

The Impact of Independent Curriculum and Work Motivation on Teacher Performance

Rika Asyura¹, Ismail^{2*}, Bahrur³
Universitas Syiah Kuala

Corresponding Author: Ismail : ismail.kutaradja@usk.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Independent Curriculum, Work Motivation, Teacher Performance, Quantitative Research, Educational Outcomes

Received : 20, March

Revised : 23, April

Accepted: 26, May

©2025 Asyura, Ismail, Bahrur (s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



ABSTRACT

This research aims to investigate the impact of implementing the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) and work motivation on teacher performance in senior high schools within Kota Sigli Sub-district. Employing a quantitative research design, the study sampled 102 teachers using simple random sampling from three high schools that have adopted the Independent Curriculum. Data collection involved observations, structured questionnaires using a Likert scale, and semi-structured interviews. Statistical analyses, including validity and reliability tests, normality tests, correlation analyses, and hypothesis testing (F-test and t-test), were conducted using SPSS version 28.0.1. Results indicate that both curriculum implementation and teacher motivation significantly enhance teacher performance, with motivation showing a stronger individual influence. The combined variables accounted for 45% of the variation in teacher performance, suggesting other unexplored factors may also be influential. Recommendations include enhancing curriculum support, developing motivational strategies, and conducting further research into additional variables affecting teacher performance.

INTRODUCTION

Education is fundamentally an effort to humanize individuals and empower them intellectually, morally, and socially (Benne, 1975). Through education, the government strives to enhance the quality of human resources, aiming for national development and global competitiveness (Sahlberg & Oldroyd, 2010). Teachers, as key actors within the education system, have a pivotal role in creating quality human resources (Diez *et al*, 2020). Educational components such as curricula, infrastructure, and financial investments would be ineffective without qualified teachers who execute their roles professionally and effectively (Angwaomaodoko, 2023).

Indonesia's educational curriculum has undergone numerous revisions since independence, reflecting shifts in educational philosophy, societal demands, and technological advancements. Recently, as a response to the educational disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Indonesian government introduced the Independent Curriculum, commonly known as Kurikulum Merdeka. This new curriculum initiative is a strategic response designed to mitigate learning loss by providing greater autonomy to teachers and schools in designing and implementing educational content that is responsive to the specific needs and potentials of students (Alimuddin, 2023; Kurniawan & Falah, 2023).

The Independent Curriculum places significant emphasis on student-centered learning, flexibility, creativity, and the cultivation of critical thinking skills. Unlike previous curricula, this approach encourages both teachers and students to actively participate in constructing an educational environment conducive to independent and enjoyable learning experiences. Teachers are granted the freedom to design operational curricula tailored to the context, resources, and particular needs of their students, within the established governmental framework. This approach aligns with contemporary educational demands such as fostering critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and character development, encapsulated within the concept of the Pancasila Student Profile (Khoirurrijal *et al.*, 2022).

Parallel to curriculum reforms, motivation has emerged as another crucial factor influencing teachers' performance. Teacher motivation significantly influences the effectiveness of teaching and the overall quality of educational outcomes. It is defined as the internal and external stimuli that drive teachers to carry out their responsibilities enthusiastically and effectively (Maduka & Okafor, 2014). Adequate motivation not only ensures teachers' satisfaction but also positively affects their professional performance, thereby directly influencing student learning outcomes. Motivation factors encompass recognition, a sense of security, professional development opportunities, and conducive work environments (Sparrow *et al.*, 2016; Robbins, 2010).

Teacher performance, defined as the result achieved by teachers through their responsibilities and roles within educational settings, is crucial for the success of educational programs. The success of teaching, class management, and interaction with students heavily depends on teacher performance, characterized by effective planning, implementation, and evaluation of the learning process

(Sparrow et al., 2016). High teacher performance is critical to achieving educational goals, thus necessitating continuous efforts to enhance teacher capacity through training, motivation, and professional development.

In the context of high schools in Kota Sigli, the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka and teacher motivation represents significant areas of interest due to their potential impact on educational quality. Observations and preliminary investigations indicate varied adoption and implementation of this curriculum among local schools, reflecting different impacts on teacher performance. This study, therefore, aims to empirically investigate and analyze the influence of implementing the Independent Curriculum and work motivation on teacher performance in selected high schools in Kota Sigli. Understanding these dynamics is expected to inform educational policy and practice, contributing to enhanced teacher effectiveness and improved student outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Curriculum Development and the Independent Curriculum Curriculum development has historically aimed to align educational objectives with societal needs and technological advancements. Kurikulum Merdeka represents Indonesia's latest curriculum reform aimed at addressing learning disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic. Alimuddin (2023) argues that this curriculum emphasizes flexibility and responsiveness to local educational contexts, providing schools the autonomy to adapt educational content to students' unique needs. Similarly, Kurniawan and Falah (2023) highlight how Kurikulum Merdeka's design fosters critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration, aiming to equip students with competencies required in the 21st century. Teacher Motivation Motivation is a fundamental determinant of teachers' professional performance. Maduka and Okafor (2014) define motivation as both internal and external stimuli influencing teachers' dedication and effectiveness. Robbins (2010) emphasizes key motivational factors such as recognition, professional growth opportunities, and work-life balance, while Sparrow et al. (2016) underscore the importance of fulfilling teachers' psychological and physiological needs to enhance motivation. Research consistently indicates that motivated teachers demonstrate higher levels of professional performance, positively impacting student outcomes and overall educational quality.

Teacher Performance Teacher performance encompasses the effectiveness with which teachers conduct their instructional roles and responsibilities. Sparrow et al. (2016) describe teacher performance through key indicators such as instructional planning, classroom management, and student assessment practices. Effective teacher performance directly correlates with improved student engagement, learning outcomes, and overall school effectiveness. Thus, supporting teacher performance through targeted professional development, training programs, and adequate motivational strategies is essential to advancing educational quality and achieving institutional goals.

Relationship between Curriculum Implementation, Motivation, and Teacher Performance Previous studies suggest a positive correlation between curriculum implementation and teacher performance. Specifically, when teachers effectively implement innovative curricula, their instructional

effectiveness, classroom management, and student engagement notably improve (Khoirurrijal et al., 2022). Additionally, motivation acts as a mediator in this relationship, enhancing teachers' willingness and capacity to adopt new curricular initiatives. Consequently, curriculum reforms coupled with robust motivational support mechanisms significantly contribute to elevated teacher performance and educational outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research approach aimed at examining the impact of implementing the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) and work motivation on teacher performance in senior high schools located in Kota Sigli Sub-district. The quantitative methodology was selected due to its suitability in analyzing numerical data and testing specific hypotheses about relationships between independent and dependent variables.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

The conceptual framework comprises two independent variables (X), namely the Independent Curriculum (X1) and Work Motivation (X2), and one dependent variable (Y), Teacher Performance. Based on the theoretical framework, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- Implementation of the Independent Curriculum significantly influences teacher performance (H1).
- Work motivation significantly influences teacher performance (H2).
- Combined, the Independent Curriculum and work motivation significantly influence teacher performance (H3).

Population and Sampling

The study's population included teachers from three high schools in Kota Sigli Sub-district implementing the Independent Curriculum. Specifically, SMAN 1 Sigli had 74 teachers, SMAN 3 Sigli had 26 teachers, and SMA Islam Terpadu Al-Uswah had 37 teachers, making a total population of 137 teachers. The sampling method used was probability sampling with simple random sampling, which ensured that each teacher had an equal chance of selection. Employing Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error, the total sample size was calculated to be 102 respondents, proportionally selected from each school.

Data Collection Techniques

For data collection, the study utilized multiple techniques to ensure comprehensive and accurate information. Systematic direct observations were conducted related to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, teachers' motivation, and their performance. Structured questionnaires based on a Likert scale (ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree") were distributed to measure teachers' understanding and implementation of the Independent Curriculum, their motivation levels concerning their responsibilities, and performance in areas such as lesson planning, teaching

execution, assessment, student mentoring, and professional development. Additionally, semi-structured interviews with selected respondents supplemented the questionnaire data, providing qualitative insights into teachers' performance.

Data Analysis

Collected data underwent rigorous analytical procedures. Initially, questionnaires were reviewed for completeness, accuracy, and scored based on predefined Likert scale criteria. Responses were then tabulated to facilitate analysis and interpretation. Validity and reliability were ensured through the Pearson Product Moment correlation for validity assessment and Cronbach's Alpha method for reliability checks. Normality tests (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test) were conducted to confirm appropriate data distribution for parametric testing, and linearity tests validated the linear relationships between independent and dependent variables.

Hypotheses were tested using simultaneous tests (F-tests) to evaluate the collective impact of the Independent Curriculum and motivation on teacher performance, and partial tests (t-tests) were conducted to ascertain each independent variable's individual influence on the dependent variable. Quantitative data analysis was performed using SPSS version 28.0.1, ensuring statistical rigor and validity.

RESEARCH RESULT

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of teachers' perceptions regarding Independent Curriculum implementation, work motivation, and performance.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Independent Curriculum	4.12	0.54
Work Motivation	4.38	0.47
Teacher Performance	4.25	0.49

Hypothesis Testing

Simultaneous Testing (F-Test)

The F-test results indicate a significant combined effect of Independent Curriculum implementation and work motivation on teacher performance, with an F-value of 12.672 and p-value of 0.001.

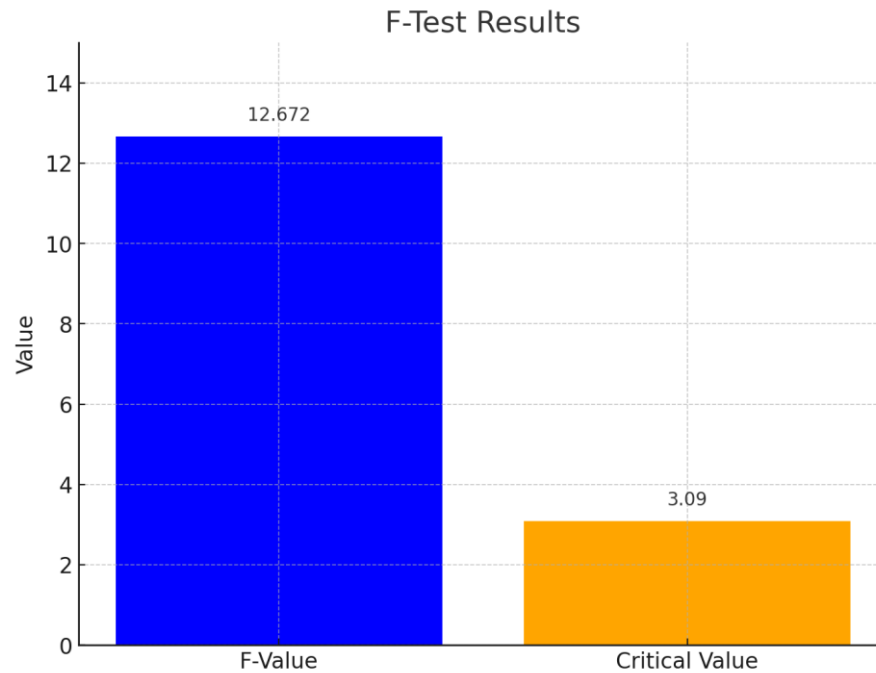


Figure 1. F-Test Results

Partial Testing (t-Test)

Results of the t-tests showed significant positive influences of both the Independent Curriculum and work motivation on teacher performance.

Table 2. Partial Test Results

Variable	t-Value	Significance (p-value)
Independent Curriculum	2.98	0.003
Work Motivation	5.12	0.000

Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis (Table 3) revealed significant positive correlations between all studied variables, indicating that increases in both Independent Curriculum implementation and work motivation correspond with enhanced teacher performance.

Table 3: Correlation Matrix

Variable	Curriculum Implementation	Work Motivation	Teacher Performance
Curriculum Implementation	1		
Work Motivation	0.572**	1	
Teacher Performance	0.423**	0.615**	1

Note: All correlations significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

The analysis of coefficient determination (R^2) indicated that 45% ($R^2 = 0.450$) of the variance in teacher performance was explained by the Independent Curriculum and work motivation, suggesting that other variables may also influence teacher performance.

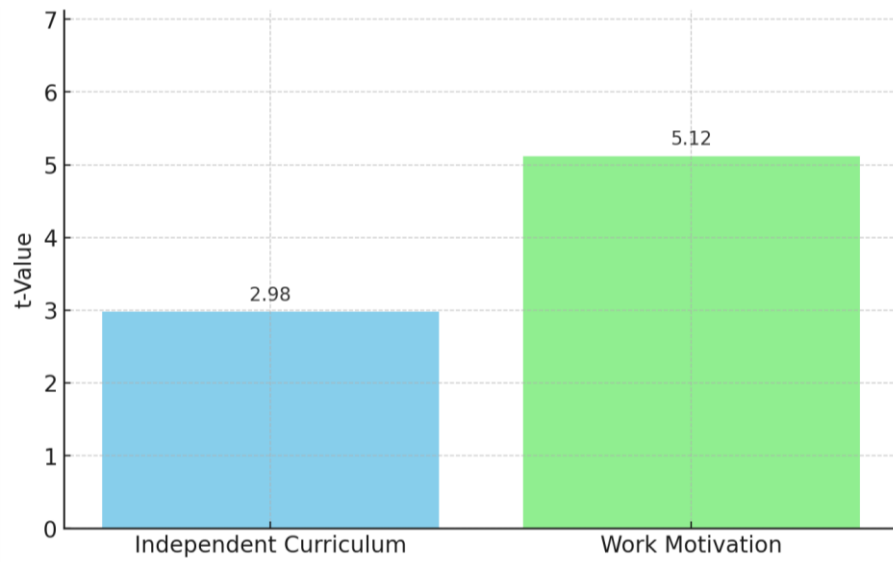


Figure 2. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Interpretation of Results

These findings demonstrate the significant positive impact of both Independent Curriculum implementation and work motivation on teacher performance. Notably, work motivation showed a stronger individual influence compared to curriculum implementation, underscoring the critical role of motivation in driving teacher effectiveness. The moderate R^2 value suggests that while curriculum and motivation significantly impact performance, other unexplored factors may also contribute to teacher performance outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study confirm that both the Independent Curriculum and work motivation positively and significantly affect teacher performance. The significant impact of the Independent Curriculum highlights the effectiveness of curriculum flexibility and innovation in enhancing teachers' abilities to meet educational objectives.

Work motivation showed a notably stronger impact on teacher performance compared to curriculum implementation. This emphasizes that intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors substantially enhance teachers' willingness and capability to perform effectively in their professional roles.

The positive correlation between the Independent Curriculum and teacher performance aligns with contemporary educational theories emphasizing teacher autonomy. When teachers have more freedom and flexibility in teaching

methods and curriculum choices, they tend to be more creative, engaged, and effective in their teaching practices.

The correlation analysis also indicated a strong positive relationship between work motivation and teacher performance. This finding aligns with motivation theories, suggesting that teachers who feel motivated through recognition, professional growth opportunities, and supportive work environments tend to exhibit higher productivity and quality in their teaching.

Despite the significant findings, the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.450$) indicates that approximately 55% of teacher performance is influenced by factors outside this study. This result suggests additional aspects such as school leadership, professional training, infrastructure support, or socio-economic factors could also significantly affect teacher performance.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this research, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum significantly enhances teacher performance. The positive perception of teachers regarding the curriculum's flexibility and innovation clearly supports its adoption and further development in educational institutions.

Moreover, teacher motivation emerges as a critical factor in improving overall performance. The strong influence of motivational factors indicates the importance of fostering a supportive, engaging, and rewarding professional environment for teachers.

The combined effect of the Independent Curriculum and teacher motivation was found to be significantly impactful, suggesting that integrating curriculum innovations with motivational strategies can lead to substantial improvements in educational outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Educational policymakers and school administrators are encouraged to continuously support and refine the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, ensuring that teachers have sufficient resources, training, and flexibility to optimize educational outcomes.

Schools should also develop comprehensive motivational programs, recognizing teachers' efforts, providing professional growth opportunities, and creating positive working conditions to sustainably enhance teacher performance and, consequently, student achievement.

Further research is recommended to identify and evaluate additional variables influencing teacher performance, particularly examining the roles of leadership, infrastructure, and socio-economic factors to develop a holistic approach to educational improvement.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

This study encountered several limitations. First, the research was limited geographically to Kota Sigli Sub-district, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study focused primarily on quantitative measures, potentially overlooking the depth of qualitative insights. Lastly, the moderate coefficient of determination highlights those other influential variables were not included in the current research framework.

Future research should broaden the geographic scope to enhance generalizability and capture diverse educational contexts. Additionally, incorporating qualitative methodologies could provide richer, deeper insights into teacher performance dynamics. Further studies should also explore additional factors such as school management practices, resource availability, teacher training programs, and socio-economic contexts to offer a comprehensive understanding of teacher performance.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author expresses sincere gratitude to all participants, teachers, and administrative staff at SMAN 1 Sigli, SMAN 3 Sigli, and SMA Islam Terpadu Al-Uswah for their cooperation and valuable insights, which greatly contributed to the success of this study. Special appreciation is extended to supervisors, family, and colleagues for their continuous guidance, support, and encouragement throughout this research process.

REFERENCES

- Alimuddin, J. (2023). *Implementasi kurikulum merdeka di sekolah dasar. Jurnal Ilmiah KONTEKSTUAL*, 4(02), 67-75.
- Angwaomaodoko, E. A. (2023). A Comparative Study of Education Systems in Nigeria and Other Developing Countries. Available at SSRN 4853871.
- Benne, K. D. (1975). The humanization of schooling. *Journal of education*, 157(2), 44-60.
- Díez, F., Villa, A., López, A. L., & Iraurgi, I. (2020). Impact of quality management systems in the performance of educational centers: educational policies and management processes. *Heliyon*, 6(4).
- Khoirurrijal, K., Fadriati, F., Sofia, S., Anisa Dwi, M., Sunaryo, G., Abdul, M., Tajeri, T., Ali, F., Hamdani, H., & Suprapno, S. (2022). *Pengembangann Kurikulum Merdeka*.
- Kurniawan, M. A., & Falah, S. (2023). *Pengaruh Penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka Terhadap Kinerja Guru Di Sma Ibnu Aqil Bogor. Jurnal DIALOGIKA: Manajemen Dan Administrasi*, 5(1), 18-26.
- Maduka, C. E., & Okafor, O. (2014). *Effect of motivation on employee productivity: A study of manufacturing companies in Nnewi. International Journal of Managerial Studies and Research*, 2(7), 137-147.
- Robbins, S. P. (2010). *Perilaku Organisasional, Jilid I dan II. Salemba Empat: Jakarta*.
- Sahlberg, P., & Oldroyd, D. (2010). Pedagogy for economic competitiveness and sustainable development. *European Journal of education*, 45(2), 280-299.
- Sparrow, P., Brewster, C., & Chung, C. (2016). *Globalizing human resource management*. Routledge.