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How the Merdeka Curriculum Implementation and Teacher Motivation Shape High School Performance Outcomes in West Aceh, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines the effects of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation and teacher motivation on high school teacher performance in Aceh Barat Regency, Indonesia. The Merdeka Curriculum, a recent educational reform emphasizing flexibility and student-centered learning, aims to enhance teaching quality and student engagement. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 74 high school teachers through structured questionnaires. Statistical analyses, including t-tests and regression, were conducted to assess the impact of curriculum implementation and motivation on teacher performance. Findings reveal that the Merdeka Curriculum significantly improves teacher performance by promoting adaptive teaching practices. Teacher motivation, encompassing intrinsic and extrinsic factors, also positively influences performance, with high motivation levels associated with more extraordinary dedication and effectiveness. The combined analysis indicates that 80.2% of the variation in teacher performance is explained by these factors, suggesting that both curriculum flexibility and motivational support are essential in enhancing educational outcomes. These results offer practical insights for policymakers and educational stakeholders aiming to support teacher engagement and curriculum adaptability.

1. Introduction

Education plays a key role in developing a skilled and competent workforce, which is needed for a nation's progress [1]. Countries with strong education systems often have better human capital, resulting in economic and social advantages [2]. Education, as defined by Indonesia's National Education System, is a deliberate and structured effort to create learning environments and processes that enable students to fully develop their potential [3]. The goal is to nurture morally grounded, disciplined, intelligent, and skilled individuals, enabling them to contribute positively to society and the nation [4].

To improve the quality of education, Indonesia has introduced several curriculum reforms over the years. The latest is the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, or Merdeka Curriculum, which replaces the 2013 Curriculum [5]. This curriculum offers greater flexibility in teaching and learning, focusing on streamlined content to give students more time to deepen their understanding and enhance their skills [6]. Teachers have more freedom to choose teaching materials, allowing them to tailor

lessons to the needs and interests of their students. Research shows this curriculum supports competency-based learning, making education more engaging and meaningful [7]. Additionally, the Merdeka Curriculum allows schools to adapt their programs based on local conditions and the specific needs of their students [8].

The Merdeka Curriculum aims to create a positive and supportive learning environment for teachers, students, and families [9]. However, its success largely depends on teachers, who must feel professionally empowered to foster active and independent learning. For this curriculum to work effectively, teachers must embrace "independent learning" themselves, using their autonomy to create open, engaging classrooms where students thrive.

Teacher competence and motivation are key factors in achieving educational goals. According to Indonesia's Teacher and Lecturer Law, teachers are expected to demonstrate competencies in pedagogy, personality, social skills, and professionalism, which are developed through professional training [10]. These competencies enable teachers to better understand their students, design and implement effective learning strategies, assess student outcomes, and contribute positively to their school communities. Internal and external motivation also play a crucial role in teacher performance. Intrinsic motivation comes from personal satisfaction in teaching, while extrinsic motivation involves external rewards like recognition or career opportunities. Studies show that motivation significantly influences the success of both teachers and students in the learning process [11, 12].

In Aceh Barat Regency, Indonesia, introducing the Merdeka Curriculum has elicited mixed reactions from teachers. While some support its goals, others express concerns about school preparedness, student characteristics, and resource availability. Some teachers feel that their schools lack the infrastructure to meet the curriculum's demands, and others find the new curriculum more challenging than the previous 2013 Curriculum. This variation in teacher perceptions is problematic because it directly affects the successful implementation of the curriculum. Teachers who feel unprepared or unsupported may struggle to adapt their teaching practices to align with the curriculum's goals, potentially leading to inconsistent educational experiences for students. Moreover, disparities in how the curriculum is implemented across schools can hinder its intended impact on student outcomes, exacerbating existing educational inequalities. Understanding the factors that contribute to these varied perceptions, particularly the role of teacher motivation, is essential to ensuring that the curriculum achieves its objectives [13].

Despite the growing body of research on curriculum reforms in Indonesia, there is limited empirical evidence examining how the Merdeka Curriculum impacts teacher performance, especially in contexts where resource constraints and varying levels of teacher readiness exist. Furthermore, the interplay between curriculum implementation and teacher motivation has not been thoroughly explored. Most studies focus on curriculum effectiveness or teacher motivation as separate areas of inquiry, leaving a gap in understanding their combined effects on teacher outcomes. This study addresses this gap by investigating how implementing the Merdeka Curriculum interacts with teacher motivation to influence high school teacher performance in Aceh Barat Regency.

This study investigates the combined effects of the Merdeka Curriculum and teachers' motivation on high school teacher performance in Aceh Barat Regency, Indonesia. Specifically, it examines the influence of the Merdeka Curriculum on teacher performance, the role of work motivation in shaping performance, and how both factors impact outcomes. The findings are expected to contribute to educational theory and provide practical insights for policymakers and educational stakeholders engaged in curriculum development and teacher support, both within Indonesia and in comparable educational contexts.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Approach

This study employs a quantitative approach throughout data collection, analysis, and presentation. Quantitative research aims to interpret phenomena or variables based on numerical measurements from quantitative methods such as surveys, tests, and observations. Data analysis in this approach generally includes statistical techniques to assess relationships and trends among variables [14].

2.2. Population and Sample

The study's population includes 492 Aceh Barat Regency, Indonesia, high school teachers. The sample for this study is a smaller group selected to represent the population. Due to limited resources and time, a sample size of 15% of the total population, or 74 teachers, was chosen. These teachers were selected from three high schools: SMA Negeri 1 Meureubo, SMA Negeri 1 Meulaboh, and SMA Negeri 1 Kaway XVI. These schools were chosen because they represent different areas and

include teachers with various backgrounds, which reflects the overall population.

Although the sample is only a part of the population, it follows accepted research practices to ensure it is representative [15]. This method allows the study to include key characteristics of the population while staying manageable within the available time and resources.

2.3. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection for this study was conducted from 16 to 30 June 2024 using structured questionnaires and interviews. Questionnaires are tools used to gather information by presenting respondents with written questions they answer in writing [16]. This study used a structured questionnaire with predefined response options, allowing respondents to express levels of agreement or disagreement on a Likert scale [17].

The Likert scale in this study is designed to measure positive and negative attitudes toward each statement, with responses assigned numerical values that reflect the degree of agreement or disagreement. A "Strongly Agree" response is rated 5 for positive items and 1 for negative items, while "Agree" is rated 4 for positive items and 2 for negative items. "Neutral" responses are assigned a score of 3 for positive and negative items, indicating neither agreement nor disagreement. "Disagree" responses are rated as 2 for positive items and 4 for negative items, and "Strongly Disagree" is rated as 1 for positive items and 5 for negative items. This scale structure allows for a nuanced assessment of respondents' attitudes by capturing varying levels of agreement or disagreement across both positive and negative statements.

2.4. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this study involved several stages to ensure rigorous testing of the hypotheses and reliable conclusions [18]. The analysis began with data tabulation, where responses were organized into tables that facilitated further statistical evaluation. Each response was coded according to the analysis requirements, creating structured datasets that allowed for streamlined statistical processing and interpretation.

The first step in the analysis was conducting prerequisite tests to confirm the suitability of the data for regression analysis. Two primary tests were performed: the validity test and the linearity test. The validity test was used to assess the accuracy of the research instruments, ensuring that each item measured the intended construct. This test employed Pearson's product-moment correlation formula, shown in Equation 1:

$$r_{xy} = \frac{N\sum xy - (\sum X)(\sum Y)}{\sqrt{(N\sum X^2 - (\sum X)^2)(N\sum Y^2 - (\sum Y)^2)}} \quad (1)$$

where r_{xy} represents the correlation coefficient between variables x and y, $\sum xy$ is the sum of the product of x and y, X denotes the score for each item, Y indicates the total score, and N is the sample size [19]. The instrument's validity is determined by comparing the calculated correlation coefficient to the critical correlation coefficient at a significance level of 5%. The instrument is considered valid if the calculated coefficient exceeds the critical value.

Following the validity test, a linearity test was performed to verify that the relationships between independent and dependent variables followed a linear pattern, a necessary assumption for regression analysis. The linearity of the data in this study was assessed using Equation 2:

$$F_{reg} = \frac{\mathrm{RK}_{reg}}{\mathrm{RK}_{res}} \quad (2)$$

where F_{reg} is the F-value for the regression line, RK_{reg} is the mean square of the regression, and RK_{res} is the mean square of the residuals [20].

Upon completion of prerequisite tests, hypothesis testing was conducted through regression analyses, beginning with simple linear regression to examine the individual effects of each independent variable, namely, the Merdeka Curriculum implementation and teacher motivation on teacher performance. The simple linear regression models are shown in Equation 3 [21]:

$$Y = a + bX_1 \ \ and \ \ Y = a + bX_2 \quad (3)$$

where Y represents teacher performance, X_1 represents the Merdeka Curriculum, and X_2 represents teacher motivation.

For a more comprehensive analysis, multiple linear regression was used to assess the combined effects of both variables on teacher performance. The regression formula applied shown in Equation 4:

$$\hat{Y} = A_0 + a_1X_1 + a_2X_2 \quad (4)$$

Where $\hat{Y}$ represents the predicted teacher performance, A_0 is the constant, and a_1 and a_2 represent the coefficients for the Merdeka Curriculum and teacher motivation variables, respectively. The results of these analyses informed conclusions regarding the influence of each variable and their combined effect on teacher performance.

Table 1. Summary of research instrument indicators and items.

Variable	Subvariable/Indicator	Number of Items
Teacher Work Motivation	Intrinsic Motivation (Responsibility, Goal Orientation, Measurable Goals, Competition, Achievement)	9
	Extrinsic Motivation (Basic Needs, Recognition)	6
Teacher Performance	Lesson Planning, Lesson Execution, Assessment, Student Guidance, Additional Duties	13
Merdeka Curriculum Implementation	Lesson Planning, Lesson Execution, Assessment, Student Guidance, Additional Duties	15

The t-test is applied to determine the influence of independent variables on the dependent variable. The formula for the t-test is shown in Equation 5:

$$t_{calculated} = \frac{b_i}{S_{b_i}} \quad (5)$$

where $t_{calculated}$ is the calculated t-value, b_i is the regression coefficient, and S_{b_i} is the standard error of the coefficient. The calculated t-value is then compared with the critical t-value at a significance level of 0.05%. The criteria for hypothesis acceptance or rejection are as follows: if the calculated significance value of $t_{calculated}$ is less than the table value, then the null hypothesis H_0 is accepted; conversely, if $t_{calculated}$ is greater than the table value, H_0 is rejected.

The F-test evaluates the significance of independent variables collectively on the dependent variable, using the Equation 6:

$$F = \frac{k \cdot R^2}{(1 - R^2)/(n - k - 1)} \quad (6)$$

where F is the regression line's F-value, R is the correlation coefficient between the criterion and predictors, k is the number of independent variables, and n is the sample size.

2.5. Research Instrument

The research instrument for this study consists of structured questionnaires aimed at assessing three primary variables: teacher work motivation, teacher performance, and the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. These questionnaires are designed to gather quantitative data systematically, employing a Likert scale format where respondents express levels of agreement. This structure captures varying degrees of attitudes and perceptions, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of each variable.

Teacher work motivation is evaluated through two dimensions: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation assesses personal fulfillment, with indicators such as responsibility, goal orientation, measurable objectives, competitive spirit, and achievement orientation. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, examines motivation arising from external factors, such as the fulfillment of essential needs and the expectation of recognition—whether through praise, incentives, or acknowledgment from others. These intrinsic and extrinsic subvariables comprise 15 items, with 9 allocated to intrinsic and 6 to extrinsic motivation.

The teacher performance instrument focuses on capturing key aspects of teaching responsibilities, which include lesson planning, lesson execution, assessment of student outcomes, student guidance, and the execution of additional duties. Specific questionnaire items represent each indicator to provide a nuanced view of the performance dimension, resulting in a total of 13 items that comprehensively address teacher performance.

The instrument for measuring Merdeka Curriculum implementation evaluates how teachers integrate and apply the curriculum's principles in their daily instructional practices. This section covers indicators such as lesson planning, lesson implementation, assessment, student guidance, and additional responsibilities. A total of 15 items are used, allowing for a robust assessment of curriculum implementation practices across various teaching functions.

Table 1 summarizes the research instrument, detailing each variable's indicators and item distribution, ensuring a concise overview of the questionnaire structure. This design facilitates an efficient understanding of the variables measured and supports the study's quantitative analysis of teacher motivation, performance, and curriculum implementation.

3. Results and Discussion

This study examines the impact of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation and work motivation on high school teacher performance in Aceh Barat Regency. The variables analyzed include Merdeka Curriculum implementation (X_1), work motivation (X_2), and teacher performance (Y). Data were collected through questionnaires distributed to 74 respondents. Before the primary data collection, a pilot test was conducted with 30 randomly selected teachers to ensure the questionnaire's validity and reliability.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for Merdeka curriculum implementation, work motivation, and teacher performance.

Variable	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Merdeka Curriculum	74	18	57	75	66.66	5.888	34.665
Work Motivation	74	18	57	75	67.12	6.228	38.793
Teacher Performance	74	19	51	70	61.68	5.927	35.126

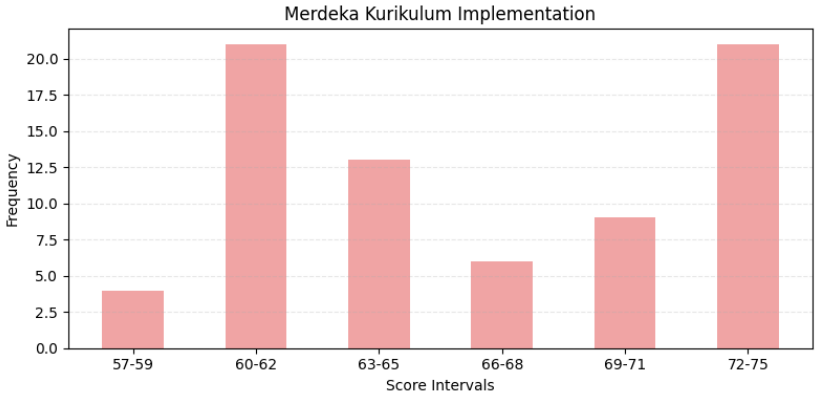

Figure 1. Distribution of Merdeka Curriculum implementation scores.

3.1. Descriptive Analysis of Variables

Table 2 presents an overview of the descriptive statistics for each variable, detailing the range, minimum, maximum, mean, standard deviation, and variance. These values help outline teacher responses' central tendency and variability across the Merdeka Curriculum implementation, work motivation, and teacher performance variables. This statistical summary provides a foundation for understanding the sample's distribution and general perception patterns.

The mean score for the Merdeka Curriculum implementation is 66.66, suggesting that most respondents have a favorable perception of the curriculum. The scores range from 57 to 75, with a standard deviation 5.89, indicating moderate variability among responses. This level of dispersion shows that, while most teachers view the curriculum positively, some variations in their assessments reflect diverse experiences and perspectives regarding its implementation.

For work motivation, the average score is 67.12, ranging from 57 to 75 and a standard deviation of 6.23. This relatively high mean indicates that teachers generally feel intrinsically and extrinsically motivated. The dispersion of scores suggests that, while motivation is generally high, differences exist among teachers, potentially influenced by factors such as school environment, professional goals, and available resources.

The mean score for teacher performance is slightly lower, at 61.68, with scores ranging from 51 to 70 and a standard deviation of 5.93. This moderate self-assessment suggests that while some teachers rate their performance relatively high, others perceive areas for improvement. The variability in performance scores reflects the range of self-perceptions, likely influenced by differences in experience, access to support, and school infrastructure.

The notable gap between high motivation scores (67.12) and lower performance scores (61.68) warrants further analysis. High motivation does not automatically translate into higher performance, suggesting potential barriers that prevent motivated teachers from achieving their full potential. These barriers could include inadequate access to teaching resources, limited professional development opportunities, or systemic challenges such as large class sizes and curriculum demands. Additionally, the discrepancy might reflect differing definitions of "performance," with some teachers feeling motivated but lacking clear guidance or support to translate their motivation into effective practices.

3.2. Frequency Distributions of Variables

To gain further insights into response patterns, Figures 1, 2, and 3 display the frequency distributions for the Merdeka Curriculum implementation, work motivation, and teacher performance variables, respectively. These distributions allow for a visual representation of where teacher responses are concentrated within each variable's scoring intervals, clarifying the trends and common responses within the data.

In Figure 1, the frequency distribution of Merdeka Curriculum implementation scores shows that the largest proportion of responses falls within the 60-62 and 72-75 intervals, each containing 28.4% of respondents. This

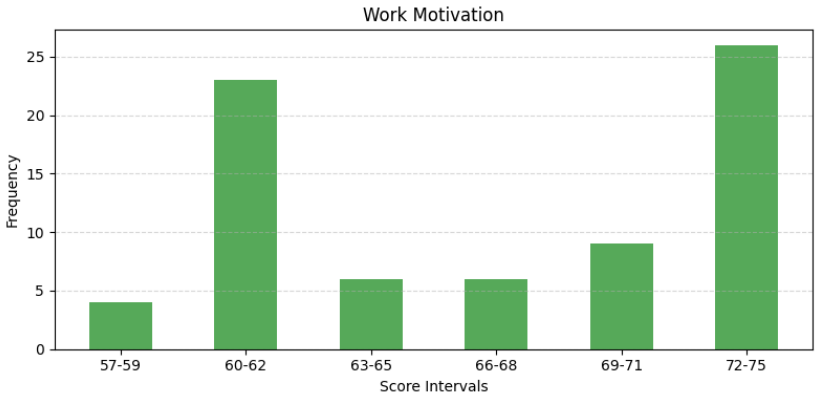

Figure 2. Distribution of work motivation scores.

clustering suggests a generally positive view of the curriculum, particularly in the higher ranges. However, two peaks, one in the middle range and one at the high end, provide further insight into teachers' perceptions of the curriculum.

The peak in the middle range (60-62) may indicate a group of teachers who recognize the potential benefits of the Merdeka Curriculum but encounter challenges in its practical application, such as a lack of resources, training, or support. In contrast, the high-end peak (72-75) likely represents teachers who see the curriculum as beneficial and feel confident and capable of implementing it effectively. This split could reflect differences in school environments, access to professional development, or individual teaching experiences.

The spread of responses across these intervals suggests that while many teachers appreciate the goals and flexibility of the Merdeka Curriculum, the varying levels of enthusiasm and perceived ease of implementation highlight areas for improvement. For instance, targeted support and training could be directed toward teachers in the middle range to address their specific concerns and challenges. Meanwhile, the high-end group could serve as a resource or model for best practices in curriculum implementation.

Figure 2 illustrates the frequency distribution of work motivation scores, with the highest frequency of responses in the 72-75 interval, comprising 35.1% of respondents. This strong concentration in the upper range reflects a high level of motivation among a significant portion of teachers. It suggests that most respondents feel motivated and fulfilled in their roles, which could positively influence their teaching effectiveness and overall job satisfaction.

The high frequency in this interval indicates that many teachers experience support related to intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors. Intrinsic factors may include a sense of accomplishment, professional growth, and a strong sense of responsibility, while extrinsic factors could involve recognition, rewards, and supportive work environments. The combination of these factors likely contributes to the overall positive trend in motivation scores.

However, the fairly distributed responses across the lower intervals reveal that not all teachers share this high level of motivation. Some may face challenges that lower their motivation, such as limited career advancement opportunities, insufficient resources, or lack of recognition. These factors might affect their enthusiasm and performance, emphasizing the need for interventions to address such barriers.

Figure 3 presents the distribution of teacher performance scores. The most common responses were in the 54-56 interval, representing 31.1% of participants, and a secondary peak was in the 67-70 interval, with 29.7% of responses. This distribution reflects a broader range of teacher performance ratings compared to the other variables, suggesting notable variability in how teachers perceive their performance.

The concentration in the mid-range (54-56) indicates that many teachers may feel their performance is adequate but not exceptional. This could be linked to limited access to teaching resources, inconsistent professional development, or insufficient administrative support. Addressing these factors might help these teachers improve their performance and move toward higher levels of effectiveness.

The secondary peak in the higher range (67-70) suggests that a substantial proportion of teachers view their performance as strong. These teachers may benefit from favorable working conditions, access to ongoing training, or recognition for their efforts, which can contribute to a higher sense of competence and achievement.

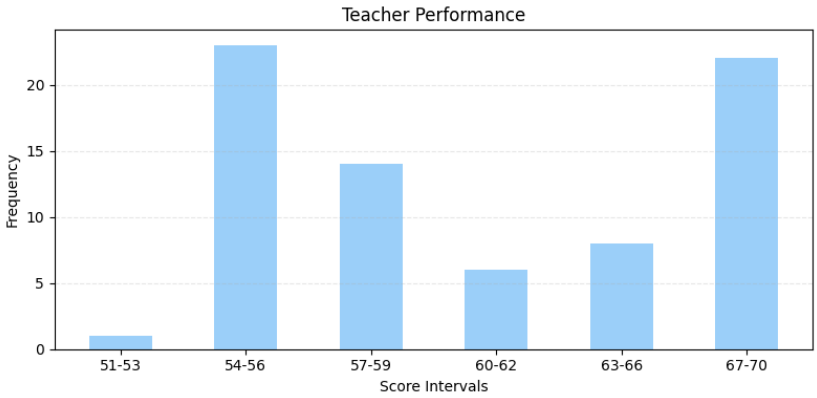

Figure 3. Distribution of teacher performance scores.

Table 3. Normality test results (Kolmogorov-Smirnov).

Test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Normality (Kolmogorov-Smirnov)	74	0	2.636813	0.25

Table 4. Linearity test results for Merdeka Curriculum and work motivation with teacher performance.

Variable Pair	Deviation from Linearity Sig.	Conclusion
Merdeka Curriculum & Teacher Performance	0.536	Linear Relationship
Work Motivation & Teacher Performance	0.119	Linear Relationship

The broader responses highlight differences in teachers' working environments, experiences, and available support systems. Schools with a significant proportion of mid-range scores might consider targeted interventions, such as mentoring programs, improved resource allocation, or performance feedback mechanisms, to help teachers enhance their practices. By addressing the variability in performance scores, schools and policymakers can work toward a more consistent standard of high-quality teaching across all respondents.

3.3. Assumption Testing

To ensure the validity of the regression analysis, a series of assumption tests were conducted, including normality and linearity tests. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to assess the normality of the data distribution, which is a critical assumption for parametric analysis. As shown in Table 3, the significance value of 0.25 exceeds the 0.05 threshold, indicating that the residuals follow a normal distribution. This result validates parametric statistical methods and ensures that conclusions drawn from the regression analysis are based on reliable data distributions. Normality is particularly important as it minimizes the risk of biased or invalid estimates in the regression model.

The linearity test examined the relationship between the independent variables (Merdeka Curriculum implementation and work motivation) and the dependent variable (teacher performance). Table 4 shows that the significance values for "Deviation from Linearity" were 0.536 for the Merdeka Curriculum and 0.119 for work motivation, greater than 0.05. These results confirm that the relationships between the variables are linear, satisfying another critical assumption for regression analysis.

The linear relationships suggest that changes in the independent variables (curriculum implementation and work motivation) are proportionally related to changes in teacher performance. This finding is essential for interpreting regression coefficients, as it ensures that the model accurately represents the strength and direction of these relationships. A lack of linearity would have introduced errors in prediction and interpretation, making the results less reliable.

These assumption tests strongly support the validity of the regression analysis. The confirmed normality of residuals and linear relationships between variables indicate that the dataset is well-suited for linear regression modeling. This strengthens the credibility of subsequent findings and conclusions, as the analysis is based on data that adheres to the fundamental statistical assumptions.

3.4. Hypothesis Testing

The individual impact of the Merdeka Curriculum and work motivation on teacher performance was analyzed using t-tests at a 95% confidence level ($\alpha = 0.05$), as presented in Table 5. The analysis utilized a critical t-value threshold of 1.66629. The t-test for the Merdeka

Table 5. T-Test results for Merdeka Curriculum and work motivation on teacher performance.

Independent Variable	t-value	Sig.	Decision	Conclusion
Merdeka Curriculum	12.524	0	Reject H_0	Significant positive effect
Work Motivation	14.078	0	Reject H_0	Significant positive effect

Table 6. F-Test results for combined effects of merdeka curriculum and work motivation on teacher performance

Model	F-value	Sig.	Decision
Curriculum & Motivation	143.85	0	Significant Combined Effect

Table 7. Coefficient of determination for Merdeka Curriculum and work motivation.

Model	r	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of Estimate
Curriculum & Motivation	0.896	0.802	0.796	2.674

Curriculum produced a calculated t-value of 12.524 with a significance level of 0.000, well below the threshold of 0.05. This result leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0), indicating that the Merdeka Curriculum implementation has a statistically significant and positive effect on teacher performance.

The t-test for work motivation yielded a calculated t-value of 14.078, with a significance level of 0.000. This result rejects the null hypothesis, affirming that work motivation significantly and positively influences teacher performance.

The F-test assessed the joint impact of Merdeka Curriculum implementation and work motivation on teacher performance, as shown in Table 6. The resulting F-value of 143.850, with a significance level of 0.000, far exceeds the critical threshold of 3.12. This finding indicates a significant combined effect of both variables on teacher performance, demonstrating that curriculum implementation and motivation jointly enhance teacher outcomes.

The coefficient of determination (R^2) was calculated to measure the extent to which the independent variables—Merdeka Curriculum implementation and work motivation—explain the variance in teacher performance. As presented in Table 7, the R^2 value is 0.802, indicating that these factors account for 80.2% of the variability in teacher performance. In contrast, the remaining 19.8% is attributed to other variables not included in this study.

This high R^2 value underscores the significant combined impact of Merdeka Curriculum implementation and work motivation on teacher performance. It suggests these two factors are central in shaping teachers' effectiveness and perceived performance levels. The model's strong explanatory power highlights these variables' importance as critical levers for improving educational outcomes.

This finding has multifaceted implications. First, it confirms the value of implementing comprehensive curricular frameworks like the Merdeka Curriculum, which provides teachers with the tools and structure necessary to succeed. Second, the strong influence of work motivation emphasizes the need for policies and initiatives that sustain and enhance intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, such as professional development, recognition programs, and resource allocation.

While the 19.8% unexplained variance suggests that other factors—such as school leadership, student behavior, or external challenges—may also influence teacher performance, the dominance of the two variables studied here highlights their priority for intervention. Policymakers and administrators should focus on strengthening curriculum implementation and motivation strategies to maximize their impact. At the same time, future research could explore additional variables to further improve the explanatory power of similar models.

3.5. Discussion

3.5.1. Impact of Merdeka Curriculum Implementation on Teacher Performance

The Merdeka Curriculum is designed to give teachers and students greater flexibility and autonomy in teaching and learning. Unlike traditional methods, this curriculum allows teachers to adjust their lessons to meet the needs and interests of their students. This flexibility helps teachers create more engaging and meaningful learning experiences [22].

The study shows that the Merdeka Curriculum significantly improves teacher performance. Teachers can better plan lessons, implement strategies, and assess student outcomes effectively. For instance, by focusing on essential content and key skills, teachers can dedicate more time to ensuring students fully understand the material rather than rushing through topics. This curriculum also emphasizes the development of student's character and critical thinking, which motivates teachers to explore creative teaching methods.

However, successful implementation depends on how well teachers adapt to the curriculum's flexibility. Some teachers may find moving away from rigid structures challenging or unsupported in making these changes. Providing adequate training and resources is essential to helping teachers fully utilize the curriculum's potential [23, 24]. By addressing these challenges, the Merdeka Curriculum can empower teachers to perform at their best and provide students with high-quality education.

3.5.2. Influence of Motivation on Teacher Performance

Teacher motivation is key in determining how effectively teachers carry out their responsibilities. Motivation can come from internal (intrinsic) or external (extrinsic) factors [25]. Intrinsic motivation includes a sense of personal fulfillment, responsibility, and the desire to achieve professional goals. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, comes from factors like recognition, rewards, or supportive work environments.

The study highlights that motivated teachers tend to perform better. Intrinsic motivation drives teachers to prepare lessons thoroughly, adapt their teaching strategies to students' needs, and take pride in their work. For example, teachers who find personal satisfaction in their role are likelier to go beyond the basics to ensure their students succeed. Extrinsic motivation, such as acknowledgment from school leaders or incentives for good performance, reinforces this behavior by creating a supportive and encouraging environment.

However, a lack of motivation can negatively impact teacher performance. Factors such as heavy workloads, limited professional growth opportunities, or insufficient resources can lower motivation, even among dedicated teachers. Schools must address these barriers by providing consistent support, offering career development opportunities, and recognizing teachers' efforts. Teachers are more engaged, productive, and likely to achieve better classroom results with high motivation levels.

3.5.3. Combined Impact of Merdeka Curriculum and Motivation on Teacher Performance

The combined effect of the Merdeka Curriculum and teacher motivation significantly influences teacher performance. The curriculum provides a structured yet flexible framework, enabling teachers to focus on meaningful learning outcomes. At the same time, motivation acts as a driving force, encouraging teachers to use the curriculum effectively [26].

The study reveals that teachers are likelier to perform at their best when both factors align. The curriculum's emphasis on creativity and adaptability aligns well with motivated teachers eager to innovate and improve their teaching methods. For example, an intrinsically motivated teacher might use the freedom offered by the curriculum to design interactive lessons that resonate with students. Similarly, extrinsically motivated teachers may feel encouraged to excel when their efforts are acknowledged or rewarded, reinforcing their commitment to using the curriculum effectively.

The synergy between the two factors creates a positive feedback loop. Motivated teachers implement the curriculum more effectively, which leads to better student outcomes. These successes, in turn, further motivate teachers to refine their teaching practices. Conversely, if either factor is lacking, performance may suffer. For instance, a poorly implemented curriculum can frustrate motivated teachers, while lacking motivation may prevent a well-designed curriculum from being properly executed. This highlights the importance of balancing both factors. Policymakers and administrators should ensure the curriculum is user-friendly and adapequa while fostering a supportive environment that motivates teachers. Together, these efforts can maximize the curriculum's benefits and significantly improve teacher performance.

4. Conclusions

This study highlights the significant impact of the Merdeka Curriculum and teacher motivation on high school teacher performance in Aceh Barat Regency, Indonesia. The Merdeka Curriculum's flexibility empowers teachers to adapt lessons to student needs, fostering effective teaching practices and improved outcomes. Meanwhile, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are essential in encouraging dedication and innovation among teachers. These factors create a strong foundation for achieving high performance and enhancing educational quality. However, the study's reliance on self-reported data and its regional focus limit the generalizability of the findings.

Future research should address these limitations by including a broader and more diverse sample from other regions in Indonesia to explore context-specific differences. Additionally, longitudinal studies are needed to assess the sustained impact of curriculum implementation and motivation on teacher performance and student achievement over time. Further exploration of other influencing factors would provide a more holistic understanding of what drives teacher success and helps shape effective education systems.

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Conflicts of Interest: All the authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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