

Challenges and Benefits Teachers on The Implementation of The Curriculum Merdeka: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

The Merdeka Curriculum, introduced as a replacement for the 2013 Curriculum, is a recent educational framework widely adopted in Indonesia with the overarching goal of enhancing the quality of learning implementation in the country. Given that teachers play a pivotal role in any curriculum by designing learning experiences and engaging directly with students, this research aims to explore teachers' perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum, specifically examining the challenges and benefits associated with this new educational framework in Indonesia. This research systematically reviews the challenges and benefits teachers face while implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. It provides valuable insights into how teachers perceive their readiness, including areas such as planning, executing learning activities, and conducting assessments. The significance lies in understanding these perceptions to address the gaps in teacher readiness, which is currently deemed only sufficient. This highlights the need for more targeted training and resources to ensure effective implementation. By exploring the benefits and challenges from the teachers' perspectives, this research can guide educational authorities in improving teacher support and curriculum execution strategies, ultimately contributing to better educational outcomes in Indonesia.

Keywords: Benefits; Challenges; Merdeka Curriculum.

Education involves the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and habits through a collective effort passed down from one generation to the next (Istikhoirini, 2021). The success of a nation is contingent upon the generation of innovation through the utilization of high-quality resources (Widodo, 2021). Enhancing the standard of education can be achieved by innovatively devising a well-structured of

Merdeka Belajar (Maghfiroh & Sholeh, 2022).

In the realm of sports, the term "curriculum" refers to the distance a runner needs to cover from the starting point to the finish line to earn a medal (Ruhimat, 2011). The field of education has adopted and adapted this concept. In education, the curriculum is defined as a set of subjects that students are required to pursue throughout a learning program to

attain a diploma. Presently, the definition of curriculum has evolved to encompass not only specific subjects but also all the learning experiences that students undergo, which can significantly impact their development (Alberty & Weber, 1979; Bullough Jr, 1976; Dewey, 2013; Ruhimat, 2011). Nowadays, the curriculum is viewed as a guide in the implementation of education to accomplish predetermined objectives.

The Merdeka curriculum fosters active and imaginative learning (Malikah et al., 2022). Developed to enhance educational quality, the Merdeka curriculum is regarded as the core of education (Siregar et al., 2021). Emphasizing student learning outcomes based on the Pancasila student profile, the Merdeka curriculum places a premium on individualized learning (Malikah et al., 2022). The essence of the freedom to learn lies in the autonomy granted to educators and students during the learning process (Aritonang & Armanto, 2022). Educators and students represent the core of self-directed learning, capable of creating education of high quality and international standards (Anggreini & Priyojadmiko, 2022).

The distinguishing features of the Merdeka curriculum are geared towards motivating educators and students to engage in learning. These characteristics include: 1) Designing learning activities using project-based learning to cultivate soft skills and the character traits outlined in the Pancasila student profile, encompassing faith and devotion to God Almighty, noble character, global awareness, collaborative spirit, creativity, critical reasoning, and independence; 2) Focusing on enhancing literacy and numeracy as fundamental competencies in learning materials; and 3) Granting educators the freedom to tailor learning experiences to students' abilities in alignment with the local context and content (Rosmana et al., 2022). The Merdeka Belajar initiative concentrates on advancing students' cognitive abilities, emphasizing critical thinking and sound analysis (Widodo, 2021). The freedom to learn

creates expansive opportunities for students to develop both cognitive and interpersonal skills (Oktaviana & Putri, 2022). Ultimately, Merdeka Belajar strives to enhance the competency of graduates, encompassing both soft skills and hard skills, to better prepare them for and align with contemporary needs (Yasmansyah & Sesmiarni, 2022).

The teacher plays a pivotal role in curriculum implementation, serving as the front line in translating and executing curriculum plans, thus holding a crucial responsibility in organizing high-quality learning activities as per the curriculum requirements (Hadi & Andrian, 2018). The success of teachers in crafting learning activities significantly influences student achievement, with some asserting that students' low proficiency may stem from teachers' inadequacies in translating and implementing the curriculum (Goh et al., 2020). Consequently, it is essential to investigate teachers' perspectives on the Merdeka Curriculum, which is still in its second year of implementation in Indonesia. This involves assessing whether teachers hold positive or negative views about the Merdeka Curriculum and delving into the challenges they encounter during its implementation. Such insights can offer valuable information to authorities, guiding them in taking necessary actions to enhance the future implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. In essence, this article aims to explore Indonesian teachers' perceptions regarding the challenges and advantages associated with implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

Method

The method employed follows The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines, involving the systematic analysis of articles through the stages of article identification, screening, and eventual inclusion (Page et al., 2021). The articles were sourced from various journal websites, including SINTA, GARUDA and others affiliated with

different academic institutions. During the identification phase, the researcher conducted searches using keywords highlighted in the research, such as “Merdeka curriculum,” “benefits,” or “challenges.” The data utilized in this paper is qualitative, and this qualitative information will be transformed and processed into descriptive data, comprising written information that is inherently relevant to each other.

Subsequently, the records underwent a manual screening process involving a thorough examination of the title, abstract, keywords, and research questions of each study to determine their relevance. Studies were excluded if they solely focused on the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum without substantial discussions regarding its benefits and challenges, leading to the exclusion of approximately 357 studies. The remaining 237 studies were then scrutinized, and some were eliminated due to factors such as literature review focus, inappropriate titles, or insufficient detailed results. In the final screening stage, the researcher carefully reviewed ninety-eight texts. Within this phase, forty-eight studies were excluded as they did not adequately address the benefits and challenges of a Merdeka curriculum. Ultimately, only studies explicitly focusing on the benefits and challenges, particularly from the perspective of teachers, as indicated in the title, abstract, keywords, or research questions, were included. No restrictions were imposed based on discipline or methodology, except for the requirement of empirical research. The concluding phase of the literature review involved an in-depth analysis of the remaining twenty-two articles.

Result and Discussion

The analysis encompassed 357 journals retrieved from multiple databases and was conducted using the PRISMA method across various stages. Following the screening of articles, 27 were identified for in-depth study. The 22 items discussed in this article are

categorized into the benefits and challenges associated with the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum.

Teachers’ Perspective on the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

Drawing from multiple studies, teachers’ viewpoints on the Merdeka Curriculum consistently fall within the positive spectrum (Anggaira, 2023; Indahwati et al., 2023; Nurhayani Siregar, 2020; Nurliani et al., 2023). According to the findings of Anggaira’s research, high school English teachers in Metro Lampung City exhibit favorable perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum (Anggaira, 2023). Similarly, Mayasari and Rahmatullah reported positive perceptions among teachers at Banjarmasin State High School 4, expressing appreciation for the Merdeka Curriculum (Nurliani et al., 2023). Teachers appreciate the Merdeka Curriculum because they recognize its capacity to provide students with opportunities for personalized learning, aligning with their characteristics, thus enhancing the likelihood of students attaining learning objectives effectively. Moreover, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes IT-integrated learning, enabling both teachers and students to stay abreast of advancements in science and technology (Horida Pasaribu et al., 2023).

While teachers, on the whole, hold a positive view of the Merdeka Curriculum, variations emerge in their perceptions when delving deeper into their readiness regarding planning, implementing learning, and evaluation. The subsequent discussion elaborates on teachers’ perceptions of their preparedness in these aspects concerning the Merdeka Curriculum.

Challenges in Planning

In the prior curriculum, teachers engaged in learning planning by creating lesson plans. However, with the advent of the Merdeka Curriculum, the obligation for teachers to formulate RPPs (Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran or Lesson Implementation

Plans) has been replaced, and teachers are now mandated to utilize modules as substitutes for RPPs. Among the various alterations introduced in the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers encounter challenges, particularly in comprehending the shift from lesson plans to instructional modules (Apriatni et al., 2023; Dani & Nurlizawati, 2023; Lesilolo, 2022). Additionally, there is a scarcity of references guiding the development of teaching modules, adding complexity to teachers' understanding of the essential elements to be incorporated into these modules. Despite modifications to the format and the streamlining of lesson plans, some teachers perceive these changes as complicating their responsibilities. Teachers grapple with the challenge of determining the significance of each piece of content, as they consider all material to be equally important (Lesilolo, 2022). Notably, the Ministry of Education and Culture has preemptively addressed this issue by furnishing teaching modules. This provision assists teachers who may not yet be adept at developing their teaching modules, enabling them to utilize the modules provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Nonetheless, it's important to note that not all teachers hold negative views regarding their preparedness for planning learning; there are also findings from other research indicating that some teachers already possess positive perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum. Certain teachers expressed readiness to develop teaching modules for the Merdeka Curriculum, asserting that the elements required in the Merdeka Curriculum learning plan were not significantly different from those in the 2013 Curriculum (Anggaira, 2023; Ndari et al., 2023; Dukalang, 2021; Nathasia & Abadi, 2022).

Challenges in the Implementation of Learning

As indicated by several studies, teacher readiness in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum falls within the category of sufficiency (Apriatni et al., 2023; Deta, 2023; Hamdi et al., 2022). The initial lack of detailed

explanations during the commencement of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation posed challenges for teachers, contributing to some difficulty in execution (Hulu et al., 2023; Putra, 2022; Susilowati, 2022). Another factor contributing to teachers' readiness being assessed as only sufficient is the ongoing need for improvement in their pedagogical skills, particularly in understanding the constructivist learning theory and applying technology in teaching (Hamdi et al., 2022; Hulu et al., 2023; Nurkholida et al., 2023). Nevertheless, this situation is consistent with the previous curriculum, as the Merdeka Curriculum demands creativity from teachers in determining suitable teaching models, methods, and techniques that align with the characteristics of teaching materials, fostering effective learning (Ahsani, 2023; Gunawan, 2022; Nathasia & Abadi, 2022; Nurulaeni & Rahma, 2022; Samsudduha, 2023; Vica, 2023).

Moreover, in its classroom application, teachers perceive that the learning activities in the Merdeka Curriculum differ from those in the previous curriculum. This curriculum necessitates a focus on individual student distinctions during learning, presenting teachers with the challenging responsibility of tailoring learning experiences to each student's character. Teachers posit that this form of learning implementation is beneficial as it facilitates active participation for each student. However, individualized learning approaches occasionally lead to unmet learning objectives due to variations in students' learning styles (Lesilolo, 2022). One strategy employed by teachers to implement differentiated learning is through product-based learning. In this approach, teachers devise tasks that involve creating diverse products, allowing each student to select a product aligned with their interests. However, the practical implementation of product-based differentiated learning faces challenges, particularly concerning time constraints. Additionally, there are instances where most students opt to develop the same product, thereby undermining the essence of

differentiated learning (Chotimah & Alwiyah, 2023).

Challenges in the Implementation of the Assessment

Multiple research findings on teacher preparedness for assessments within the Merdeka Curriculum indicate that teachers are also unprepared to conduct authentic assessments in this curriculum due to a lack of clear communication regarding the assessment implementation (Apriatni et al., 2023; Minarti et al., 2022). One of the challenges faced by teachers in administering assessments in the Merdeka Curriculum is the struggle with completing assessment forms that deviate from the formats they are accustomed to using (Samsudduha, 2023). Within the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers are not solely tasked with conducting authentic assessments but are also mandated to perform diagnostic assessments at the onset of learning to gauge students' initial capabilities. This allows teachers to tailor learning experiences according to the student's initial proficiency levels. However, research findings indicate that teachers are not accustomed to conducting these diagnostic assessments (Deta, 2023; Harianto, 2023).

Conversely, when considering the preparations made by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud), an institution responsible for overseeing the implementation of this curriculum, numerous guidebooks for authentic assessment implementation are available. In the Merdeka Curriculum, an example is the "Periodic Cognitive Diagnostic Assessment Pocket Book," which has been published by the Center for Study and Learning, R&D, and Bookkeeping Agency of the Ministry of Education and Culture since 2020. Despite the existence of such resources, potential deficiencies may still exist in terms of teachers' access to guidebooks on implementing assessments in the Merdeka Curriculum.

Some teachers engaged in the assessment process within the Merdeka

Curriculum have mentioned that the assessment outcomes provided by teachers may occasionally diverge from the expectations of students' parents regarding assessments. For instance, parents often anticipate assessments solely in numerical form, whereas according to the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers furnish assessments not only as numerical grades but also as descriptive evaluations of students' work results. This is evident in portfolio assessments, which are designed not only to gauge student achievement but also to observe the process and progression of students throughout their learning journey (Lesilolo, 2022).

Teachers' Views on the Advantages of the Merdeka Curriculum

While the overall readiness of teachers to implement the Merdeka curriculum is generally deemed sufficient, several research findings indicate that teachers recognize various benefits associated with the Merdeka Curriculum, including:

Advancement of Individualized Learning

Following the Merdeka Curriculum, Merdeka learning implies that students have the freedom to pursue education based on their interests and talents. Through this form of differentiated learning, both educators and students can unleash and cultivate their potential (Pasaribu et al., 2023).

Merdeka Curriculum Emphasizes Core Content

According to teachers, directing attention to essential material creates opportunities for a more concentrated focus on the learning process. This enables teachers to concentrate on monitoring each student's progress, facilitating the implementation of a learning approach that accommodates individual differences (Hardianto et al., 2023; Mayasari et al., 2023).

Designated time is allocated for the development of soft skills and an initiative to fortify the Pancasila student profile. A distinctive feature of the Merdeka Curriculum

is the implementation of a project aimed at enhancing students' Pancasila profile, known as P5. In this process, P5 is allotted dedicated study hours separate from regular subjects, ensuring a more concentrated and focused implementation. Additionally, P5 employs project-based learning methodologies, as outlined in various sources (Hardianto et al., 2023; Ilhamsyah et al., 2023; Mayasari et al., 2023).

Autonomy for Schools in Crafting Their Operational Curriculum

The Merdeka Curriculum grants educational institutions the flexibility to formulate their operational curriculum, taking into account the local context and content. According to teachers, this autonomy has a positive impact. Not only does it allow schools to tailor their operational curriculum based on input and the available facilities and infrastructure, but it also empowers teachers to design their own learning plans or teaching tools. This design process considers students' abilities, as indicated by the results of diagnostic tests, without overlooking the predetermined Competence Standards set by the ministry (Firdaus et al., 2023; Mayasari et al., 2023; Nathasia & Abadi, 2022).

Teachers' Views on the Drawbacks of the Merdeka Curriculum

Despite the numerous advantages of the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers highlight several weaknesses. Various research findings indicate that the Merdeka Curriculum exhibits a lack of continuity between different educational levels. For instance, at the elementary school level, students are accustomed to the integrated Natural Sciences and Social Sciences (IPAS) subject, where both disciplines are combined. In contrast, at the high school level, the science and social studies subjects are delineated more specifically, requiring students to adapt to distinct presentations of scientific and social studies materials (Hulu et al., 2023; Ihsan, 2022).

Studies examining the adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum in Vocational Schools indicate a heightened emphasis on skills. As a result, the Merdeka Curriculum elevates the allocation of subjects in Vocational Schools from 60% to 70%. While this shift is perceived as advantageous, facilitating more direct application of skills in the professional sphere, it does come with a trade-off. The increased focus on skills might lead to a deficiency in general knowledge among students (Hulu et al., 2023).

Teachers' Perspectives on Common Challenges in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and Strategies for Addressing Them

A prevalent challenge faced by teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum pertains to limited facilities and infrastructure, particularly those related to information technology (IT) that are crucial for supporting the learning process, despite IT being an integral component of the Merdeka Curriculum itself (Deta, 2023; Harianto, 2023; Sriwulandari et al., 2023; Vica, 2023). To surmount these challenges, schools can take various measures, such as: 1) establishing a technology-based educational ecosystem, fostering collaboration among stakeholders, and incorporating technological innovation as a policy framework and cornerstone for the learning process.

As previously discussed, teachers' perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum exhibit variations, contingent on the specific aspects under consideration. This diversity in perception can be attributed to several factors, including the teacher's experience, educational background, training, and certification status (Gusnandy et al., 2023; Indahwati et al., 2023). Generally, teachers who have undergone training tend to hold more favorable perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum compared to their counterparts who haven't participated in such training. Educational attainment also appears to play a role, as teachers with higher levels of education

tend to adapt to and embrace curriculum changes more readily than those with minimal education. Similarly, teacher certification status demonstrates a correlation, with certified teachers displaying a proclivity to accept curriculum changes more readily than their non-certified counterparts.

Conclusion

Since 2022, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has been progressively introduced across all levels of formal education in Indonesia. Overall, A positive view contributes significantly to giving benefits by fostering an open mindset, enhancing adaptability, and improving performance. Teachers who maintain a positive outlook on new frameworks, such as the Merdeka Curriculum, are more likely to appreciate its advantages and actively engage in its implementation. This optimistic approach helps them focus on the curriculum's potential to improve personalized learning, encourage the development of both hard and soft skills, and better prepare students for future challenges. Additionally, a positive mindset fosters a supportive and encouraging learning environment, which enhances student motivation and outcomes. However, when examining teachers' perceptions of their readiness in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, it becomes evident that their readiness is categorized as only sufficient. Teachers express a need to augment their understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum to effectively implement it. A common challenge faced by teachers in executing the Merdeka Curriculum is associated with the integration of information technology (IT) into the learning process. In this research, there are still several weaknesses in using this method, such as first, this research is still general and does not specifically discuss one area or one ability. Secondly, researchers did not focus on teachers in just one subject. It is hoped that future researchers can develop some of these shortcomings and be more specific.

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