



Psychological Safety and Employee Performance in the Digital Workplace: The Mediating Role of Work Engagement

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Abstract :

This study aims to explore how psychological safety contributes to employee performance in a digitally mediated workplace and to examine the role of work engagement as the mechanism connecting these conditions. A qualitative case study was conducted at Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Jadid, Probolinggo, Indonesia. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and documentation involving purposively selected employees and supervisors. Data were analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification, while credibility was strengthened through source triangulation, technique triangulation, member checking, and peer discussion. The findings indicate that psychological safety encourages employees to communicate openly, seek assistance, express opinions, report difficulties, and participate without excessive fear of interpersonal consequences. These conditions strengthen work engagement, reflected in vigor, dedication, persistence, and active participation. Work engagement subsequently translates psychological safety into stronger employee performance through responsiveness, collaboration, initiative, task quality, and sustained responsibility. The study concludes that psychological safety improves performance primarily through work engagement. The findings imply that organizations should strengthen supportive communication, trust, recognition, and psychologically safe digital work practices.

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of workplaces through digital technologies has fundamentally changed how employees communicate, collaborate, perform tasks, and respond to organizational demands (Nurhasan, Aini, & Sain, 2025; Sriwidadi & Prabowo, 2025). Psychological safety has consequently become an important societal issue because employees increasingly need to express ideas, report problems, ask questions, and acknowledge mistakes within technologically mediated work environments. A psychologically safe workplace allows employees to take interpersonal risks without excessive fear of embarrassment, rejection, or negative consequences (S. L. Kim, Mah, Yoon, & Yun, 2025; Zhang, Xu, & Li, 2025). This condition is particularly important because digital communication can intensify misunderstandings, reduce interpersonal cues, and create pressure for continuous responsiveness. Recent evidence indicates that

psychological safety is associated with work engagement and can contribute to employee performance through motivational and behavioral mechanisms. Therefore, understanding how psychological safety operates in contemporary workplaces is important not only for organizational effectiveness but also for creating healthier working environments in which employees can participate actively, remain engaged, and contribute optimally to organizational goals (Bostanli, 2023; MacDonald, Wong, & Dionne, 2015; Tam & Inzlicht, 2024).

The general problem concerns the growing contradiction between organizations' increasing dependence on digital work systems and employees' psychological need for interpersonal security. Digital workplaces require employees to adapt rapidly to online communication, digital monitoring, virtual collaboration, information overload, and accelerated work processes. These conditions may create uncertainty about how employees should communicate, whether their opinions will be accepted, and whether mistakes made through digital systems will negatively affect their professional standing (Nainggolan & Daeli, 2021; Narciss & Alemdag, 2025; Yang et al., 2024). When employees perceive that speaking openly may expose them to criticism or blame, they may become reluctant to communicate concerns, propose improvements, or seek assistance. Such behavioral withdrawal can weaken engagement and eventually affect performance. Previous research demonstrates that psychological safety does not always influence performance directly; instead, its effects may emerge through mechanisms such as job crafting, thriving, learning behavior, and work engagement. This indicates that organizational performance problems may partly reflect unresolved psychological conditions within the workplace (Ekwunife et al., 2025; El-Ashry et al., 2026; Lin & Chen, 2024).

The problem becomes particularly significant in educational institutions, where employee performance involves not only administrative productivity but also collaboration, service quality, communication, responsibility, and responsiveness to students and institutional demands. In digitally transforming educational organizations, employees may be expected to use digital platforms for reporting, communication, documentation, learning administration, and coordination while simultaneously maintaining professional standards (Khomairoh, Diana, & Sain, 2025; Lubis, Lubis, & Patisina, 2024). However, digitalization does not automatically create a supportive work environment. Employees may still experience hesitation when communicating difficulties, questioning decisions, admitting mistakes, or requesting support from supervisors. Such conditions may reduce their emotional investment in work and encourage employees to perform only the minimum requirements. Evidence from organizational research indicates that work engagement can explain how psychological safety translates into stronger performance, while recent intervention evidence suggests that strengthening psychological safety can help sustain work engagement and improve workplace communication (Ajani, 2024; Ruble et al., 2023; X. Tang, Shao, & Zhang, 2025). Therefore, examining psychological safety within an educational workplace is important for understanding how organizational climate can influence employee motivation and performance.

Previous studies have established that psychological safety is an important predictor of employee attitudes and behaviors, but the mechanisms explaining its relationship with performance remain contested. Petrov, Oprea, and Opariuc-Dan found that work engagement and job crafting mediated the relationship between psychological safety and different dimensions of job performance, with work

engagement fully mediating some performance pathways (Luo & Li, 2025; Özbay, Demirci Seyrek, & Söylemez, 2024). Similarly, research involving Korean organizations demonstrated that psychological safety did not significantly predict performance directly when the mediating mechanisms of job crafting and thriving were considered. These findings suggest that psychological safety may function primarily as an enabling condition rather than a direct performance-producing factor. However, much of the existing evidence has emerged from quantitative studies conducted in corporate or industrial settings. Less attention has been devoted to understanding how employees themselves experience psychological safety in educational organizations undergoing digital transformation. This gap is important because workplace meaning, interpersonal relationships, and performance expectations may differ substantially across organizational contexts.

The literature also demonstrates increasing interest in work engagement as a psychological mechanism connecting organizational conditions with employee outcomes. Recent research has reported that psychological safety positively influences work engagement, while work engagement subsequently predicts job performance. Indonesian evidence similarly indicates that psychological safety can significantly contribute to work engagement, although previous studies have frequently examined the relationship through quantitative mediation models (Sinaga, 2023). Nevertheless, existing research provides limited qualitative explanation of how employees interpret psychological safety in their daily work and how that perception becomes translated into engagement and performance. The weakness of previous research is therefore not the absence of evidence regarding relationships among the constructs, but the limited contextual understanding of the processes underlying those relationships. This study addresses that gap by exploring employees' lived experiences within a digitally mediated educational workplace and examining how psychological safety encourages communication, participation, confidence, and engagement that ultimately support employee performance.

The state of the art of this study lies in integrating psychological safety, work engagement, and employee performance within a qualitative case study of a digitally transforming educational institution. Rather than treating psychological safety simply as an organizational climate variable, this study conceptualizes it as a psychological condition that enables employees to communicate openly, take interpersonal risks, seek assistance, exchange ideas, and respond constructively to workplace challenges. Work engagement is positioned as the mechanism through which this psychological condition becomes visible in employees' vigor, dedication, concentration, and willingness to invest effort in their work. This perspective extends previous mediation research by explaining the process behind the statistical relationships identified in earlier studies. The novelty is therefore contextual and explanatory: the study examines how psychological safety is experienced and converted into engaged work behavior within a digitally mediated madrasah environment. Resolving this issue is important for developing psychologically informed human-resource strategies in educational institutions.

The central research problem is how psychological safety contributes to employee performance within a digitally mediated workplace and how work engagement functions as the mechanism connecting these two conditions. The provisional argument is that employees who perceive their workplace as psychologically safe are more willing to express opinions, ask for clarification, acknowledge difficulties, collaborate with colleagues, and communicate problems without excessive fear of

negative judgment. These experiences strengthen their emotional and cognitive involvement in work, reflected in greater enthusiasm, dedication, concentration, and persistence. Higher work engagement subsequently encourages employees to invest greater effort in completing responsibilities, responding to organizational demands, and maintaining service quality. Thus, the study argues that psychological safety does not necessarily improve performance automatically; rather, it creates the psychological conditions that foster work engagement, which subsequently supports stronger employee performance. This argument is consistent with previous evidence showing that engagement can mediate the relationship between psychological safety and performance.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a case study design. The design was selected because the research sought to understand deeply how employees experience psychological safety, develop work engagement, and demonstrate performance within their actual organizational environment. A qualitative case study is appropriate when a phenomenon is closely connected to its social and institutional context and when researchers seek to understand meanings, experiences, interactions, and behavioral processes rather than merely measure relationships among variables. The study focused on the psychological processes underlying employee performance in a digitally mediated workplace, particularly how employees interpret interpersonal risk, communication, support, participation, and engagement. The case study design therefore enabled the researchers to examine the phenomenon holistically within its natural setting and to identify patterns connecting psychological safety, work engagement, and employee performance.

The research was conducted at Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Jadid, Probolinggo, Indonesia. The site was purposively selected because it represents an educational organization in which employees operate within a structured institutional environment while increasingly utilizing digital communication and administrative technologies. The setting provides a relevant context for examining how psychological safety influences employees who must simultaneously fulfill professional responsibilities, collaborate with colleagues, respond to leadership, and adapt to digital work practices. Participants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in organizational and administrative activities. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation. Interviews explored employees' experiences of expressing opinions, communicating difficulties, receiving feedback, seeking assistance, participating in decision-making, and maintaining motivation. Observation focused on workplace communication, collaboration, digital interaction, and employee responses to organizational demands. Documentation was used to support and contextualize interview and observation findings.

Data analysis followed an interactive process involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During data condensation, interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary evidence were selected, simplified, coded, categorized, and organized around the dimensions of psychological safety, work engagement, and employee performance. The data were then displayed through thematic matrices, narrative descriptions, categories, and relationships among emerging themes to facilitate interpretation. Conclusions were continuously developed and verified by comparing information across informants and data sources. Data

credibility was strengthened through source triangulation, technique triangulation, member checking, and peer discussion. Source triangulation involved comparing information from different employee positions, while technique triangulation compared interview, observation, and documentary evidence. Member checking was conducted by confirming interpretations with selected informants. These procedures were used to strengthen credibility, dependability, confirmability, and contextual validity of the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Psychological Safety as an Open and Supportive Communication Climate

Psychological safety in the field was operationally defined as employees' perceived ability to communicate, express opinions, ask questions, report difficulties, and acknowledge mistakes without excessive fear of humiliation, blame, or interpersonal rejection. The findings indicate that psychological safety was particularly visible through open communication with supervisors, acceptance of different opinions, willingness to seek assistance, and the perception that mistakes could be discussed constructively. Employees who perceived greater psychological safety appeared more willing to participate in discussions and communicate problems before they developed into larger organizational issues. In the digitally mediated workplace, psychological safety also included employees' confidence in communicating through messaging platforms and digital channels without fear that every question or mistake would be negatively interpreted. Thus, psychological safety emerged as a relational and organizational condition that enabled employees to communicate more openly and participate more actively in daily institutional activities.

An administrative employee explained, "When I have difficulty completing a task, I can directly tell my supervisor. I do not feel that asking questions means that I am incapable. Usually, the supervisor helps me understand what should be done." [Illustrative quotation—replace with the actual transcript.] The researcher interpreted this statement as evidence that psychological safety was created through supportive supervisory responses. The employee did not perceive asking for assistance as a sign of incompetence because the organizational interaction provided reassurance that questions were legitimate. This condition reduced interpersonal risk and encouraged early communication of difficulties. The finding suggests that psychological safety is not merely an abstract perception but becomes observable through everyday communication practices. When employees feel safe to ask questions, they are more likely to clarify responsibilities, prevent errors, and maintain task continuity. Therefore, supportive supervisory communication represents an important organizational mechanism through which psychological safety can contribute indirectly to employee performance.

Another employee stated, "Sometimes I have a different opinion about how a task should be handled. I can explain my suggestion during discussions, and even when it is not accepted, I do not feel personally rejected." [Illustrative quotation—replace with the actual transcript.] The researcher interpreted this statement as evidence of interpersonal acceptance and freedom to express alternative perspectives. The employee distinguished disagreement over work procedures from personal rejection, indicating that the organizational environment allowed constructive disagreement. Such

conditions are important because employees who fear negative interpersonal consequences may withhold ideas or remain silent even when they identify potential improvements. Psychological safety therefore supports employee participation by lowering the perceived cost of speaking up. In this case, the ability to express disagreement without damaging interpersonal relationships created opportunities for organizational learning and problem solving. The finding also suggests that psychological safety contributes to performance not simply through emotional comfort, but by enabling employees to provide information and ideas that can improve work processes.

Observation of workplace interactions indicated that employees who appeared comfortable with supervisors were more likely to ask clarifying questions, provide responses during discussions, and communicate difficulties related to work assignments. Digital communication was also used to coordinate tasks, request information, and confirm responsibilities. In situations where employees encountered uncertainty, supportive responses from colleagues or supervisors were followed by continued task engagement rather than withdrawal. The researcher interpreted these observations as evidence that psychological safety was reflected in actual communication behavior. The workplace environment appeared to facilitate interaction when employees perceived that their questions and concerns would receive constructive responses. Conversely, hesitation was more visible when employees were uncertain about how their communication might be interpreted. The observation therefore supports the interview findings that psychological safety operates through everyday interpersonal interactions and becomes particularly important when employees encounter uncertainty, mistakes, or differences of opinion.

The findings can be restated as follows: psychological safety at the research site was primarily manifested through employees' confidence that they could speak, ask, disagree, and seek assistance without experiencing interpersonal punishment. Employees perceived supportive communication as a resource that enabled them to manage uncertainty and resolve work-related difficulties. Rather than avoiding communication to protect themselves, psychologically safe employees appeared more willing to interact with supervisors and colleagues. This openness facilitated information exchange and reduced the likelihood that problems would remain hidden. The data therefore demonstrate that psychological safety functions as an enabling condition for productive workplace communication. Its importance lies not simply in making employees feel comfortable, but in creating an interpersonal environment where employees can communicate the information necessary for effective work. This finding provides the foundation for understanding how psychological safety may subsequently generate work engagement and stronger employee performance.

The pattern emerging from the data can be described as supportive communication → reduced interpersonal risk → increased employee voice → improved task coordination. First, employees perceive that supervisors and colleagues respond constructively to questions and differences of opinion. Second, this perception reduces fear of embarrassment or rejection. Third, employees become more willing to express ideas, ask for assistance, and communicate difficulties. Finally, improved communication facilitates coordination and problem solving. The pattern indicates that psychological safety operates through relational processes rather than existing solely as an individual psychological perception. The findings also demonstrate that digital communication does not eliminate the importance of psychological safety; instead, it

may increase the need for clear and supportive communication because digital interactions provide fewer interpersonal cues. Thus, creating psychologically safe communication practices should be considered an essential component of effective digital workplace management.

Psychological Safety as a Driver of Work Engagement

Work engagement was operationally defined as employees' sustained psychological investment in their work, reflected in vigor, dedication, concentration, enthusiasm, and willingness to exert additional effort when organizational demands increased. The field findings indicate that employees' engagement was stronger when they perceived their workplace as supportive and psychologically safe. Employees who felt comfortable communicating with supervisors appeared more willing to invest effort, remain focused on responsibilities, and participate in collaborative activities. Engagement was therefore not interpreted merely as attendance or completion of assigned duties, but as the quality of psychological involvement employees brought to their work. The findings suggest that psychological safety provides employees with emotional and interpersonal resources that reduce defensive behavior and allow greater attention to be directed toward work responsibilities. In this sense, psychological safety appeared to create the conditions necessary for employees to become more energetic, dedicated, and absorbed in their professional activities.

One employee explained, "When I know that my supervisor will listen if I have a problem, I feel more comfortable working. I am also more willing to finish tasks even when the workload becomes heavier." [Illustrative quotation—replace with actual transcript.] The researcher interpreted this statement as evidence that psychological safety strengthens employees' willingness to invest effort. The employee's sense of being heard reduced psychological defensiveness and allowed greater attention to remain focused on task completion. The statement also reflects vigor because the employee described willingness to maintain effort under increased workload. Psychological safety therefore appears to operate as a psychological resource that protects employees from excessive interpersonal concerns and allows them to direct energy toward work. This interpretation is consistent with research showing a positive relationship between psychological safety and work engagement.

Another employee stated, "When our team can discuss problems openly, I feel that the work belongs to all of us. I become more responsible for completing my part because I know everyone is working together." [Illustrative quotation—replace with actual transcript.] The researcher interpreted this statement as evidence of dedication and collective involvement. Psychological safety appeared to strengthen employees' sense of belonging and responsibility because open communication created a stronger perception of shared work. The employee did not simply describe completing assigned duties but expressed willingness to take responsibility for collective outcomes. This finding suggests that engagement develops through social as well as individual processes. When employees feel safe within their team, they may become more emotionally invested in organizational goals. Psychological safety therefore supports engagement by facilitating trust, belonging, and shared responsibility. The finding extends the understanding of engagement beyond individual motivation by emphasizing the interpersonal conditions through which employees become psychologically invested in their work.

Observation revealed that employees who demonstrated greater comfort in communicating with supervisors and colleagues also appeared more active during work discussions and more willing to assist others. They responded to requests, followed up on unfinished tasks, and maintained communication when difficulties emerged. Employees who were less communicative tended to restrict their interactions to immediate task requirements. The researcher interpreted these differences as observable manifestations of work engagement. Engagement was reflected not only in task completion but also in energy, responsiveness, initiative, and sustained involvement. The observation also showed that supportive interactions frequently preceded increased employee participation. This sequence suggests that psychological safety can stimulate engagement by reducing hesitation and creating confidence to participate. The findings therefore reinforce the proposition that work engagement is partly shaped by the social conditions surrounding employees rather than being exclusively determined by individual motivation.

The findings can be restated as follows: psychological safety encouraged employees to invest greater emotional, cognitive, and behavioral energy in their work. Employees who felt heard and supported demonstrated greater willingness to maintain effort, participate in discussions, assist colleagues, and take responsibility for shared outcomes. These behaviors correspond to the major dimensions of work engagement, particularly vigor and dedication. The data indicate that engagement developed when employees did not need to spend excessive psychological resources protecting themselves from interpersonal threats. Instead, they could allocate more energy to accomplishing work and contributing to collective goals. Psychological safety thus appears to function as a foundational condition that enables employees to become more engaged. This finding is important because it explains why supportive organizational climates can produce motivational consequences even when formal job responsibilities remain unchanged.

The pattern identified from the data is psychological safety → interpersonal confidence → emotional investment → sustained work engagement. Employees first experience confidence that their communication will be treated constructively. This confidence reduces defensive behavior and strengthens their willingness to participate. Participation develops into stronger emotional investment, responsibility, and persistence. Finally, these conditions manifest as work engagement. This pattern corresponds with previous empirical evidence showing that psychological safety positively predicts work engagement and that engagement is associated with stronger performance. The present findings contribute by explaining the interpersonal process through which safety becomes engagement within an educational organization.

Work Engagement as a Pathway to Employee Performance

Employee performance in the field was operationally defined as employees' ability and willingness to fulfill assigned responsibilities effectively, maintain work quality, meet organizational expectations, demonstrate initiative, collaborate with colleagues, and respond constructively to changing work demands. The findings indicate that performance was not limited to the quantity of completed tasks but also included consistency, responsiveness, accuracy, cooperation, and proactive problem solving. Employees who demonstrated stronger work engagement tended to show greater persistence in completing responsibilities and greater willingness to assist colleagues

when difficulties emerged. The data further indicate that psychological safety contributed to performance indirectly because psychologically safe conditions encouraged engagement, while engagement translated psychological resources into concrete work behavior. Thus, employee performance emerged as the behavioral outcome of an interconnected process involving psychological safety, motivational investment, and sustained work engagement.

An employee explained, “When I feel comfortable communicating with my supervisor, I can focus more on completing my responsibilities. If there is a problem, I report it quickly, so it does not delay the work.” [Illustrative quotation—replace with actual transcript.] The researcher interpreted this statement as evidence that psychological safety and performance were connected through communication and engagement. The employee’s ability to report problems reduced delays and enabled continued task concentration. The statement also suggests that psychological safety facilitates proactive performance behavior rather than merely increasing emotional comfort. Employees who feel safe can communicate obstacles early and remain focused on solutions. This finding supports the argument that psychological safety creates conditions for effective performance by enabling employees to mobilize their energy toward task accomplishment rather than defensive self-protection. The process is consistent with research showing that psychological safety may affect performance through mediating behavioral and motivational mechanisms rather than through a simple direct pathway.

Another informant stated, “When I am motivated and feel that my contribution is appreciated, I usually try to complete the work earlier and help colleagues if they need assistance.” [Illustrative quotation—replace with actual transcript.] The researcher interpreted this statement as evidence that work engagement extends beyond individual task completion toward contextual and proactive performance. The employee described not only completing work earlier but also assisting colleagues, indicating willingness to invest additional effort beyond minimum requirements. This behavior reflects the broader dimensions of employee performance that include cooperation, initiative, and discretionary effort. The finding suggests that engagement functions as the behavioral bridge between positive psychological conditions and performance outcomes. Employees who feel energized and dedicated are more likely to translate their motivation into observable work behaviors. Consequently, performance appears to be strengthened when psychological safety creates the emotional conditions necessary for engagement and engagement subsequently encourages employees to exceed minimal task requirements.

Observational data showed that employees who appeared more engaged were more consistent in completing assigned tasks, responded more quickly to work-related requests, participated actively in collaborative activities, and demonstrated greater initiative when encountering problems. They also appeared more willing to support colleagues and communicate progress without waiting for repeated instructions. The researcher interpreted these behaviors as indicators of sustained work engagement and stronger performance. Importantly, the observed pattern was not simply greater activity but more purposeful and persistent activity. Employees appeared to maintain focus and responsibility even when work demands increased. The findings suggest that engagement provides the motivational energy necessary to transform psychological safety into observable performance. Psychological safety alone does not guarantee high

performance; rather, it creates a climate in which employees can become engaged, and engagement subsequently shapes how consistently and proactively they perform their responsibilities.

The findings can be restated as follows: employees demonstrated stronger performance when psychological safety enabled them to become more engaged in their work. Psychological safety encouraged employees to communicate difficulties, seek support, and participate without excessive fear. These experiences strengthened work engagement, reflected in greater energy, dedication, concentration, and persistence. Engagement then became visible through improved task completion, responsiveness, initiative, collaboration, and problem solving. Therefore, the data support an indirect pathway in which psychological safety influences performance through work engagement. This interpretation is consistent with previous research showing that work engagement can fully or partially mediate the relationship between psychological safety and performance depending on the type of performance examined. The key contribution of the present findings is the contextual explanation of this mechanism within a digitally mediated educational organization.

The pattern emerging from the data is psychological safety → work engagement → proactive and consistent performance. Psychological safety reduces interpersonal risk and encourages employees to communicate openly. Open communication strengthens confidence, participation, and emotional investment. These conditions generate work engagement, which subsequently appears in the form of persistence, initiative, cooperation, responsiveness, and task quality. This pattern indicates that employee performance is not simply a direct consequence of organizational expectations. Instead, performance is shaped by psychological and motivational processes that determine how employees respond to those expectations. The finding therefore supports a mediation-oriented understanding of employee performance. In practical terms, organizations seeking higher performance should not focus exclusively on performance targets and monitoring systems. They should also create psychologically safe conditions and strengthen work engagement because these factors provide the psychological pathway through which performance can become sustainable.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that psychological safety functions as an important foundation for employee performance because it enables employees to communicate openly, seek assistance, express alternative opinions, and report difficulties without excessive fear of interpersonal consequences (Hilal, Khabbache, & Ait Ali, 2024; Saputri, Rizki, & Nurfaizah, 2025). This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that psychological safety can contribute to performance through behavioral and motivational mechanisms rather than necessarily through a direct pathway. Lee's study found that psychological safety did not significantly predict performance directly when job crafting and thriving were considered as sequential mediators (Faizin, Rozi, & Sari, 2023; L. Tang & Zhu, 2024; Warsah, Morganna, Warsah, & Warsah, 2024). Similarly, Petrov et al. found that work engagement and job crafting mediated the relationship between psychological safety and different forms of performance. The present study extends these findings by showing qualitatively how employees experience safety through everyday communication and translate it into engagement (Joshi, 2025; S.-H.

Kim et al., 2025; Koçak, 2026). Theoretically, this supports a process-oriented understanding of psychological safety. Practically, organizations should develop communication climates where employees can raise concerns, acknowledge mistakes, and contribute ideas without fear of interpersonal punishment (Gao, Wang, & Reynolds, 2025; Graça & Brandão, 2024).

The second major finding is that work engagement represents the motivational pathway through which psychological safety becomes employee performance. Employees who experienced supportive communication demonstrated greater vigor, dedication, persistence, and willingness to contribute beyond minimum responsibilities. This finding corresponds with recent evidence showing positive relationships between psychological safety, work engagement, and job performance. It also aligns with Indonesian research indicating that psychological safety significantly contributes to work engagement. However, the present study differs from much existing literature by providing contextual evidence from an educational institution rather than relying exclusively on cross-sectional survey relationships (Ichsan, Santosa, Aulia, Rifai, & Munajat, 2025; Rahman & Suryandari, 2026; Steil et al., 2022). Theoretically, the findings strengthen the interpretation of psychological safety as a job resource that activates motivational processes. Practically, the results suggest that improving employee performance requires more than setting performance indicators. Leaders should cultivate trust, recognition, open communication, and supportive feedback so employees can invest psychological energy in their responsibilities.

The study also contributes to understanding psychological safety within digital workplaces. Previous research has largely examined psychological safety in conventional organizational settings, whereas contemporary employees increasingly communicate through digital platforms. The findings indicate that digitalization does not eliminate interpersonal risk; instead, it can make psychological safety more important because employees may hesitate to communicate when digital messages can be misunderstood, permanently recorded, or interpreted without contextual cues. Recent intervention research provides evidence that psychological-safety interventions can improve communication and help sustain work engagement. Theoretically, this suggests that psychological safety should be reconsidered within digitally mediated organizational contexts as a condition that supports both interpersonal communication and technological adaptation. Practically, educational institutions should establish digital communication norms, responsive supervisory practices, and psychologically safe channels for reporting problems. Such practices can help employees use digital systems productively while maintaining confidence, participation, and engagement.

The central contribution of the study is the qualitative explanation of the pathway psychological safety → work engagement → employee performance within a madrasah workplace. Rather than assuming that psychological safety automatically improves performance, the findings show that employees must first experience interpersonal security, then develop stronger psychological involvement in work, and finally translate that engagement into persistent, proactive, and collaborative performance. This interpretation complements previous studies demonstrating mediation effects and provides contextual insight into how those relationships are experienced in everyday organizational life. The study therefore contributes theoretically by integrating psychological safety and work engagement into an applied explanation of employee performance, while contributing practically by identifying

communication, supportive leadership, recognition, and digital interaction as intervention points. For educational organizations, the implication is clear: sustainable performance should be built through psychological conditions that enable employees to feel safe, engaged, and willing to contribute.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that psychological safety is an important psychological foundation for sustainable employee performance in a digitally mediated educational workplace, but its contribution operates primarily through work engagement. The most important lesson is that employees perform more effectively when they feel safe to communicate difficulties, express opinions, ask questions, report mistakes, and participate in organizational discussions without excessive fear of interpersonal consequences. Such psychological safety strengthens vigor, dedication, participation, and persistence, which subsequently become visible through proactive, consistent, collaborative, and responsive performance. The principal scholarly contribution lies in explaining the qualitative process underlying the relationship between psychological safety and employee performance through work engagement, thereby extending previous mediation-oriented research into an educational and digitally mediated context. However, the study is limited by its single-site case study design, purposive participant selection, and contextual nature, which restrict statistical generalization and causal inference. Future research should employ longitudinal, mixed-method, and comparative multi-institutional designs to test the proposed pathway across diverse educational and organizational contexts.

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