

THE INFLUENCE OF DELEGATIVE LEADERSHIP AND TEACHER PERFORMANCE ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH THE MERDEKA BELAJAR POLICY IN JEMBER ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of delegative leadership and teacher performance on student achievement in the context of Jember Regency's elementary schools, with the Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) policy as a mediating variable. Utilizing a quantitative approach, data were collected from 289 schools using questionnaires and analyzed through Partial Least Squares (PLS) with WarpPLS software. The findings reveal significant direct effects of delegative leadership and teacher performance on both the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy and student achievement. Furthermore, the Merdeka Belajar policy mediates the relationships between delegative leadership, teacher performance, and student achievement. This research integrates the Expectancy-Value Theory and Multi-Level Perspective framework, providing a novel understanding of the dynamics between leadership, teacher performance, policy implementation, and educational outcomes. The results emphasize the critical role of leadership empowerment, teacher development, and effective policy implementation in improving educational quality and student outcomes. These insights offer valuable implications for future educational strategies and policy development in Indonesia.

Keywords : Delegative Leadership; Merdeka Belajar; Student Achievement; Teacher Performance

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menguji pengaruh kepemimpinan delegatif dan kinerja guru terhadap prestasi siswa dalam konteks SD Kabupaten Jember, dengan kebijakan Merdeka Belajar sebagai variabel mediasi. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif, data dikumpulkan dari 289 sekolah menggunakan kuesioner dan dianalisis melalui Partial Least Squares (PLS) dengan perangkat lunak WarpPLS. Temuan ini mengungkapkan efek langsung yang signifikan dari kepemimpinan delegatif dan kinerja guru terhadap implementasi kebijakan Merdeka Belajar dan prestasi siswa. Selanjutnya, kebijakan Merdeka Belajar memediasi hubungan antara kepemimpinan delegatif, kinerja guru, dan prestasi siswa. Penelitian ini mengintegrasikan kerangka kerja Expectancy-Value Theory dan Multi-Level Perspective, memberikan pemahaman baru tentang dinamika antara kepemimpinan, kinerja guru, implementasi kebijakan, dan hasil pendidikan. Hasil penelitian menekankan peran penting pemberdayaan kepemimpinan, pengembangan guru, dan implementasi kebijakan yang efektif dalam meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan dan hasil siswa. Wawasan ini menawarkan implikasi

yang berharga bagi strategi pendidikan masa depan dan pengembangan kebijakan di Indonesia.

Kata kunci : Kepemimpinan Delekatif; Merdeka Belajar; Prestasi Siswa; Kinerja Guru

INTRODUCTION

Jember Regency is home to various public elementary schools distributed across multiple subdistricts, each with unique characteristics and challenges. These schools cater to students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, shaping the educational dynamics and demands within each institution (Gunawan, 2019). The Local Education Unit (UPTD) plays a critical role in supporting these schools by providing essential resources, teacher training, and facilities to ensure a conducive learning environment (Irawan et al., 2024). Moreover, the UPTD monitors and evaluates school performance, including teaching effectiveness, student engagement, and academic achievement. As a liaison between local government and schools, UPTD ensures the effective implementation of educational policies, such as the Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) initiative, aimed at enhancing flexibility and innovation in teaching while fostering equal access to quality education (Widiatsih et al., 2020),

The data highlights in table 1 concerning decline in student achievement in Jember Regency's elementary schools over recent years. Participation in both academic and non-academic competitions has decreased, alongside a drop in mathematics and science exam scores. Additionally, student motivation has declined, absenteeism has increased, and extracurricular participation has fallen significantly. These issues may stem from ineffective delegative leadership, suboptimal teacher performance, and incomplete implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy. Addressing these challenges requires optimizing UPTD roles, providing targeted teacher training, and strengthening policy execution to foster improved learning environments and student outcomes.

Student achievement refers to the academic and non-academic accomplishments students attain during their educational journey, measured through exam scores, participation in extracurricular activities, and academic or non-academic awards (Kazi, 2021; Rashid et al., 2022). It serves as a critical indicator for evaluating the effectiveness of educational systems and teaching quality, reflecting students' ability to understand and apply knowledge and skills acquired at school (Lubis et al., 2019). Several factors influence student achievement, including teaching quality, family

support, and a conducive learning environment, which incorporates delegative leadership (Suhaini, 2020). Delegative leadership involves granting authority and trust to subordinates to make decisions and execute tasks (Elpisah & Hartini, 2019). Employee performance is positively influenced by leadership style characteristic (Fenny & Setyawan, 2024). In education, school principals adopting this style empower teachers to innovate and take initiative, enhancing teacher performance and student outcomes (Wulandari et al., 2021). This approach fosters motivation and collaboration among teachers while allowing principals to focus on strategic aspects of school development (Pitriani, 2024).

Studies show positive impacts of delegative leadership, teacher performance, and policy implementation on student achievement. Delegative leadership significantly enhances student achievement in secondary schools, as observed in Takalar (Elpisah & Hartini, 2019). Teacher performance also positively influences student achievement in elementary schools (Sukmaswati et al., 2020). Its adaptability to non-educational settings, such as improving productivity in Bank Danamon, suggests its potential application in education (Halim, 2021). Furthermore, teacher performance plays a crucial role in implementing policies like Merdeka Belajar, which positively impacts student outcomes (Nurabadi et al., 2021; Sukmaswati et al., 2020).

However, research gaps and inconsistencies persist. Delegative leadership had no significant effect on student satisfaction in university academic teams (Thuy, 2023), contrasting with earlier findings. Similarly, no significant impact of teacher performance on student achievement was found in STIKes Muhammadiyah Palembang (Herdayati et al., 2020). Research exploring the direct impact of delegative leadership on the implementation of Merdeka Belajar remains limited. Furthermore, discrepancies in policy outcomes, with some studies showing positive effects and others finding no significant impact, highlight the need for further investigation, particularly in elementary education (Nurabadi et al., 2021; Sukmaswati et al., 2020).

This study offers the novelty of integrating the Expectancy-Value Theory and the Multi-Level Perspective (MLP) framework to explain the complex dynamics of student achievement in the context of elementary education. The Expectancy-Value Theory highlights how students' expectations of success and the value they place on tasks influence their academic motivation and achievement, providing critical insights

into individual-level factors (Meyer et al., 2019; Putwain et al., 2019). The MLP framework, on the other hand, emphasizes the interaction between niche innovations, socio-technical regimes, and broader socio-technical landscapes, offering a systemic perspective on transitions facilitated (Geels, 2019, 2020). Addressing the research gap in understanding how these theories intersect, particularly within elementary education, this study aims to analyze the impact of delegative leadership, teacher performance, and policy implementation on student achievement through these frameworks. Ultimately, it seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing educational outcomes and to inform strategies for improving education quality in Jember Regency.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Influence of Leadership Style on Student Achievement

The Expectancy-Value theory shows that a leadership style that supports and empowers subordinates can increase their motivation and involvement in achieving educational goals. A delegative leadership style allows teachers to feel more valued and motivated, which can ultimately improve the quality of teaching and student achievement (Meyer et al., 2019). When leaders provide the right freedom and support, teachers can develop more effective teaching methods, which have a positive impact on students' academic achievement (Putwain et al., 2019).

Research by Elpisah and Hartini (2019) shows that the delegative leadership style has a positive and significant influence on student achievement. Based on these findings, the fourth hypothesis proposed is: H1: Leadership style has a positive and significant effect on student achievement.

The Effect of Teacher Performance on Student Achievement

Expectancy-Value theory can also be used to explain how teacher performance affects student achievement. High-performing teachers tend to provide better teaching, which increases student motivation and engagement in the teaching and learning process (Esterlina & Hariani, 2021). Good teacher performance includes careful preparation, effective implementation, and proper evaluation of the learning process, all of which contribute to improved student achievement.

Research by Sukmaswati et al. (2020) shows that teacher performance has a significant influence on student achievement in elementary school. Based on these

findings, the fifth hypothesis proposed is: H2: Teacher performance has a positive and significant effect on student achievement.

The Influence of Leadership Style on Freedom of Learning

The Expectancy-Value Theory developed by Eccles explains that the motivation to achieve achievement is influenced by the expectation of success and the value placed on the task. In the context of delegative leadership, leaders who give freedom and authority to their subordinates can increase the expectations and values placed on educational tasks, ultimately increasing their motivation and involvement in the learning process (Meyer et al., 2019). This leadership style allows teachers and students to feel more valued and motivated, so that they can contribute more effectively to the implementation of the Freedom of Learning policy (Putwain et al., 2019).

Various studies have shown that the delegative leadership style has a significant influence in improving the implementation of education policies. Halim (2021) found that the delegative leadership style has a dominant influence on work productivity that can be adapted in the context of education. Therefore, the first hypothesis proposed is: H3: Leadership style has a positive and significant effect on Freedom of Learning.

The Influence of Teacher Performance on Freedom of Learning

The Expectancy-Value Theory is also relevant in explaining how teacher performance can affect the implementation of the Freedom of Learning policy. High-performing teachers demonstrate the preparation, implementation, and evaluation of a quality learning process, which increases the expectations and values placed on learning by students (Esterlina & Hariani, 2021). When teachers are high-performing, they can implement the Freedom of Learning policy more effectively, creating a conducive and innovative learning environment.

Research by Nurabadi et al. (2021) shows that teacher performance has a direct influence on the implementation of education policies, including Freedom of Learning. However, there were several studies that found different results, suggesting the need for further research. Therefore, the second hypothesis proposed is: H4: Teacher performance has a positive and significant effect on Freedom of Learning.

The Influence of Independent Learning on Student Achievement

The Multi-Level Perspective (MLP) theory developed by Geels explains how policies can facilitate systemic change through interactions at various levels. In the

context of the Freedom of Learning policy, this policy aims to provide flexibility and freedom in the learning process, which in turn can improve student achievement by allowing them to learn according to their interests and talents (Geels, 2020). Effective implementation of the Freedom of Learning policy can create a more dynamic and inclusive learning environment, which supports students' academic achievement (Geels, 2019).

Sukmaswati et al. (2020) stated that effective education policies have a positive influence on student achievement. Based on these findings, the third hypothesis proposed is: H5: Freedom of Learning has a positive and significant effect on student achievement.

The Influence of Leadership Style on Student Achievement with Freedom of Learning as an Intervening Variable

The Expectancy-Value Theory can be applied to explain the influence of leadership style on student achievement through the Freedom of Learning policy. An effective delegative leadership style can improve teacher motivation and performance, which in turn can better implement the Freedom of Learning policy (Meyer et al., 2019). The effective implementation of the Independent Learning policy will then create a more conducive learning environment for students, which improves their achievement (Putwain et al., 2019).

Research by Halim (2021) shows that the delegative leadership style has a dominant influence on work productivity and can be adapted in the context of education. Therefore, the sixth hypothesis proposed is: H6: Leadership style has a positive and significant effect on student achievement with Freedom of Learning as an intervening variable.

The Effect of Teacher Performance on Student Achievement with Freedom of Learning as an Intervening Variable

The Expectancy-Value Theory can be used to explain how teacher performance affects student achievement through the Freedom of Learning policy. High-performing teachers not only provide quality teaching, but are also better able to implement the Freedom of Learning policy effectively, which in turn creates a more supportive learning environment for students (Esterlina & Hariani, 2021). Good teacher performance involves careful preparation, effective implementation, and proper

evaluation of the learning process, all of which contribute to improved student achievement.

Research by Nurabadi et al. (2021) shows that teacher performance has a direct influence on the implementation of education policies, including Freedom of Learning. The implementation of this effective policy will then improve student achievement by creating a more holistic and innovative learning environment. Based on these findings, the seventh hypothesis proposed is: H7: Teacher performance has a positive and significant effect on student achievement with Freedom of Learning as an intervening variable.

METHODS

This study employs a quantitative approach involving the entire population of public elementary schools under UPTD in Jember Regency. This approach is chosen for its ability to provide comprehensive and measurable insights into the influence of delegative leadership and teacher performance on student achievement, with the Merdeka Belajar policy as an intervening variable. The research is scheduled for 2024, utilizing questionnaires as the primary data collection instrument. The questionnaire uses a Likert scale to measure respondents' perceptions, attitudes, and opinions quantitatively. It will be distributed online via Google Forms to facilitate data collection from schools spread across Jember Regency.

The data analysis employs the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method with the WarpPLS software, which is effective for structural equation modeling with latent variables and addressing multicollinearity issues. WarpPLS will analyze the relationships between the independent variables (delegative leadership and teacher performance), the intervening variable (Merdeka Belajar policy), and the dependent variable (student achievement) while testing the proposed hypotheses. The population comprises all 1045 public elementary schools in Jember Regency. Using Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error, the sample size is determined to be 289 schools from the total population.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

This study aims to present a comprehensive analysis of the research model through key statistical evaluations, including goodness-of-fit indices, coefficients of

determination, direct effects, and mediation effects. The goodness-of-fit analysis will assess how well the model aligns with the observed data, ensuring the validity and reliability of the results. Coefficients of determination will provide insights into the explanatory power of the independent variables on the dependent variable. Furthermore, the study will examine direct effects to understand the immediate relationships between variables and explore mediation effects to determine the role of the Merdeka Belajar policy as an intervening variable. These analyses collectively aim to provide a robust understanding of the relationships between delegative leadership, teacher performance, and student achievement in the context of Jember Regency's elementary education system. Table 2 presents the results of the model fit test, demonstrating that the research model aligns well with the data. Indices such as APC, ARS, AVIF, AFVIF, GoF, SPR, RSCR, SSR, and NLBCDR exhibit satisfactory values, meeting expected criteria. Overall, the research model shows good fit and is appropriate for further interpretation and analysis.

Figure 1 illustrates the tested model demonstrates strong explanatory power for the dependent variables. The R-squared value for the Merdeka Belajar policy (Z) is 0.729, indicating that 72.9% of the variation in policy implementation is explained by delegative leadership (X1) and teacher performance (X2). Additionally, the R-squared value for student achievement (Y) is higher, at 0.866, signifying that 86.6% of the variation in student achievement is explained by delegative leadership, teacher performance, and the Merdeka Belajar policy. These results suggest that the model possesses robust predictive capability for both dependent variables, reinforcing its suitability for analyzing the relationships among the variables.

The table 3 presents the path coefficients and their significance levels, highlighting the relationships among the variables. X1 (delegative leadership) and X2 (teacher performance) significantly influence Z (Merdeka Belajar policy) and Y (student achievement). Additionally, Z significantly affects Y, confirming its mediating role. The indirect effects, $X1 \rightarrow Z \rightarrow Y$ and $X2 \rightarrow Z \rightarrow Y$, are also significant, emphasizing that the Merdeka Belajar policy mediates the impact of delegative leadership and teacher performance on student achievement. These findings demonstrate the robustness of the model and the importance of mediation in this framework.

Discussion

Influence of Delegative Leadership on Merdeka Belajar Policy

The findings reveal that delegative leadership significantly influences the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy, with a path coefficient of 0.663 ($p < 0.001$). This supports prior research by Elpisah and Hartini (2019), which highlighted that delegative leadership encourages teachers to innovate and adapt their teaching practices. Within the Merdeka Belajar framework, this leadership style provides teachers with the autonomy to develop flexible and student-centered learning strategies. Drawing on Expectancy-Value Theory, the empowerment of teachers enhances their expectations of success in implementing the policy, leading to higher engagement and effectiveness (Putwain et al., 2019). These findings suggest that leadership training programs focusing on delegation could further enhance the policy's success in improving educational outcomes.

Influence of Teacher Performance on Merdeka Belajar Policy

Teacher performance was found to significantly affect the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy, with a path coefficient of 0.232 ($p < 0.001$). This aligns with Nurabadi et al. (2021), who emphasized that effective teacher performance accelerates the adoption of innovative educational policies. The Multi-Level Perspective (MLP) framework positions teachers as key actors within socio-technical regimes, where their performance bridges policy innovation and classroom practice (Geels, 2020). These results underscore the importance of targeted professional development programs to enhance teacher competencies, ensuring smoother and more impactful policy implementation.

Influence of Delegative Leadership on Student Achievement

Delegative leadership directly impacts student achievement, as indicated by a path coefficient of 0.188 ($p < 0.001$). This finding is consistent with Pitriani (2024), who found that empowering teachers through delegative leadership fosters collaboration and innovation, ultimately improving student outcomes. According to Expectancy-Value Theory, the supportive environment created by such leadership enhances students' expectations of success and the value they assign to academic tasks (Meyer et al., 2019). These findings highlight the necessity of implementing leadership training programs that prioritize delegation to foster better student outcomes in elementary education.

Influence of Teacher Performance on Student Achievement

Teacher performance demonstrated a significant positive impact on student achievement, with a path coefficient of 0.314 ($p < 0.001$). This finding aligns with Sukmaswati et al. (2020), who emphasized that high-quality teaching significantly enhances student academic performance in elementary schools. In the context of Merdeka Belajar, effective teaching strategies tailored to students' needs can foster engagement and learning motivation. The MLP framework highlights that strengthening teacher performance at the individual level contributes to systemic educational transformation (Geels, 2019). These findings emphasize the need for continuous professional development programs to sustain and improve teacher effectiveness.

Influence of Merdeka Belajar Policy on Student Achievement

The Merdeka Belajar policy significantly influences student achievement, with a path coefficient of 0.500 ($p < 0.001$). This result supports Widiatsih et al. (2020), who found that the policy's flexibility enhances creativity and innovation in teaching, positively impacting student learning outcomes. Through the lens of Expectancy-Value Theory, the policy fosters intrinsic motivation by enabling students to explore their interests and develop a deeper connection to academic tasks (Putwain et al., 2019). These findings suggest that strengthening the policy's implementation through comprehensive training and support can further optimize its impact on student outcomes.

Mediating Role of Merdeka Belajar Policy in the Influence of Delegative Leadership on Student Achievement

The Merdeka Belajar policy mediates the influence of delegative leadership on student achievement, with an indirect path coefficient of 0.332 ($p < 0.001$). This supports Nurabadi et al. (2021), who highlighted that education policies can amplify the effectiveness of leadership styles in achieving student-centered goals. Within the MLP framework, the policy acts as a niche innovation, facilitating the alignment between leadership strategies and systemic educational outcomes (Geels, 2020). These findings suggest that synchronizing leadership development programs with policy implementation strategies is crucial for enhancing student achievement.

Mediating Role of Merdeka Belajar Policy in the Influence of Teacher Performance on Student Achievement

The Merdeka Belajar policy also mediates the relationship between teacher performance and student achievement, with an indirect path coefficient of 0.116 ($p = 0.002$). This is consistent with Sukmaswati et al. (2020), who demonstrated that education policies can strengthen the link between teacher performance and student outcomes. From an Expectancy-Value Theory perspective, the policy enhances the perceived value of academic tasks, reinforcing the impact of teacher performance on students' motivation and academic success (Meyer et al., 2019). These findings highlight the importance of designing educational policies that support and complement teacher efforts to improve learning outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant influence of delegative leadership, teacher performance, and the Merdeka Belajar policy on student achievement in Jember Regency's elementary education system. Delegative leadership and teacher performance directly and indirectly enhance student achievement, with the Merdeka Belajar policy playing a crucial mediating role. These findings underscore the importance of empowering school leaders and teachers to innovate and adapt to evolving educational demands while effectively implementing policies designed to foster flexibility and inclusivity. By integrating Expectancy-Value Theory and the Multi-Level Perspective framework, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between individual, institutional, and systemic factors, offering valuable insights for improving educational outcomes and informing future educational policy and leadership training programs.

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TABLE

Table 1. Trends in Declining Student Achievement in Jember Elementary Schools

Indicator	2020	2021	2022	2023	Target
Participation in academic competitions	30%	25%	20%	20%	25%
Participation in non-academic competitions	50%	45%	40%	45%	45%
Mathematics exam scores	80	75	70	75	78
Science exam scores	Good	Declining	Declining	Declining	Good
Student learning motivation	High	Declining	Declining	Declining	High
Student absenteeism	Low	Increasing	Increasing	Decreasing	Low
Participation in extracurricular activities	65%	60%	55%	50%	80%

Source: Primary and Secondary Data from UPTD Jember Regency Elementary Schools, analyzed by Researchers (2024).

Table 2. Model Fit Indices

Index	Value	Description
Average Path Coefficient (APC)	0.379	With (<0.001) Result is Significant
Average R-squared (ARS)	0.798	
Average Adjusted R-squared (AARS)	0.796	
Average Block VIF (AVIF)	3.049	Accepted
Average Full Collinearity VIF (AFVIF)	5.000	
Tenenhaus GoF (GoF)	0.729	Large
Simpson's Paradox Ratio (SPR)	1.000	Ideal
R-squared Contribution Ratio (RSCR)	1.000	
Statistical Suppression Ratio (SSR)	1.000	
Nonlinear Bivariate Causality Direction Ratio (NLBCDR)	1.000	

Source: Data Processed by Researchers (2024)

Table 3. Path Coefficients and Significance

Path	Path Coefficient	P-value	Description
X1 → Z	0.663	<0.001	Significant
X2 → Z	0.232	<0.001	Significant

X1 → Y	0.188	<0.001	Significant
X2 → Y	0.314	<0.001	Significant
Z → Y	0.500	<0.001	Significant
X1 → Z → Y	0.332	<0.001	Significant
X2 → Z → Y	0.116	0.002	Significant

Source: Data Processed by Researchers (2024)

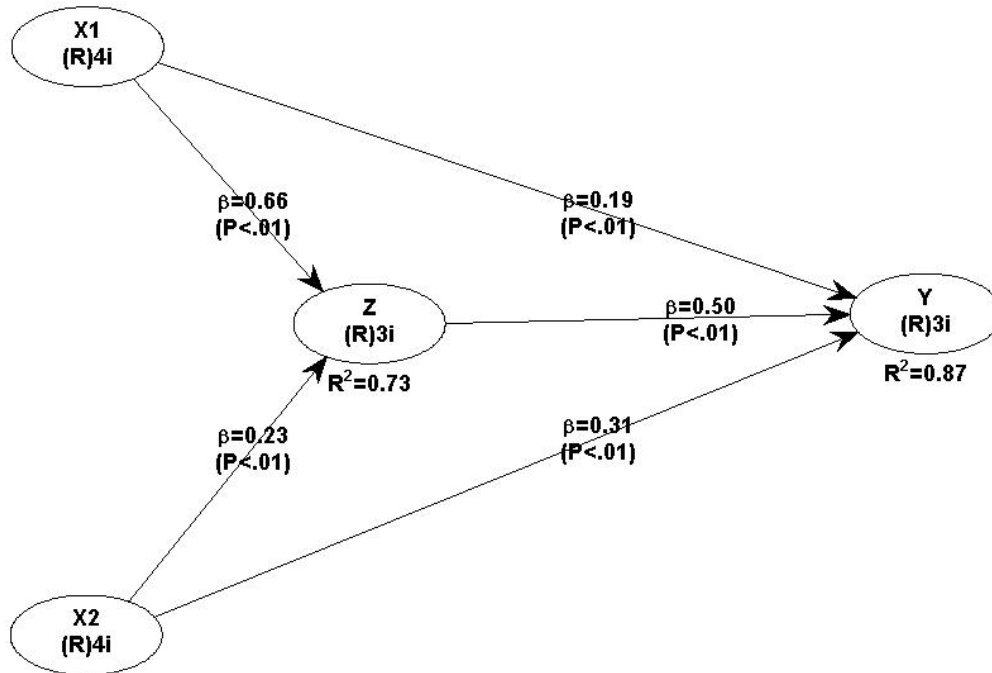


Figure 1. Path Analysis Result