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IMPACT OF INDEPENDENT LEARNING POLICY AND COMPENSATION ON TEACHER PERFORMANCE THROUGH JOB SATISFACTION AS A MEDIATING VARIABLE

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Abstract

This study explores the influence of the Independent Learning Policy and compensation on teacher performance, with job satisfaction as a mediating variable. Using a quantitative research design and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4, data were collected from 107 teachers across three junior high schools in Situbondo Regency. The results indicate that the Independent Learning Policy significantly impacts teacher performance both directly and indirectly through job satisfaction, with a path coefficient of 0.347 (p = 0.005). Compensation also plays a key role, directly influencing job satisfaction (path coefficient = 0.270, p < 0.001) and indirectly affecting teacher performance through job satisfaction (path coefficient = 0.130, p = 0.008). The adjusted R² values reveal that 89.8% of the variance in job satisfaction and 86.4% of the variance in teacher performance are explained by the model. These findings highlight the interconnected roles of educational policies, compensation, and job satisfaction in enhancing teacher performance, providing actionable insights for policymakers and school administrators to foster supportive environments that promote educational excellence.

Keywords: Independent Learning Policy, Compensation, Job Satisfaction, Teacher Performance, Educational Policy.

INTRODUCTION

Situbondo Regency, located on the east coast of Java Island, is known as an area that has a high commitment to education. With various educational institutions spread across its region, Situbondo continues to strive to improve the quality of education through programs that support the development of student potential (Turmudi, 2022). Various schools in Situbondo have shown brilliant achievements, both in the academic and non-academic fields, which not only bring pride to the region, but also have a positive impact on human resource development (Rakhman et al., 2023). In this context, a number of junior high schools (SMP) in Situbondo, such as SMPN 2 Sumbermalang, SMPN 1 Kalianget, and SMP Negeri 3 Situbondo, are real examples of institutions that have succeeded in producing outstanding students.

SMPN 2 Sumbermalang is one of the leading junior high schools in Situbondo Regency. Known for its commitment to quality education, this school has managed to score various academic and non-academic achievements. The students of SMPN 2 Sumbermalang have consistently shown their excellence in various competitions, ranging from district-level science olympiads to cultural arts competitions. This achievement is inseparable from the support of adequate facilities and the dedication of teachers who always provide optimal guidance to students. With a high spirit of competition, the students of this school continue to strive to bring the good name of the school to a higher level(Koloszár et al., 2024).

SMPN 1 Kalianget is also no less competitive in producing outstanding students. Located in the strategic area of Situbondo Regency, this school is known as an educational center that emphasizes innovation and development of student potential. Various achievements achieved by SMPN 1 Kalianget students include champions in the field of sports, such as futsal and badminton, to academic achievements in English debate competitions. This success shows that SMPN 1 Kalianget not only focuses on academic achievement, but also supports the development of students' talents in other fields. With a competitive learning atmosphere, this school continues to encourage students to excel and become a superior generation(Triwiyanto et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, SMP Negeri 3 Situbondo has proven itself as one of the schools that consistently produces outstanding students in various fields. With a diverse range of extracurricular programs, the school provides opportunities for students to develop their potential, whether in art, sports, or technology. One of the proud achievements of SMP Negeri 3 Situbondo is the success of students in winning the provincial level technology innovation competition, showing that their students are able to compete in the digital era. Not only that, various awards won in art and culture competitions also strengthen the school's reputation as an educational institution that supports the holistic development of students. With a conducive environment, this school continues to be the birthplace of outstanding students who are able to compete at the national and international levels (Cheng et al., 2024).

Student achievements, which have long been a source of pride for various schools, are now facing significant challenges due to a noticeable decline in performance at multiple educational levels. This phenomenon is evident from the reduction in student awards across local, regional, and national competitions. While the COVID-19 pandemic played a significant role by forcing a shift to online learning methods, which could not entirely replicate the effectiveness of face-to-face education, other underlying issues have also contributed. Limited access to technological devices and internet networks in certain areas exacerbated the decline in learning quality, resulting in students being less prepared to understand academic material or excel in competitions.

Beyond technological barriers, this phenomenon may also be attributed to a decline in teacher performance, which plays a critical role in fostering student motivation and achievement. Reduced teacher engagement and adaptation during the transition to online learning may have impacted the effectiveness of lesson delivery and feedback mechanisms. Furthermore, the lack of robust teacher-student interaction in both academic and extracurricular contexts likely diminished opportunities to nurture students' talents and potential. This indicates that improving teacher performancethrough enhanced professional development, motivational frameworks, and adaptive teaching strategies could serve as a pivotal solution to reverse the trend of declining

student achievements. Therefore, addressing this issue requires coordinated efforts between educational institutions, governments, and parents to support both teachers and students in achieving optimal learning outcomes.

Teacher performance is the result achieved by teachers in carrying out assigned tasks based on skills, experience, and sincerity as well as effective use of time (Surtini &Muhtar, 2024). This performance includes the preparation, implementation, and evaluation of a quality learning process in the classroom(Affandi et al., 2021). Factors that affect teacher performance include the principal's leadership, teacher competence, and teachers' work motivation in carrying out their duties (Wahyudi et al., 2024). Teacher performance is also influenced by a supportive work environment and teacher discipline in carrying out their duties (Nurhidayah et al., 2024). In the context of the Freedom of Learning policy, the role of teacher performance has become increasingly crucial in encouraging student achievement(Irwan et al., 2024).

Job satisfaction is an important factor that affects employee performance in an organization (Rodrigo et al., 2022). Employees who are satisfied with their jobs tend to have higher motivation, stronger commitment to the company, and better work performance (Idris et al., 2020). This satisfaction can come from various factors, such as a comfortable work environment, appropriate rewards, to the ease of using technology that supports their work. When job satisfaction increases, employees are more likely to contribute to the maximum, show higher creativity, and work efficiently, which ultimately has a positive impact on productivity and the achievement of company targets (Farsole, 2023). In other words, employee satisfaction levels have a direct correlation with their improved performance in the workplace (Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020).

The Independent Learning Policy is an initiative from the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia which aims to provide greater freedom and flexibility to teachers, students, and schools in managing the learning process (Indrawati, 2024). This policy is designed to improve the quality of education by allowing educators to innovate and be creative without being limited by rigid rules(Lin & Chen, 2024). With this policy, it is hoped that students can be more active in learning and develop their potential to the maximum (Derakhshan & Yin, n.d.). In addition, Merdeka Belajar also encourages the disclosure of school information and increases public satisfaction with school performance (Masri et al., 2024).

Compensation is a form of appreciation or recognition given as a positive response to certain performance or achievements, which aims to improve individual motivation and performance (Saifuddin et al., 2023). Compensation has the ability to increase the likelihood of the occurrence of the desired behavior by providing a pleasant or desirable stimulus after the behavior has occurred (Cabeza et al., 2021). Compensation usually functions as a reinforcer, which is something that when given after a certain behavior will increase the probability of that behavior occurring in the future (Sinclair et al., 2023). Compensation is an important factor in stimulating organizational performance (Murrell et al., 2021). Compensation can include forms of recognition, appreciation, or other incentives given to employees as a consequence of their participation and contribution to the organization. Compensation can be in the form of financial enhancement, the provision of formal compensation, or even promotions, which can be a significant performance factor (Waghe et al., 2023).

Various studies have been conducted to explore the influence of teacher performance. Teacher performance is an important factor that affects student achievement. Research states that

teacher performance has a significant influence on student achievement (Sukmaswati et al., 2020). However, other studies found that there was no significant influence of lecturer performance on student achievement (Herdayati et al., 2020). This shows that the context of education and school level may affect the results of the study, so further research is needed in the context of elementary schools. Research shows that teacher performance has a direct influence on the implementation of education policies, including Freedom of Learning (Nurabadi et al., 2021). However, not all studies found consistent results, suggesting the need for further research to understand the factors influencing the implementation of education policies. The implementation of the Freedom of Learning policy is expected to have a positive impact on student achievement. Research states that effective education policies have a positive influence on student achievement in elementary school (Sukmaswati et al., 2020). However, other findings state that there is no significant influence of education policies on student achievement in certain contexts (Herdayati et al., 2020).

Other research conducted also revealed the same thing, namely job satisfaction is closely related to the compensation they receive (Lubis et al., 2021);(Puspitawati & Atmaja, 2020);(Prawira, 2020);(E. Damayanti & Ismiyati, 2020);(Hermingsih & Purwanti, 2020);(Pharisee & Pane, 2020);(Azhar et al., 2020).Other researchers also stated that employee performance is proven to be greatly influenced by compensation (Suhardi, 2019);(Sutrisno et al., 2022);(Shyreen A et al., 2022);(Widodo & Yandi, 2022);(Sutoro et al., 2020);(Seran et al., 2023);(Yulandri & Onsardi, 2020);(Hidayat, 2021);(Astuti & Suhendri, 2019);(Dwianto et al., 2019);(Arifin et al., 2019);(Sugiarti, 2020);(Sinaga & Hidayat, 2020);(Alwi & Sugiono, 2019).The final results were also found that performance was also influenced by job satisfaction (Sanosra et al., 2020);(Islam et al., 2022)(Ariani, 2023);(Widayati et al., 2020);(Nurrohmat & Lestari, 2021);(Bodroastuti & Tirtono, 2019).

The phenomenon of declining student achievements, coupled with the existing gaps in understanding the relationship between teacher performance, job satisfaction, compensation, and educational policies such as the Independent Learning Policy, highlights a critical area for intervention. While previous studies have established the significant influence of teacher performance on student outcomes, inconsistencies remain, particularly concerning the mediating roles of job satisfaction and compensation. This underscores the need for further research to explore these dynamics within diverse educational contexts, especially in regions like Situbondo Regency, which is committed to educational excellence. Addressing these gaps requires collaborative efforts from policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to ensure that policies are effectively implemented, teacher performance is enhanced, and the overall quality of education is improved, thereby fostering an environment conducive to student success and holistic development.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a quantitative research design using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4 app, this method to analyze the relationships between the independent learning policy, teacher performance, and student achievement. PLS-SEM was chosen due to its suitability for exploring complex models with multiple variables and its ability to handle small to medium sample sizes effectively. This

method also supports simultaneous testing of direct and indirect effects, making it particularly valuable for examining teacher performance as a mediating variable.

The study employs a census sampling method, wherein the entire population of teachers from the three selected schools in Situbondo Regency was included as participants. This approach was chosen to ensure that all perspectives and variations in teacher performance are comprehensively captured, allowing for a more accurate analysis of how the Independent Learning Policy influences teacher performance and subsequently impacts student achievement. The decision to involve all teachers eliminates the risk of sampling bias, thereby enhancing the validity and generalizability of the findings. The total population and sample consist of 107 teachers distributed across the three schools: 36 teachers from SMP Negeri 1 Situbondo, 62 teachers from SMPN 1 Kalianget, and 9 teachers from SMPN 2 Sumbermalang. These schools were selected purposively based on their reputation for academic excellence and their active engagement with the Independent Learning Policy. The inclusion of all teachers ensures that the study represents the full spectrum of educational practices and resource conditions, providing a balanced understanding of the factors influencing teacher performance and their role in the successful implementation of educational policies.

By focusing on the entire population, the study ensures a holistic and detailed evaluation of how teacher performance serves as a mediating factor between the Independent Learning Policy and broader educational outcomes. Unlike sampling methods that may overlook certain demographic or institutional characteristics, the census approach allows for the inclusion of diverse experiences and practices from all teachers across the selected schools. This inclusivity ensures that the findings reflect the full range of variations in teacher performance, enabling a more nuanced understanding of how policies are implemented and their impact on education.

The study's comprehensive scope helps identify key trends in teacher behavior, instructional strategies, and policy adoption that might otherwise go unnoticed in a smaller sample. It also highlights specific challenges teachers face, such as varying levels of access to resources, differences in institutional support, or unique cultural and geographic factors that influence their effectiveness. By capturing these elements, the study provides valuable data on the real-world application of the Independent Learning Policy and its capacity to drive meaningful changes in the educational environment.

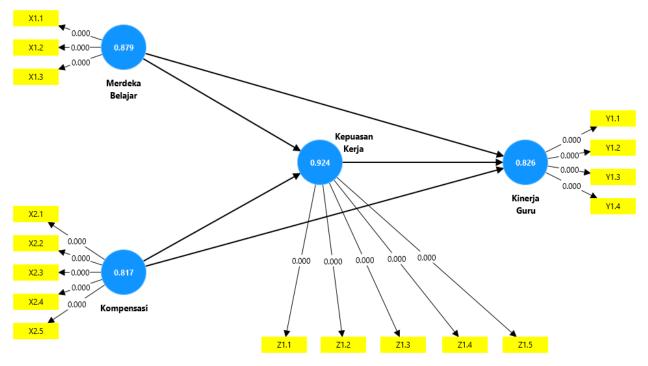


Figure 1. Outer Model Result

The outer model results presented in Figure 1 demonstrate strong reliability and validity across all constructs included in the study. The Cronbach's Alpha values indicate high internal consistency for each latent variable, with "Merdeka Belajar" scoring 0.879, "Compensation" at 0.817, "Job Satisfaction" at 0.924, and "Teacher Performance" at 0.826, all surpassing the commonly accepted threshold of 0.7. These values signify that the indicators for each construct accurately measure their respective variables. Additionally, the factor loadings for all indicators exhibit significant contributions (p < 0.001), reinforcing the robustness of the measurement model. For instance, the indicators for "Merdeka Belajar" (X1.1, X1.2, X1.3) and "Compensation" (X2.1 through X2.5) strongly represent their constructs, as do the indicators for "Job Satisfaction" (Z1.1 through Z1.5) and "Teacher Performance" (Y1.1 through Y1.4). These results provide a solid foundation for proceeding to the structural model analysis, ensuring the constructs are well-defined and the relationships between them can be reliably interpreted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of this study provide a comprehensive exploration of the relationships between the Independent Learning Policy ("Merdeka Belajar"), compensation, job satisfaction, and teacher performance. Using a robust analytical framework supported by Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) and SmartPLS 4, the study evaluates both the measurement (outer) model and the structural (inner) model to examine the direct and indirect effects of these variables. The analysis focuses on understanding how compensation and job satisfaction mediate the influence of the Independent Learning Policy on teacher performance, offering valuable insights for improving education quality.

A key aspect of this study is the inclusion of job satisfaction as a critical mediating variable. Teacher job satisfaction is widely regarded as a cornerstone of educational effectiveness, influencing motivation, engagement, and overall performance. By examining how 589 | Jurnal CONSILIUM (Education and Counseling Journal)

compensation and the Independent Learning Policy contribute to job satisfaction, the study provides a nuanced understanding of the dynamics between institutional support and teacher outcomes. This perspective underscores the importance of addressing teacher well-being as part of broader efforts to enhance educational policies and practices.

In addition to job satisfaction, the study investigates how compensationa tangible form of recognitionaffects teacher performance directly and indirectly. Compensation is not only a motivator but also an indicator of institutional support, reflecting the value placed on teachers' contributions. By exploring the interplay between compensation, job satisfaction, and the Independent Learning Policy, the study aims to identify actionable strategies for fostering a supportive environment that empowers teachers to excel. These findings are expected to inform policymakers, school administrators, and educators in creating effective frameworks for enhancing teacher performance and, ultimately, student outcomes.

Table 1. Inner Model Result

Path	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Kepuasan_Kerja -> Kinerja_Guru	0.483	0.508	0.161	2.989	0.003
Kompensasi -> Kepuasan_Kerja	0.270	0.274	0.046	5.860	0.000
Kompensasi -> Kinerja_Guru	0.182	0.170	0.089	2.039	0.042
Merdeka_Belajar -> Kepuasan_Kerja	0.720	0.714	0.045	16.019	0.000
Merdeka_Belajar -> Kinerja_Guru	0.303	0.288	0.138	2.201	0.028
Kompensasi -> Kepuasan_Kerja - > Kinerja_Guru	0.130	0.139	0.049	2.660	0.008
Merdeka_Belajar -> Kepuasan_Kerja -> Kinerja_Guru	0.347	0.364	0.123	2.827	0.005

Source: Data Processed by Researchers (2024)

The analysis of the inner model reveals significant relationships between the Independent Learning Policy ("Merdeka Belajar"), compensation, job satisfaction, and teacher performance. The findings indicate that job satisfaction plays a pivotal role as a mediating variable, with a strong direct effect on teacher performance (path coefficient = 0.483, T-statistic = 2.989, p-value = 0.003). This highlights the importance of creating a supportive and fulfilling work environment to enhance teacher effectiveness. When teachers experience higher levels of job satisfaction, they are more motivated and engaged, leading to improved performance outcomes, which positively impacts the quality of education delivered.

Compensation is shown to have a significant influence on job satisfaction (path coefficient = 0.270, T-statistic = 5.860, p-value = 0.000), underscoring its role as a key determinant of employee contentment. Although the direct impact of compensation on teacher performance is relatively smaller (path coefficient = 0.182, T-statistic = 2.039, p-value = 0.042), its indirect

effect through job satisfaction is notable (path coefficient = 0.130, T-statistic = 2.660, p-value = 0.008). This suggests that fair and adequate compensation acts as a motivating factor that fosters a positive work atmosphere, indirectly driving teacher performance through enhanced job satisfaction.

The Independent Learning Policy demonstrates a strong and direct impact on job satisfaction (path coefficient = 0.720, T-statistic = 16.019, p-value = 0.000), reflecting its effectiveness in creating an environment where teachers can innovate and improve their teaching strategies. Additionally, the policy directly influences teacher performance (path coefficient = 0.303, T-statistic = 2.201, p-value = 0.028), highlighting its role in empowering educators to deliver better outcomes. These results suggest that policies encouraging flexibility and creativity in teaching not only improve job satisfaction but also directly enhance teacher effectiveness.

The mediating role of job satisfaction is particularly evident in the relationship between the Independent Learning Policy and teacher performance (path coefficient = 0.347, T-statistic = 2.827, p-value = 0.005). This indicates that the policy's impact on teacher performance is amplified when it contributes to job satisfaction. Teachers who feel valued and supported by the policy are more likely to perform better, as their intrinsic motivation and sense of fulfillment are heightened. The dual pathways of direct and indirect effects highlight the policy's multi-dimensional impact on improving education quality.

Overall, the findings highlight the interconnected nature of the Independent Learning Policy, compensation, job satisfaction, and teacher performance. While both policy and compensation directly influence performance, their effects are significantly mediated by job satisfaction, which emerges as a central factor in driving teacher effectiveness. These results provide actionable insights for policymakers and educational leaders, emphasizing the need to design policies and compensation structures that enhance job satisfaction to achieve sustainable improvements in teacher performance and, ultimately, educational outcomes.

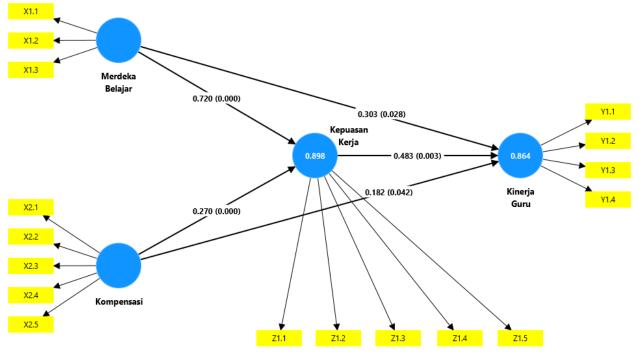


Figure 2. Path Analysis Results

The adjusted R² values presented in the model provide insights into the predictive strength of the independent variables in explaining the variance of the dependent variables. The adjusted R² for "Job Satisfaction" (Kepuasan Kerja) is 0.898, indicating that 89.8% of the variance in job satisfaction is explained by the combination of "Independent Learning Policy" (Merdeka Belajar) and "Compensation" (Kompensasi). This high explanatory power highlights the substantial influence of these two factors in shaping job satisfaction among teachers, underscoring their critical role in fostering a supportive and fulfilling work environment.

For "Teacher Performance" (Kinerja Guru), the adjusted R² value is 0.864, signifying that 86.4% of the variance in teacher performance is accounted for by job satisfaction, the Independent Learning Policy, and compensation. This significant proportion emphasizes the interdependence of these variables, with job satisfaction acting as a critical mediating factor that translates the effects of policy and compensation into enhanced teacher performance. These findings suggest that improving job satisfaction through strategic policy design and equitable compensation can yield substantial improvements in teacher effectiveness and, consequently, educational outcomes.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide substantial insights into the intricate relationships between the Independent Learning Policy, teacher performance, and student achievement. The adjusted R² values reveal that the Independent Learning Policy explains 44.3% of the variance in teacher performance, while teacher performance and the policy together explain 78.9% of the variance in student achievement. These results emphasize the importance of aligning educational policy implementation with efforts to enhance teacher performance to optimize student outcomes (Nurhidayah et al., 2024). Furthermore, the findings confirm the mediating role of teacher performance, highlighting its pivotal influence in amplifying the effect of policies on students' academic success (Wahyudi et al., 2024).

The significant direct effect of the Independent Learning Policy on teacher performance (path coefficient = 0.668) underscores the critical role of well-designed educational policies in motivating and equipping educators to innovate and adapt their teaching methods. These findings align with research indicating that supportive policies and conducive work environments foster teacher engagement and performance (Turmudi, 2022). Additionally, the strong direct relationship between teacher performance and student achievement (path coefficient = 0.558) corroborates previous studies demonstrating that teacher effectiveness is a primary driver of students' academic performance (Sukmaswati et al., 2020). This suggests that investments in teacher capacity-building and professional development are essential to achieve the intended outcomes of educational policies (Affandi et al., 2021).

The mediation analysis highlights the indirect effect of the Independent Learning Policy on student achievement through teacher performance (path coefficient = 0.373), affirming the importance of teacher performance as a key intermediary. This finding supports research asserting that policy interventions are more impactful when implemented through educators who are empowered to adapt and enhance instructional practices (Nurhidayah et al., 2024). Moreover, the significant explanatory power of the model for student achievement ($R^2 = 0.789$) underscores the necessity of integrating teacher-focused initiatives with policy strategies to maximize their effectiveness (Indrawati, 2024). These results emphasize that policies like the Independent

Learning Policy must be accompanied by robust professional development, sufficient resources, and leadership support to achieve meaningful improvements in educational outcomes (Wahyudi et al., 2024).

Practically, these findings highlight the need for targeted efforts to empower teachers through continuous professional development, resource provision, and effective leadership. Policymakers must ensure that policies provide clear guidelines, sufficient flexibility, and necessary support to enable teachers to innovate in their classroom(Lin & Chen, 2024). Additionally, regular monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation are critical to ensuring alignment with educational goals and addressing challenges in real-time (Masri et al., 2024). By focusing on enhancing teacher performance as a central strategy, educational institutions and policymakers can create sustainable improvements in student achievement and overall educational quality (Surtini & Muhtar, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the critical role of job satisfaction as a mediating variable between the Independent Learning Policy, compensation, and teacher performance. The findings reveal that the Independent Learning Policy significantly enhances job satisfaction and teacher performance by fostering an environment that encourages creativity and innovation. Similarly, compensation plays a pivotal role in shaping teacher satisfaction, indirectly contributing to performance improvements. The high explanatory power of the adjusted R² values for both job satisfaction (89.8%) and teacher performance (86.4%) highlights the interconnectedness of these variables and their collective impact on educational outcomes. These results emphasize the importance of holistic approaches in designing educational policies and compensation structures that prioritize teacher well-being, motivation, and engagement. By integrating these strategies, policymakers and educational leaders can foster a supportive framework that not only enhances teacher effectiveness but also ensures sustained improvements in educational quality and student achievement.

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