance ($r = 0.523$; $p < 0.001$). This indicates that higher levels of democratic leadership tend to be associated with better member performance. The study contributes empirical evidence from student organizations in Surabaya and highlights the importance of shared decision-making, recognition of members' potential, openness to feedback, and collaboration. However, the correlational design does not establish a causal relationship.

Keywords: Democratic leadership style; Member performance; Student organizations; Pearson correlation; Surabaya.

Abstrak

Kinerja anggota organisasi mahasiswa merupakan aspek penting dalam keberhasilan organisasi, termasuk dalam penerapan gaya kepemimpinan demokratis. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis hubungan antara gaya kepemimpinan demokratis dan kinerja anggota organisasi mahasiswa di Surabaya. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif korelasional dengan melibatkan 65 mahasiswa yang dipilih melalui *purposive sampling*. Data dianalisis menggunakan korelasi Pearson dengan bantuan IBM SPSS Statistics 32. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan hubungan positif dan signifikan dengan kekuatan sedang antara gaya kepemimpinan demokratis dan kinerja anggota ($r = 0,523$; $p < 0,001$). Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa semakin tinggi penerapan gaya kepemimpinan demokratis, semakin tinggi pula kecenderungan kinerja anggota. Penelitian ini memberikan bukti empiris dalam konteks organisasi mahasiswa di Surabaya dan menyoroti pentingnya pengambilan keputusan bersama, penghargaan terhadap potensi anggota, keterbukaan terhadap masukan, serta kerja sama. Namun, desain korelasional tidak membuktikan hubungan sebab-akibat.

Kata Kunci: Gaya kepemimpinan demokratis; Kinerja anggota; Organisasi mahasiswa; Korelasi Pearson; Surabaya.

Introduction

The performance of student organization members can be assessed in terms of their ability to complete tasks, maintain work quality, meet deadlines, and collaborate toward achieving organizational goals. Hidayah and Rahmawati (2022) examined the management board of the Student Executive Board (BEM) at the Faculty of Economics and Management, IPB University. Their regression results showed that leadership styles had a significant simultaneous effect on performance, but only achievement-oriented leadership had a statistically significant partial effect. A different finding was reported by Ahmadi (2021), who studied 110 employees from 11 university student cooperatives in Surabaya. The path analysis showed that democratic leadership influenced job satisfaction but did not have a statistically significant direct effect on performance. In contrast, Leunupun et al. (2021) found a positive and significant effect among 28 employees of a financing company in Ambon. These divergent findings indicate the need for further investigation in a more specific context.

Democratic leadership provides members with opportunities to express their opinions, participate in decision-making, and collaborate in carrying out tasks. However, leaders' openness should also be considered alongside members' ability to fulfill their responsibilities. Nastiti (2023) examined student organizations in public administration using a qualitative approach and found that these organizations played a role in fostering critical thinking, discipline, and responsibility. The study also identified several obstacles, including limited human resources, funding constraints, and difficulties in time management. Meanwhile, Rinaldhi et al. (2024) surveyed 55 members of the Student Executive Council (DEMA) at the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, IAIN Ponorogo, using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). Their findings showed that organizational leadership had a positive and significant effect on student organizational performance ($\beta = 0.264$, $p = 0.037$). However, work commitment was not found to mediate this relationship ($\beta = 0.089$, $p = 0.280$). These findings indicate that leadership is associated with performance, although this relationship does not necessarily operate through work commitment.

Evidence from formal workplaces suggests that the relationship between democratic leadership and performance needs to be examined in light of the context and indicators used. Octavia Olla and Andriyani (2019) studied employees at PT Timor Express Intermedia Kupang and reported a positive effect, with a t value of 7.433 and an R^2 of 54.6%. Isgunandar et al. (2022) included 51 employees of PD Parkir Makassar Raya and three informants in their study. They found a moderate relationship and a positive, significant effect on performance. Meanwhile, Salsabila and Hetami (2022) examined 47 field employees at PT AEL Indonesia in Sangatta. Their multiple regression analysis showed that democratic leadership and work culture affected

performance both individually and jointly, with democratic leadership emerging as the dominant factor.

Research on the relationship between democratic leadership style and performance has also considered additional factors and different work contexts. Wibowo and Sari (2022) examined 77 employees at PT Universal Prima Grafika in Sidoarjo and found that democratic leadership, the work environment, and work discipline had significant effects on performance. Kusuma (2022) studied employees at KSPPS BMT Al-Fath in South Tangerang, incorporating intrinsic motivation and compensation into the analysis. Through interviews with 11 employees at Konter S7 Cell, Pratiwi and Manafe (2022) identified practices involving consultation, recognition of employees' potential, acceptance of criticism and suggestions, and collaboration. Suprianto et al. (2021) examined the relationship between democratic leadership and employee performance at the Watang Sawitto District Office in Pinrang. Nurwahidah et al. (2023) investigated democratic leadership and leadership regeneration in relation to employee performance, while Natania (2023) studied 43 Indonesian National Police personnel at the Jambi City Samsat office and reported a direct effect of democratic leadership on performance. Although these studies expand the available empirical evidence, they predominantly focus on formal workplace settings. Therefore, a specific investigation is still needed to examine the relationship between democratic leadership style and student organization member performance in Surabaya using measurable indicators.

In light of this research gap, this study aims to examine the relationship between democratic leadership style and the performance of student organization members in Surabaya. A quantitative correlational approach was employed, involving 65 students with experience in carrying out organizational tasks. Democratic leadership style was measured through shared decision-making, recognition of members' potential, openness to criticism and suggestions, and collaboration. Member performance was assessed in terms of work quality, work quantity, timeliness, cost-effectiveness, independence, and interpersonal relationships. The importance of this study lies in the need for empirical evidence that reflects the distinctive characteristics of student organizations, which differ from those of companies and formal institutions. The findings are expected to clarify the direction and strength of the relationship between the two variables and provide a basis for organizational leaders to evaluate their leadership practices. Given its correlational design, this study does not seek to establish a causal relationship.

Method

This study employed a quantitative approach with a correlational design using a survey method to examine the relationship between democratic leadership style and the performance of student organization members in Surabaya. A quantitative approach enables variables to be measured numerically and relationships to be

examined through statistical analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). The study population comprised active university students in Surabaya who had previously been or were currently members of student organizations, whether affiliated with or external to their universities. The sample was selected using a non-probability sampling technique with a purposive sampling method. Respondents were required to meet three criteria: being active university students in Surabaya, having previous or current experience as active members of student organizations, and having experience carrying out organizational tasks and responsibilities. Based on these criteria, 65 respondents participated in the study.

Data were collected through an online questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) (Sugiyono, 2023). The research instrument consisted of 12 statements measuring democratic leadership style and 19 statements measuring member performance. Democratic leadership style was operationalized through four dimensions: shared decision-making, recognition of members' potential, openness to criticism and opinions, and collaboration with members. Meanwhile, member performance was measured through six dimensions: work quality, work quantity, timeliness, cost-effectiveness, independence, and interpersonal relationships. Each dimension was translated into indicators that served as the basis for developing the questionnaire items. The dimensions and indicators for both variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Operationalization of the research variables

Variable	Dimension	Indicators
Democratic leadership style	Shared decision-making	Member involvement in decision-making, consideration of shared interests, deliberation, and decisions based on majority vote
	Recognition of members' potential	Providing recognition, encouraging the development of potential, appreciating abilities, and granting authority to complete tasks
	Openness to criticism and opinions	Willingness to accept members' criticism, suggestions, and opinions
	Collaboration with members	Collaboration and leader involvement in carrying out tasks jointly
Member performance	Work quality	Conformity of outcomes with standards, achievement of quality targets, and accuracy of work results
	Work quantity	Achievement of work-volume targets, completion of assigned tasks, and compliance with standard operating procedures
	Timeliness	Completing tasks on time, using time wisely, and making work-related decisions promptly

Cost-effectiveness	Minimizing work errors, conserving budgetary resources, and maintaining organizational facilities and inventory
Independence	Ability to work independently, responsibility for assigned tasks, adherence to schedules, and ability to overcome difficulties
Interpersonal relationships	Creating a comfortable working atmosphere, appreciating other members' work, and discussing matters with teammates

Source: Author's analysis.

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 32. The analyses included instrument validity and reliability tests, a normality test, a linearity test, and the Pearson product-moment correlation test. The validity test was used to evaluate whether the questionnaire items appropriately measured the intended variables, while the reliability test assessed the instrument's internal consistency. The normality test examined the distribution of the residuals, whereas the linearity test assessed whether the relationship between the two variables followed a linear pattern. After the analytical assumptions had been examined, Pearson correlation was used to determine the direction, strength, and statistical significance of the relationship between democratic leadership style and member performance. The results were then interpreted in accordance with the correlational design, meaning that the findings indicate an association between the variables and should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of a causal relationship.

Results and Discussion

Respondent characteristics: Age, gender, university affiliation, and type of organization

This study involved 65 students who met the respondent eligibility criteria, namely, students who were currently active or had previously been active in student organizations in Surabaya. Respondent characteristics were classified by age, gender, university affiliation, and type of organization. This descriptive analysis aimed to provide an overview of the respondents' profiles and the sample context for examining the relationship between democratic leadership style and the individual performance of student organization members. For ease of presentation, age and gender characteristics are presented in Table 2, while university affiliation and type of organization are presented in Table 3. These tables provide an overview of the sample composition before the results of the relationship analysis are discussed in greater detail.

Table 2. Respondent characteristics by age and gender

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	18–20 years	39	60.0
	21–23 years	25	38.5
	> 23 years	1	1.5
	Total	65	100.0
Gender	Male	10	15.4
	Female	55	84.6
	Total	65	100.0

Source: Primary data processed by the researchers (2026).

As shown in Table 2, most respondents were students aged 18–20 years, comprising 39 individuals (60.0%), while 25 respondents (38.5%) were aged 21–23 years. Only one respondent (1.5%) was older than 23 years. This composition indicates that the sample primarily reflects the experiences of students in a relatively young age group. Regarding gender, there were 55 female respondents (84.6%) and 10 male respondents (15.4%). This difference in proportions indicates that gender representation in the sample was uneven. Nevertheless, these data describe only the composition of the respondents and cannot be used to conclude that age or gender determines perceptions of leadership or member performance without further testing.

Table 3. Respondent characteristics by university affiliation and type of organization

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
University affiliation	Institut Teknologi Sepuluh Nopember	1	1.5
	Universitas Airlangga (UNAIR)	45	69.2
	Universitas Ciputra Surabaya	2	3.1
	Universitas Katolik Widya Mandala Surabaya	1	1.5
	Universitas Negeri Surabaya	12	18.5
	Universitas Surabaya	2	3.1
	UPN Veteran Jawa Timur	1	1.5
	WSE (Western Sydney University Indonesia)	1	1.5
	Total	65	100.0
Type of organization	Student Executive Board (BEM)	5	7.7
	Faculty Legislative Council	1	1.5
	Student Representative Council (DPM)	1	1.5

Student Association	31	47.7
Google Developer Groups UNAIR	1	1.5
Campus counseling community	1	1.5
Airlangga University Disaster Response Students (Mahagana UNAIR)	1	1.5
External campus organization	1	1.5
Society of Renewable Energy, Universitas Airlangga (SRE UNAIR)	1	1.5
Student Activity Unit (UKM)	22	33.8
Total	65	100.0

Source: Primary data processed by the researchers (2026).

As shown in Table 3, the largest number of respondents came from Universitas Airlangga (UNAIR), comprising 45 students (69.2%), followed by Universitas Negeri Surabaya, with 12 students (18.5%). Universitas Ciputra Surabaya and Universitas Surabaya each contributed two respondents (3.1%), while four other universities were represented by one respondent each (1.5%). In terms of organizational affiliation, student associations constituted the largest group, with 31 respondents (47.7%), followed by student activity units (UKM), with 22 respondents (33.8%), and student executive boards (BEM), with five respondents (7.7%). Each of the five other organizational categories was represented by one respondent (1.5%). This composition indicates that the sample included students from several universities and types of organizations, although representation was concentrated at UNAIR and among members of student associations and student activity units. Therefore, the scope of the findings should be interpreted in light of the characteristics of the available sample.

Overall, the respondent characteristics show that the sample was dominated by students aged 18–20 years, female students, students from UNAIR, and members of student associations and student activity units. This profile provides a clear context for understanding the group of respondents whose data contributed to the research findings. However, the uneven distribution across gender, university affiliation, and organizational type should be considered when interpreting the scope of the findings. This composition does not, in itself, invalidate the correlation analysis, but it limits the basis for generalizing the results to all student organization members in Surabaya. Accordingly, the analysis of the relationship between democratic leadership style and individual performance should be understood as empirical evidence based on the 65 respondents studied, rather than as a representation that automatically applies to all student groups and organizations.

Instrument validity and reliability tests

Validity and reliability tests were conducted to ensure that the research instrument measured the variables under investigation accurately and consistently. The tests covered two variables: democratic leadership style (X) and individual performance of student organization members (Y). Item validity was assessed using Pearson product-moment correlation at a significance level of 5%. An item was considered valid if its calculated r value exceeded the critical r value and its significance level was below 0.05. In this study, the critical r value was set at 0.244. The validity test results for the democratic leadership style variable are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Validity test results for the democratic leadership style variable (X)

Item	Calculated r	Significance (p)	Critical r	Conclusion
X1	0.477	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
X2	0.613	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
X3	0.605	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
X4	0.440	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
X5	0.480	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
X6	0.604	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
X7	0.563	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
X8	0.646	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
X9	0.530	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
X10	0.576	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
X11	0.633	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
X12	0.494	< 0.001	0.244	Valid

Source: Research data processed using IBM SPSS Statistics 32.

As shown in Table 4, all 12 items measuring democratic leadership style had calculated r values ranging from 0.440 to 0.646. All values exceeded the critical r value of 0.244, with significance levels of $p < 0.001$. These results indicate that every item met the validity criteria applied in this study. Accordingly, all items measuring democratic leadership style were retained for further analysis. These findings provide a basis for concluding that the instrument met the validity criteria assessed through the correlation test, although a comprehensive evaluation of instrument validity should also consider other aspects of validity in accordance with the research design.

The next test examined the individual performance variable, which consisted of 19 items. The same decision criteria were applied: the calculated r value had to exceed the critical r value of 0.244, and the significance level had to be below 0.05. The results for each item are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Validity test results for the individual performance of student organization members variable (Y)

Item	Calculated r	Significance (p)	Critical r	Conclusion
Y1	0.527	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
Y2	0.571	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
Y3	0.546	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
Y4	0.562	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
Y5	0.615	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
Y6	0.530	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
Y7	0.568	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
Y8	0.488	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
Y9	0.683	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
Y10	0.644	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
Y11	0.556	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
Y12	0.523	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
Y13	0.358	0.003	0.244	Valid
Y14	0.626	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
Y15	0.555	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
Y16	0.552	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
Y17	0.647	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
Y18	0.533	< 0.001	0.244	Valid
Y19	0.600	< 0.001	0.244	Valid

Source: Research data processed using IBM SPSS Statistics 32.

The results in Table 5 show that the calculated r values for the 19 items measuring the individual performance of student organization members ranged from 0.358 to 0.683. All values exceeded the critical r value of 0.244. Regarding statistical significance, 18 items had values of $p < 0.001$, while item Y13 had a value of $p = 0.003$. Although the correlation coefficient for Y13 was lower than those of the other items, it still met the established criteria because its calculated r value exceeded the critical r value and its significance level was below 0.05. Therefore, all 19 items measuring the individual performance of student organization members were considered valid based on these test results and were retained for subsequent analysis.

Following the validity tests, reliability testing was conducted to assess the internal consistency of the items for each variable. Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. An instrument was considered reliable if its coefficient reached or exceeded 0.70. The reliability test results for democratic leadership style and the

individual performance of student organization members are presented together in Table 6.

Table 6. Instrument reliability test results

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Number of items	Conclusion
Democratic leadership style (X)	0.878	12	Reliable
Individual performance of student organization members (Y)	0.908	19	Reliable

Source: Research data processed using IBM SPSS Statistics 32.

As shown in Table 6, the democratic leadership style variable had a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.878 across 12 items, while the individual performance of student organization members variable had a coefficient of 0.908 across 19 items. Both values exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.70 applied in this study. These results indicate that both instruments met the reliability criterion in terms of internal consistency. Accordingly, the instruments measuring democratic leadership style and individual performance of student organization members were considered suitable for further analysis. Nevertheless, reliability and validity represent two distinct aspects of instrument evaluation. The reliability results indicate the instrument's internal consistency, whereas the validity results presented earlier demonstrate whether the items met the correlation criteria used to assess them.

Classical assumption tests: Normality and linearity

Classical assumption tests were conducted to examine the characteristics of the data before hypothesis testing. In this study, the tests included normality and linearity tests. The normality test was used to evaluate the distribution of the residuals, whereas the linearity test assessed whether the relationship between democratic leadership style and member performance followed a linear pattern. Normality was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test on the unstandardized residuals. Meanwhile, linearity was examined using the analysis of variance (ANOVA) table, focusing on the significance value for *Deviation from Linearity*. The results of these two tests were used to assess whether the data met the assumptions required for Pearson correlation analysis.

Table 7. Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test results

Component	Value
Number of respondents (N)	65
Mean residual	0.0000000
Residual standard deviation	6.22937716
Most Extreme Differences – Absolute	0.070
Most Extreme Differences – Positive	0.070

Most Extreme Differences – Negative	–0.056
Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic	0.070
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.200
Monte Carlo Sig. (2-tailed)	0.599
99% confidence interval – lower bound	0.586
99% confidence interval – upper bound	0.611

Source: Primary data processed by the researchers (2026).

As shown in Table 7, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test applied to the unstandardized residuals from 65 respondents yielded a test statistic of 0.070 and an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.200. This significance value exceeded 0.05, indicating insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis that the residuals followed a normal distribution. Accordingly, based on the criteria applied in this study, the residual normality assumption was considered satisfied. This result supports the use of Pearson correlation analysis to examine the relationship between democratic leadership style and member performance. However, this interpretation pertains to the distribution of the residuals tested and does not mean that all study variables have automatically been shown to follow normal distributions.

The linearity test was subsequently conducted to determine whether the relationship between democratic leadership style, as the independent variable, and student organization member performance, as the dependent variable, followed a linear pattern. The test was performed using the ANOVA table, with particular attention to the significance value in the *Deviation from Linearity* row. If the significance value for this component exceeds 0.05, no statistically significant deviation from a linear pattern is detected. The linearity test results based on the SPSS output are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Linearity test results based on the ANOVA table

Source of variation	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Significance
Between Groups – Combined	1,920.553	22	87.298	2.448	0.006
Linearity	934.933	1	934.933	26.215	< 0.001
Deviation from Linearity	985.621	21	46.934	1.316	0.220
Within Groups	1,497.908	42	35.664	–	–
Total	3,418.462	64	–	–	–

Source: Primary data processed by the researchers (2026).

As shown in Table 8, the significance value for *Linearity* was $p < 0.001$, indicating a statistically significant linear component in the relationship between democratic leadership style and student organization member performance. Meanwhile, the significance value for *Deviation from Linearity* was 0.220, exceeding 0.05. This result

indicates that the deviation from the linear pattern was not statistically significant. Therefore, based on this test, the relationship between the two variables could be treated as linear. It is important to note that this conclusion was based on the significance value for *Deviation from Linearity*, rather than on the significance values for *Combined* or *Linearity* considered separately.

Overall, the normality and linearity tests indicated that both assumptions examined in this study were satisfied according to the criteria applied. The unstandardized residuals met the normality criterion, with an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.200, while the relationship between democratic leadership style and student organization member performance met the linearity criterion, with a *Deviation from Linearity* value of 0.220. Accordingly, Pearson correlation analysis could be used to examine the relationship between the two variables. Nevertheless, these assumption tests do not, by themselves, establish that the relationship between the study variables is statistically significant. The significance and strength of the relationship must still be determined through hypothesis testing.

Hypothesis testing: Pearson correlation analysis

Pearson correlation is a parametric technique used to measure the strength and direction of a linear relationship between two quantitative variables measured on an interval or ratio scale (Subhaktiyasa et al., 2025). The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) ranges from -1 to $+1$. A positive value indicates a positive association, whereas a negative value indicates an inverse association. The use of this test requires consideration of relevant statistical assumptions, including normality and linearity, to ensure that the results are interpreted appropriately (van den Heuvel & Zhan, 2022). The strength of the relationship between variables is then interpreted based on the correlation coefficient (r) according to the following categories.

Table 9. Guidelines for interpreting the Pearson correlation coefficient

Pearson correlation coefficient interval (r)	Strength of correlation
0.00–0.19	Very weak
0.20–0.39	Weak
0.40–0.59	Moderate
0.60–0.79	Strong
0.80–1.00	Very strong

Source: Adapted from Subhaktiyasa et al. (2025).

Hypothesis testing was conducted to determine whether a statistically significant relationship existed between democratic leadership style and the performance of student organization members. The hypothesis was tested using the Pearson product-moment correlation, considering the correlation coefficient and statistical significance

at the 0.05 level. If the significance value was below 0.05, the relationship between the two variables was considered statistically significant. The results of the Pearson correlation analysis between democratic leadership style and student organization member performance are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Results of the Pearson correlation test

Variable	Statistic	Democratic leadership style	Member performance
Democratic leadership style	Pearson correlation (<i>r</i>)	1.000	0.523***
	Significance (2-tailed)	—	< 0.001
	Number of respondents (<i>N</i>)	65	65
Member performance	Pearson correlation (<i>r</i>)	0.523*	1.000
	Significance (2-tailed)	< 0.001	—
	Number of respondents (<i>N</i>)	65	65

Note: *Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).

Source: Primary data processed by the researchers (2026).

As shown in Table 10, the Pearson correlation coefficient was $r = 0.523$, with a significance value of $p < 0.001$ among the 65 respondents. This significance value was below 0.05, indicating that the relationship between democratic leadership style and student organization member performance was statistically significant. The positive correlation coefficient indicates that the two variables were positively associated. In other words, higher ratings of democratic leadership style tended to be associated with higher ratings of member performance. Based on the interpretation categories in Table 9, the correlation coefficient of 0.523 falls within the moderate category. Therefore, the results support the hypothesis that a statistically significant relationship exists between democratic leadership style and student organization member performance. However, this finding indicates a statistical association and does not establish that democratic leadership style directly causes improvements in member performance.

The relationship between democratic leadership style and student organization member performance

Democratic leadership emphasizes member participation, openness to opinions, recognition of individual potential, and collaboration as important elements of organizational management. In student organizations, these characteristics can help members understand collective decisions and fulfill their shared responsibilities. However, member involvement does not always result in high performance, as task execution is also associated with motivation, commitment, and organizational coordination. This study found a moderate positive relationship between democratic

leadership style and member performance, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0.523$ and $p < 0.001$. This finding indicates that scores on the two variables tended to increase together. In other words, democratic leadership was associated with member performance, but it cannot yet be considered a direct cause of improved performance. This interpretation remains limited by the sample scope and the correlational research design employed.

The relationship can be understood in light of the study by Febrianty and Pujianto (2024), who found that democratic leadership in the Management Study Program Student Association at UNUSIDA was practiced through communication, member involvement, and decision-making. Their qualitative findings indicated that these practices were associated with members' comfort in participating in organizational activities and their loyalty to the organization. These findings help explain the importance of member involvement in organizational life. Members who feel included have opportunities to express their opinions and understand collective decisions. However, comfort and loyalty are not equivalent to performance measures. Therefore, this study provides an explanation of a possible mechanism linking leadership with member behavior, but it does not establish the mechanism underlying the correlation found in the present study. The statistical relationship between democratic leadership and performance is based on the findings of this study. These findings do not mean that loyalty automatically improves the quality of organizational task performance.

Pratiwi and Manafe (2022) found that the leader of Konter S7 Cell involved employees in decision-making, recognized their potential, listened to criticism and suggestions, and worked alongside them. Their qualitative findings illustrate how democratic leadership can be expressed through concrete behaviors that encourage communication and collaboration. The similarities between these behaviors and the leadership dimensions examined in the present study strengthen the rationale for considering participation and openness when interpreting member performance. However, Pratiwi and Manafe did not statistically measure the correlation between the two variables. Therefore, their findings cannot confirm the magnitude of the correlation coefficient of 0.523. Their contribution lies in explaining democratic leadership practices, whereas the empirical relationship with student organization member performance is demonstrated by the results of the present study. The difference in context also limits the extent to which their findings can be applied to student organizations.

Different findings were reported by Ardiansyah and Trisnawati (2021) and Fadilah et al. (2025). Ardiansyah and Trisnawati found that democratic leadership style did not have a statistically significant partial effect on the performance of executive members of the Student Executive Board (BEM) at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA), whereas commitment had a significant effect.

The two variables jointly had a significant effect on performance. Fadilah et al. likewise found that leadership style did not have a statistically significant partial effect, whereas work motivation had a positive and significant effect on BEM member performance. These results differ from the positive correlation found in the present study. However, the differences should be interpreted in light of the analytical models employed. Pearson correlation measures the association between two variables, whereas multiple regression examines the contribution of variables while accounting for other factors in the model. Therefore, the present study does not establish whether the relationship between leadership and performance would remain significant after controlling for motivation or commitment. This comparison also highlights the need for further testing using comparable analytical models.

Isgunandar et al. (2022) provide empirical evidence that supports the direction of the relationship found in the present study. Among employees of PD Parkir Makassar Raya, they identified a moderate relationship between democratic leadership style and performance and reported a positive, statistically significant effect using simple linear regression. Suprianto et al. (2021), in their study of employees at the Watang Sawitto District Office in Pinrang, also reported an effect of democratic leadership on performance. These similar findings indicate that positive relationships between democratic leadership and performance have also been observed outside student organizations. Nevertheless, both studies were conducted in formal employment settings with different structures of responsibility. Their findings support a general pattern of association between leadership and performance but do not demonstrate that the underlying mechanisms or strength of the relationship are identical among student organization members. Differences in organizational characteristics must be considered before applying these findings to the student organization context.

Salsabila and Hetami (2022) found that democratic leadership style and work culture had significant individual and joint effects on the performance of 47 employees at PT AEL Indonesia in Sangatta. Democratic leadership style was also reported as the dominant variable in their model. These findings suggest that leadership may contribute to performance when it is analyzed alongside other organizational factors. Wibowo and Sari (2022) also examined the effects of democratic leadership, the work environment, and work discipline on employee performance at PT Universal Prima Grafika using multiple linear regression. Both studies emphasize the importance of considering organizational factors when explaining performance. In the present study, work culture, the work environment, and work discipline were not examined. Consequently, it cannot be concluded whether these factors strengthen or alter the relationship between democratic leadership and student organization member performance. Moreover, the dominance of a variable in a corporate model does not necessarily apply to student organizations.

Holl and Ali (2025) found a positive and statistically significant effect of democratic leadership style on students' academic performance based on a survey of lecturers at public universities in Cambodia. Their regression results showed $B = 0.361$ and $p < 0.001$, but the model explained only 6.1% of the variation in academic performance ($R^2 = 0.061$). These findings demonstrate that a positive relationship can also be identified in higher education settings, although most of the variation in academic performance remained unexplained by the model. This finding highlights that leadership is not the only factor associated with student outcomes. However, academic performance differs from performance in student organizational activities. Therefore, the study by Holl and Ali broadens the context of the discussion rather than providing direct evidence of the correlation between democratic leadership style and student organization member performance. Their findings should be interpreted in light of differences in the constructs and the sources used to assess performance.

Yahya et al. (2022) identified variations in leadership styles within the Student Association of the Islamic Education Management Department at UIN Alauddin Makassar, including charismatic, democratic, authoritarian, and situational leadership across different leadership periods. They also emphasized that democratic leadership allows members to express their opinions before decisions are made. These findings indicate that leadership experiences in student organizations may vary according to the leader and the leadership period. Jannah and Almuhammad (2024) found that a clear organizational structure, activity procedures, and democratic and trustworthy leadership supported the development of discipline, order, character, and responsibility among female students at an Islamic boarding school. Both studies broaden the understanding of leadership in educational organizations. However, neither study tested the same correlation examined in the present research. Their findings therefore provide interpretive context rather than direct evidence of the statistical relationship identified here. They offer contextual insights, not quantitative measures of member performance.

The findings of this study indicate that democratic leadership style has a positive and statistically significant relationship with student organization member performance in Surabaya. This relationship suggests that openness, participation, recognition of members' potential, and collaboration are leadership practices worth considering in organizational management. However, the moderate strength of the relationship indicates that member performance cannot be understood solely in terms of leadership style. Motivation, commitment, and other organizational factors may also warrant further investigation. Because this study employed a correlational approach, its findings do not establish a cause-and-effect relationship. The study contributes empirical evidence concerning the relationship between democratic leadership style and member performance in student organizations while providing a basis for further investigation of factors that may be associated with performance.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that democratic leadership style has a positive and statistically significant relationship with student organization member performance in Surabaya, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0.523$ and $p < 0.001$. This moderate relationship indicates that higher scores for democratic leadership style tend to be associated with higher member performance scores. The findings suggest that involving members in decision-making, remaining open to opinions, recognizing individual potential, and fostering collaboration are leadership practices that warrant attention in student organization management. Substantively, democratic leadership can be understood as one factor associated with how members fulfill their responsibilities, rather than the sole determinant of performance. Because this study employed a correlational design, the findings indicate an association between the variables and do not establish a cause-and-effect relationship.

This study contributes empirical evidence regarding the relationship between democratic leadership style and member performance in the context of student organizations in Surabaya. In practical terms, the findings may serve as a basis for organizational leaders to evaluate and develop open communication, member participation, and collaboration in program implementation. However, the study is limited by its sample size and scope, the use of purposive sampling, and an analysis focused on the relationship between two variables without incorporating other factors that may be associated with performance. Therefore, the findings should be generalized with caution. Future research is recommended to include respondents from a wider range of universities and types of student organizations and to examine motivation, commitment, and other organizational factors using multivariate analysis. Such an approach could clarify whether the relationship between democratic leadership style and member performance remains consistent after accounting for other factors.

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