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TEACHER COMPETENCE AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT EFFECTS ON PERFORMANCE: MEDIATED BY READINESS FOR MERDEKA CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION

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Abstract: This study examines the effects of professional competence, organizational commitment, and teacher readiness on teacher performance in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka. A quantitative research design was employed, involving 119 teachers of MAN in East Java as respondents. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS. The findings reveal that professional competence and teacher readiness have positive, significant direct effects on teacher performance, whereas organizational commitment does not. However, professional competence and organizational commitment both significantly affect teacher readiness, which in turn mediates their influence on teacher performance. These results indicate that teacher readiness plays a crucial mediating role in strengthening performance outcomes. The study implies that improving teacher performance in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka requires strategic efforts to enhance professional competence and foster organizational conditions that build teachers' readiness, including supportive work environments, clear role expectations, and a constructive organizational climate.

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INTRODUCTION

Curriculum reform is a strategic instrument for improving educational quality and ensuring alignment with societal needs (Buabeng & Amo-Darko, 2025; Senior et al., 2025). In Indonesia, curriculum transformation has intensified following the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the shift from the 2013 Curriculum to the Emergency Curriculum through Ministerial Decree No. 719/P/2020. This reform was introduced in response to alarming findings from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which show that 70% of Indonesian students perform below minimum competency levels in literacy and numeracy, with no significant improvement over the last decade.

Although the Emergency Curriculum reportedly mitigated learning loss reducing the pandemic's impact by 73% in literacy and 86% in numeracy persistent disparities across regions and socio-economic groups remain evident. Consequently, the government introduced the Kurikulum Merdeka as a more comprehensive reform under the Merdeka Belajar initiative, emphasizing flexibility, autonomy, and competency-based learning.

Despite its progressive design, the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka reveals a significant gap between policy expectations and field realities. The curriculum promotes teacher empowerment, simplified lesson planning , and authentic learning aligned with the philosophy of Ki Hajar Dewantara (Liang et al., 2025; Rosanawati et al., 2025). However, empirical findings indicate that teachers remain burdened with administrative tasks and demonstrate low motivation in preparing lesson plans (Cevikbas et al., 2024; Isberg, 2025). Preliminary observations in the Department of Education of Kepahiang Regency, Bengkulu, further reveal suboptimal teacher performance, including limited instructional planning, minimal innovation, and weak integration of technology in learning. This condition reflects a critical discrepancy: while the Kurikulum Merdeka demands autonomy, competence, and adaptability, many teachers have not yet demonstrated the readiness required to meet these expectations.

Theoretically, teacher performance in curriculum implementation is influenced by competence, organizational commitment, and readiness. Teacher competence encompasses pedagogical, personal, social, and professional dimensions and is positively associated with performance (Molina-Moreno et al., 2024; Zhang & Tian, 2025). Organizational commitment, defined as identification with institutional goals and loyalty to the organization (Hamidi et al., 2024; Mueller et al., 2024), has also been found to significantly influence performance. However, contradictory findings suggest that commitment may negatively affect performance when emotional attachment and loyalty are weak. Meanwhile, teacher readiness defined as belief, intention, and capacity to implement change has consistently shown a positive and significant relationship with performance (Almusawi & Durugbo, 2024; Rajapakse et al., 2024). These inconsistencies indicate a theoretical gap regarding how competence and commitment interact with readiness in influencing teacher performance.

Previous studies have largely examined competence, organizational commitment, and readiness as separate predictors of performance. The direct influence of competence and commitment on teacher performance, emphasize the significant role of readiness (Bataineh et al., 2025; Elyashiv & Rozenberg, 2024). However, limited studies integrate these variables within a single structural model, particularly in the specific context of implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka. Furthermore, the mediating role of teacher readiness in linking competence and organizational commitment to performance remains underexplored. Therefore, this study positions itself by examining readiness not merely as an independent predictor but as a mediating mechanism that may explain inconsistencies in previous findings.

Based on the identified theoretical and empirical gaps, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) Does professional competence significantly influence teacher performance in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka? (2) Does organizational commitment significantly influence teacher performance? (3) Does teacher readiness mediate the relationship between professional competence and teacher performance? (4) Does teacher readiness mediate the relationship between organizational commitment and teacher performance? These questions aim to clarify the structural relationships among competence, commitment, readiness, and performance within the context of curriculum reform.

This study argues that professional competence and organizational commitment enhance teacher performance both directly and indirectly through teacher readiness. Teachers who possess strong competencies are more likely to feel confident and capable of implementing curricular changes, thereby increasing their readiness and ultimately improving performance. Similarly, organizational commitment strengthens psychological attachment and motivation, which fosters readiness for change. Thus, readiness functions as a crucial mediating mechanism that translates competence and commitment into effective performance in the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka. These arguments form the basis of the hypotheses tested in this study.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study takes teachers of Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) in East Java as the unit of analysis, focusing on the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka in relation to teacher performance. Institutionally, the research was conducted in MAN schools across East Java, which are formally implementing the national curriculum reform policy. Thus, the material object of this study is the educational institution, particularly teachers' professional practices in carrying out curriculum transformation at the secondary education level.

The study employed a quantitative research design using an explanatory survey approach. This design was selected to examine causal relationships among variables and to explain the influence of teacher competence and organizational commitment on teacher performance through the mediating role of teacher readiness in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka (Ghanad, 2023; Sardana et al., 2023). The survey approach enables systematic data collection from a relatively large number of respondents to obtain empirical generalizations.

The sources of information in this study were respondents, namely all teachers of MAN in East Java, totaling 119 individuals. A census sampling technique was applied, meaning that the entire population was included as research respondents. Primary data were obtained directly from respondents through a structured questionnaire developed based on the research variables, including teacher competence, organizational commitment, teacher readiness, and teacher performance in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka.

The data collection process was conducted by distributing structured questionnaires designed according to the theoretical constructs of each variable.

The research instrument was developed from relevant indicators derived from the literature review and adjusted to the context of Kurikulum Merdeka implementation. The questionnaire served as the main instrument to measure respondents' perceptions of their competence, organizational commitment, readiness, and performance. In addition, a desk review was conducted to strengthen the conceptual framework and support the development of research indicators.

Data analysis was carried out using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach with the assistance of SmartPLS software. PLS is a variance-based Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique used to assess both the measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model). The evaluation of the outer model includes testing Convergent Validity, Discriminant Validity, and Composite Reliability (Gul, 2023). Subsequently, the inner model was assessed to examine the relationships among constructs, the significance of these relationships, and the R-square values to determine the explanatory power of the independent variables on the dependent variables. Changes in R-square values were used to evaluate the substantive contribution of each exogenous construct to the endogenous variables in the research model.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Outer Model Measurement (*Outer* Model)

The Outer Model analysis is conducted to examine the relationship between latent variables and their indicators, or in other words, to define how each indicator relates to its respective latent variable. Three measurement criteria are used in data analysis with SmartPLS to assess the model. These three measurements are Convergent Validity, reliability testing (Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha), and Discriminant Validity, as follows.

Results of the Convergent Validity Test

According to the general rule of thumb, an indicator is considered valid if its factor loading is ≥ 0.7. However, in the development of new models or indicators, factor loadings between 0.5 and 0.6 are still acceptable. An indicator is deemed valid if its factor loading is positive and greater than 0.70. The factor loading value reflects the weight of each indicator/item as a measure of its respective variable. Indicators with higher factor loadings represent the strongest (most dominant) measures of the variable. The outer loading values for all variable indicators indicate that an indicator is considered invalid if its outer loading is below 0.70. Therefore, it is necessary to remove indicators that are deemed invalid. This criteria data are considered valid if the value is greater than 0.70.

Reliability Test Result

Reliability testing is a tool used to measure a questionnaire that serves as an indicator of a variable or construct. A measuring instrument or questionnaire is considered capable of providing stable or consistent results if it is reliable. In

this study, the reliability of the research instrument was tested using Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha coefficients.

The criteria used to assess reliability are that the Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values should be greater than 0.70 for confirmatory research, while values between 0.60 and 0.70 are still acceptable for exploratory research. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) reflects the amount of variance or diversity in the manifest variables that can be explained by the latent construct. An ideal AVE value is 0.5, indicating good convergent validity, meaning that the latent variable can explain more than half of the variance in its indicators. The criterion for AVE to consider a variable valid is that it must be above 0.50. The following are the results of the Reliability Test (Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha) and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) test:

Table 1. The Result of Reliability Test

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
X1 (Teachers' Competence)	0.982	0.986	0.982	0.505
X2 (Organization Commitment)	0.943	0.959	0.948	0.536
Y (Teachers' Performance)	0.966	0.968	0.969	0.517
Z (Teachers' Readiness)	0.981	0.982	0.982	0.544

Source: Data Processing Results, (2025)

Based on Table 1 above, it can be seen that the reliability test output shows satisfactory results, with both Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding 0.7 for each variable. This indicates a high level of consistency and stability of the instruments used. In other words, all constructs or research variables have become fit measurement tools, and all items used to measure each construct demonstrate good reliability. The SmartPLS output also shows that all variables have an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value greater than 0.5, indicating that the variables possess good validity.

Results of the Discriminant Validity Test

Discriminant validity is used to test the validity of a model. It is assessed through cross-loading values, which indicate the strength of the correlation between a construct and its indicators compared to indicators of other constructs. Discriminant validity can also be measured by comparing the square root of the AVE for each construct with the correlations between that construct and other constructs in the model. If the square root of the AVE for a construct is greater than its correlations with other constructs, it indicates good discriminant validity. The following compares the square root of the AVE values:

Table 2. Results of the AVE Value Comparison Test

	X1 (Teachers' Competence)	X2 (Organization Commitment)	Y (Teachers' Performance)	Z (Teachers' Readiness)
X1 (Teachers' Competence)	0.710			
X2 (Organization Commitment)	0.528	0.732		
Y (Teachers' Performance)	0.570	0.373	0.719	
Z (Teachers' Readiness)	0.583	0.455	0.713	0.738

Source: Data Processing Results, (2025)

Based on Table 2 and the output, it can be observed that the square root of the AVE for each variable is higher than its correlation with other variables in the model. This indicates that, according to the AVE test, the model demonstrates good discriminant validity.

Structural Model Evaluation (*Inner* Model)

After conducting the outer model test, the next step is to perform the inner model test. The inner model, or structural model, is tested to examine the relationships between constructs, the significance of these relationships, and the R-square values of the research model, as follows:

Determination Coefficient Test (*R-Square*)

The evaluation of the PLS-SEM structural model begins by examining the R-square values for each dependent latent variable. The results of the determination coefficient (R-square) in this study can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. R Square Test Result

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Y (Teachers' Performance)	0.545	0.536
Z (Teachers' Readiness)	0.370	0.363

Source: Data Processing Results, (2025).

Table 3 shows that the R-square value for teacher performance is 0.545. This means that the variability in the teacher performance construct can be explained by the variability in teacher competence, organizational commitment, and teacher readiness constructs by 54.5%, while the remaining variance is explained by other variables outside the model. The R-square value for teacher readiness is 0.370, indicating that the variability in the teacher readiness construct can be explained by the variability in teacher competence and organizational commitment constructs by 37%, with the remaining variance explained by other variables outside the model.

Predictive Relevance (Q-Square)

Predictive relevance is a test conducted to determine how well the observed values are predicted by the model using the blindfolding procedure, assessed

through the Q-square value. If the Q-square value is greater than 0, it indicates good predictive relevance, whereas a Q-square value less than 0 indicates poor predictive relevance. The Q-square for predictive relevance in the structural model measures how well the observed values are generated by the model and its parameter estimates.

Table 4. Q Square Test Result

	SSO	SSE	Q² (=1-SSE/SSO)
X1 (Teachers' Competence)	9184.000	9184.000	
X2 (Organization Commitment)	2624.000	2624.000	
Y (Teachers' Performance)	4756.000	3481.244	0.268
Z (Teachers' Readiness)	7544.000	6084.230	0.194

Source: Data Processing Results, (2025).

Based on the data presented in the table above, it can be seen from the output that the Q^2 values are 0.268 and 0.194. Since these values are greater than 0, the model demonstrates predictive relevance.

Effect size (f^2)

This formula is used to determine whether an endogenous latent variable is strongly influenced by exogenous latent variables. The resulting f^2 value is 0.02, the effect of the exogenous latent variable is considered small; if it is 0.15, the effect is considered medium; and if it is 0.35, the effect is considered large.

Table 5. Effect Size Test Result

	X1 (Teachers' Competence)	X2 (Organization Commitment)	Y (Teachers' Performance)	Z (Teachers' Readiness)
X1 (Teachers' Competence)			0.073	0.259
X2 (Organization Commitment)			0.000	0.048
Y (Teachers' Performance)				
Z (Teachers' Readiness)			0.468	

Based on the table above, the results are as follows: the f-square value of variable X1 on Y is 0.073, indicating a small effect; X1 on Z is 0.259, indicating a medium effect; X2 on Y is 0.000, indicating a small effect; X2 on Z is 0.048, indicating a small effect; and Z on Y is 0.468, indicating a large effect.

Hypothesis Testing

The testing of the structural model aims to explain the relationships between the variables in the study. Structural model testing is conducted using PLS software. The basis for directly testing hypotheses is the output from the path coefficients, either in the diagram or numerical form. A hypothesis is considered

supported if the p-value < 0.05 (significance level = 5%), indicating a significant effect of the exogenous variable on the endogenous variable. The following provides a detailed explanation of the hypothesis testing:

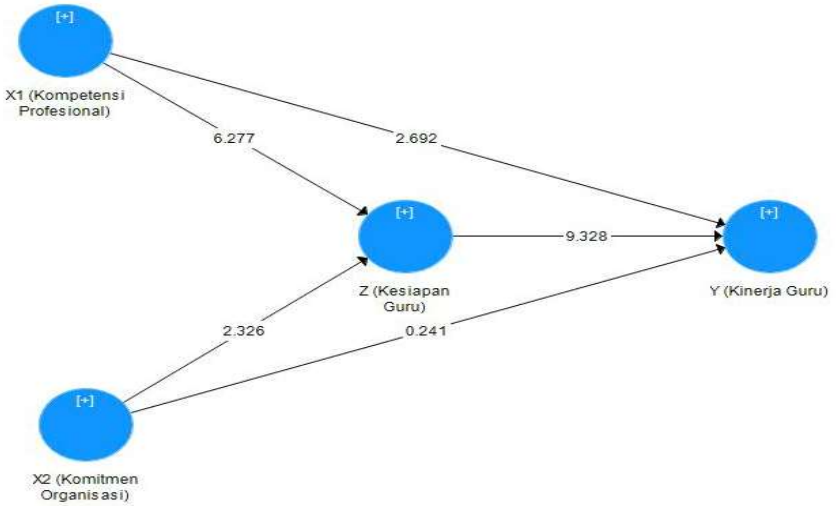

Figure 1. Hypothesis Testing
Source: Data Processing Results, (2025)

In this hypothesis testing stage, the analysis examines whether there is a significant effect of the independent variables on the dependent variables. The hypothesis testing is conducted by examining the path coefficients, which indicate the estimated parameter coefficients and their corresponding t-statistics for significance. The significance of the estimated parameters provides information about the relationships between the research variables. The threshold for accepting or rejecting the proposed hypotheses is set at a probability of 0.05. The results of the hypothesis testing in this study can be seen in Table 5 below.

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing Result

Path	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
Direct Effect					
X1 (Teachers' Competence) -> Y (Teachers' Performance)	0.240	0.237	0.089	2.692	0.007
X1 (Teachers' Competence)-> Z (Teachers' Readiness)	0.476	0.472	0.076	6.277	0.000
X2 (Organization Commitment)-> Y (Teachers' Performance)	-0.018	-0.015	0.075	0.241	0.809
X2 (Organization Commitment) -> Z (Teachers' Readiness)	0.204	0.217	0.088	2.326	0.020
Z (Teachers' Readiness)-> Y	0.582	0.586	0.062	9.328	0.000

(Teachers' Performance)					
Indirect Effect					
X1 (Teachers' Competence) -> Z (Teachers' Readiness) -> Y (Teachers' Performance)	0.277	0.278	0.058	4.781	0.000
X2 (Organization Commitment) -> Z (Teachers' Readiness) -> Y (Teachers' Performance)	0.119	0.128	0.055	2.155	0.032

Based on Table 5 and Figure 1, the hypotheses can be described as follows:

Teacher competence has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance. This is evident from the Path Coefficient output, where the t-statistic value is 2.692, greater than 1.96, and the P-value is 0.007, less than 0.05, indicating that Ho is rejected and Ha is accepted. The positive coefficient (Original Sample column) means that the effect is positive; in other words, an increase in teacher competence leads to an increase in teacher performance.

Organizational commitment has no significant effect on teacher performance. This is indicated by the Path Coefficient output, where the t-statistic value is 0.241, less than 1.96, and the P-value is 0.809, greater than 0.05, so Ho is accepted and Ha is rejected.

Teacher readiness has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance. This is shown in the Path Coefficient output, where the t-statistic value is 9.328, greater than 1.96, and the P-value is 0.000, less than 0.05, meaning Ho is rejected and Ha is accepted. The positive coefficient indicates that an increase in teacher readiness leads to an increase in teacher performance.

Teacher competence has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance through teacher readiness. Based on the Indirect Effect analysis, the P-value of the indirect effect is 0.000, less than 0.05, and the positive coefficient indicates a positive effect.

Discussion

The empirical results demonstrate that teacher competence significantly enhances teacher performance in the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka. This finding reinforces the view that professional knowledge, pedagogical expertise, and instructional skills constitute the foundational capital for effective curriculum enactment (Idris et al., 2024; Ro, 2024). Competence operates as a functional driver that enables teachers to interpret curriculum principles, design meaningful learning experiences, and implement authentic assessment practices. In reform contexts that demand flexibility and innovation, competence ensures that policy directives are translated into high-quality classroom practice. The implication is that strengthening professional competence is not only a

developmental agenda but a structural necessity for sustaining curriculum transformation (Buabeng & Amo-Darko, 2025; Senior et al., 2025).

Teacher readiness shows the strongest direct effect on performance, indicating that psychological preparedness and perceived capability are central determinants of reform success. Readiness reflects teachers' cognitive understanding of change, emotional acceptance, and behavioral intention to act (Li et al., 2024; Ye & Cao, 2025). Its large effect size suggests that performance is more immediately influenced by teachers' internal state of preparedness than by formal institutional attachment. This finding underscores the importance of readiness-building strategies such as collaborative planning, reflective supervision, and continuous mentoring. When teachers feel prepared and confident, they are more likely to experiment with new instructional approaches and maintain consistent performance standards (Amemasor et al., 2025; Fan et al., 2025).

The non-significant direct effect of organizational commitment on teacher performance provides a nuanced theoretical insight. Organizational commitment represents loyalty and identification with institutional goals, yet these attitudinal bonds do not automatically translate into measurable performance outcomes. Performance in curriculum reform contexts requires adaptive capacity and operational readiness rather than affective attachment alone (Kusmawan, 2025; Pan & Wiens, 2024). This suggests that commitment functions as a background condition that shapes motivational orientation, while readiness acts as the immediate mechanism that activates performance behavior. The structural relationship revealed in this study clarifies why commitment without readiness may not yield observable improvements in instructional practice (Somuah et al., 2026; Teledahl et al., 2024).

The mediating role of teacher readiness strengthens the explanatory power of the proposed model. Competence and organizational commitment both exert significant indirect effects on performance through readiness. This pattern indicates that readiness integrates structural resources and psychological alignment into actionable performance. From a structural perspective, competence provides capability, commitment provides motivational grounding, and readiness converts these dimensions into behavioral execution (Jajoo & Deshmukh, 2024; Khamdamovna, 2025). The mediation findings support change management theory, which positions readiness as the proximal predictor of successful reform implementation (Kalbarczyk et al., 2024; Kalbermatten, 2024).

The model's explanatory strength, reflected in moderate R-square values and positive predictive relevance (Q^2), indicates that the integration of competence, commitment, and readiness offers a meaningful account of teacher performance variability. The large effect size of readiness on performance further confirms its central structural position. These results contribute theoretically by repositioning readiness as a core mechanism rather than a peripheral construct within educational reform research. The study advances the literature by presenting a mediated structural framework that clarifies the dynamic interaction

among professional, organizational, and psychological dimensions (Hidayat et al., 2024; Zheng et al., 2025).

From a policy and managerial standpoint, the findings suggest that curriculum reform strategies should be designed as integrated capacity-building systems. Professional development initiatives should be aligned with institutional climate enhancement and change-readiness programs. Leadership practices that promote role clarity, collaborative culture, and participatory decision-making are likely to strengthen readiness and, in turn, improve performance outcomes (Musaddad, 2025; Rofiqi et al., 2026). Reform effectiveness depends on synchronizing competence development, organizational alignment, and psychological preparedness within a coherent institutional structure that supports sustained instructional improvement (Wardhani et al., 2025; Wong & Li, 2025).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that teacher competence and teacher readiness play decisive roles in enhancing teacher performance in the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka. Professional competence has a positive and significant direct effect on performance, while teacher readiness also significantly strengthens performance outcomes. Although organizational commitment does not directly influence teacher performance, it exerts a significant indirect effect through teacher readiness, highlighting readiness as a crucial mediating mechanism. These results suggest that improving teacher performance is not solely dependent on technical competence or institutional loyalty, but fundamentally on the extent to which teachers are psychologically and professionally prepared to implement educational change. The major insight of this study is that teacher readiness functions as a strategic bridge that translates competence and organizational commitment into effective performance, thereby reinforcing the importance of capacity-building and change-readiness programs in curriculum reform initiatives.

From a scholarly perspective, this study contributes to the literature by integrating teacher competence, organizational commitment, and teacher readiness within a single structural model using a variance-based SEM (PLS) approach, offering a more comprehensive explanation of performance in the context of curriculum reform. By positioning teacher readiness as a mediating variable, this research refines previous perspectives that primarily examined direct relationships among variables. However, this study is limited to a specific institutional context teachers of MAN in East Java with a relatively homogeneous sample in terms of institutional setting and research design (survey-based quantitative method). The findings may therefore not fully capture variations across regions, school types, gender, age groups, or different educational environments. Accordingly, future research is recommended to involve broader and more diverse samples, incorporate demographic variations, and employ mixed-method or longitudinal approaches to obtain a more comprehensive understanding that can serve as a stronger basis for more targeted and effective educational policy formulation.

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