Perceptions of Indonesian teachers on the implementation of “Merdeka” Curriculum

Adelia Alfama Zamista a *, Pipi Deswita b

UIN Imam Bonjol Padang. Jl. Prof. M. Yunus, Lubuh Lintah, Padang, Sumatera Barat, Indonesia

a adelia.zamista@uinib.ac.id; b pipideswita@uinib.ac.id

* Corresponding Author.

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Abstract: The Merdeka Curriculum is a curriculum that has just been widely implemented in Indonesia as a substitute for the 2013 Curriculum. This curriculum aims to improve the quality of learning implementation in Indonesia. The teacher is always the spearhead of a curriculum. Because teachers design learning and interact directly with students. This study aims to see how teachers perceive the Independent Curriculum, which is a new curriculum in Indonesia. The research method used is a systematic literature review. The results of the literature review show that in general teachers have a positive perception of the Independent Curriculum, because teachers are aware of the potential of the Independent Curriculum in improving the quality of learning. But furthermore, for teacher readiness to apply the Independent Curriculum, such as planning, implementing learning, and conducting assessments, it turns out that the teacher’s perception is still in the sufficient category. Teachers still need various trainings to improve their knowledge and skills in implementing the Independent Curriculum.

Keywords: Curriculum, Independent Curriculum, Teacher Perceptions


INTRODUCTION

Originally, the curriculum was a term used in the world of sports which was defined as the distance a runner had to travel starting from start until finish to get a medal (Ruhimat, 2011). Education field later adapted this understanding. The education curriculum is interpreted as several subjects that must be followed by students from the beginning to the end of the learning program to receive a diploma. Currently, the understanding of the curriculum has become broader, not only limited to subjects but also includes all learning experiences experienced by students that can influence the development of these students (Alberty & Weber, 1979; Bullough Jr, 1976; Dewey, 2013; Ruhimat, 2011). Nowadays, the curriculum is interpreted as a reference in the implementation of education to achieve the goals that have been set.

The curriculum is dynamic. Take for example in Indonesia, since Indonesia's independence there have been changes to the curriculum many times. The change of curriculum is seen as a necessity because the curriculum needs to adapt to technological developments. Changing times and technological developments require humans to adapt and have certain skills.

At present one of the improvements to the Curriculum in Indonesia is the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum to replace the 2013 Curriculum. The main goal of Merdeka Curriculum is to improve the quality of learning, especially the recovery from the crisis experienced
during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Improving the quality of learning in the Merdeka Curriculum is carried out in the following ways: (1) emphasizing learning according to students' interests and talents, (2) learning that focuses on essential material, and (3) providing flexibility to educational units to design operational curricula according to school capabilities.

In implementing the curriculum the teacher is the spearhead. The teacher is the executor in the field of translating and implementing the curriculum, so that the teacher has an important role in compiling quality learning activities in accordance with the demands of the curriculum (Hadi & Andrian, 2018). The success of the teacher in designing learning activities will greatly determine the success of students. There is even a presumption that the low ability of students is caused by the ability of teachers who are not able yet to translate and apply the curriculum (Goh et al., 2020). Therefore it is necessary to study how teachers perceive the Merdeka Curriculum, which has just entered its second year of implementation in Indonesia. Furthermore knowing whether teachers have positive or negative perceptions of the Independent Curriculum, followed by digging up information about the difficulties faced by teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, can provide information to those who have the authority to take the necessary follow-up so that the future implementation of the Independent Curriculum is better. Generally this article will examine the perceptions of Indonesian senior high schools teachers towards the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

METHODS

This research is a literature study with systematic literature review (SLR) method. SLR is a review activity that is carried out systematically to critically examine the results of previous studies (Rother, 2007; Xiao & Watson, 2019). There are six stages carried out in this study, the stages of which are shown in Figure 1 and the details of each stage are as follows (Triandini et al., 2019):

Planning (Determining the Object of Research)

The planning stage is the initial stage of the research, which includes the process of determining the object of research. In this study, the object of research was the Merdeka Curriculum and how the perceptions of teachers, especially high school teachers, regarding the implementation of the curriculum. Furthermore, after the research object is clear, it is continued by compiling research questions (RQ). The RQ in this study is as follows:

RQ1: How is the Merdeka Curriculum implemented at the senior high school?
RQ2: How do high school teachers perceive the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum?

These questions will then be answered through a literature study.

Literature Search

Literature search is a process of finding articles that are relevant to the research topic. In this study, a literature search was carried out with the help of an application called publish or perish. The search was carried out by entering keywords that match the research problem. The keywords included during the literature search process were: Merdeka curriculum, teacher perceptions, and senior high school. Search results using publish or perish with these three keywords obtained 920 related articles.

Assessment of Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

This third step is carried out by setting certain criteria for the best articles to be analyzed further. In this study, there are two criteria used, namely: (1) Articles are journal articles
published in the 2022-2023 when the Merdeka Curriculum was implemented in Indonesia; (2) The article discusses the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum at the senior high school level.

![Figure 1. Prism Table of SLR Stages](image1)

![Figure 2. Literature Search Results with Publish or Perish](image2)
Quality Assessment

This fourth step is a process to check whether the articles resulting from the literature search process contain the desired data in accordance with the predetermined RQ. The criteria used in quality assessment are as follows:

QA1: Does the journal article contain information about implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at the senior high school level?

QA2: Does the journal article contain information about how teachers respond or perceive the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum?

Data Collection

Based on the results of the quality assessment, it can be determined which journal articles need further study. Reading and analyzing the contents of these articles constitutes the data collection process.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of answering research questions based on the collected literature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Results of a Literature Search, Criteria Assessment, and Quality Assessment

It was previously explained that based on the results of a literature search using publish or perish with the keywords Merdeka curriculum, teacher perceptions, and senior high school found 920 related articles. All of the search results articles were then assessed with criteria. The criteria are (1) looking at whether the articles were published in the 2022-2023 and (2) examining the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in schools. Based on the assessment of the criteria found 49 articles that match the criteria.

Next, a quality assessment is carried out. Referring to the two questions on quality assessment, an excerpt of the quality assessment results is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Quality assessment results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Article Title</th>
<th>Publication Year</th>
<th>QA1</th>
<th>QA2</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Adaptasi Guru Sosiologi Sekolah Penggerak di Kota Padang Terhadap Kulikulum Merdeka”</td>
<td>2023</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writer: Annisa Rahma Dani, Nurlizawati Nurlizawati</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka dalam Meningskatkan Kompetensi Profesionalisme Guru di SMKS 2 Tamaniswa Pematangsiantar”</td>
<td>2023</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writer: Endang Pujiarti, Amiruddin Amiruddin, Ratna Sari, Friska Deliana Purba, Kartika Dewi Ahmadi, Sri Mulya</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Symbol description:

V = if the article contains the requested information on the quality assessment
- = if article does not contains the requested information on the quality assessment
√ = journal articles will be continued for analysis
x = journal articles are not analyzed
Of the 49 articles subject to quality assessment, 31 articles met the criteria for quality assessment. So that these 31 articles will be further analyzed to answer research questions.

**Discussion**

Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the SMA level

The Merdeka Curriculum is the curriculum currently used in Indonesia which replaces the previous curriculum, the 2013 Curriculum. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum since 2022 is based on the Decree (SK) of the Head of the Standards, Curriculum and Education Assessment Agency (BSKAP) Number 044/H/KR/2022 dated 12 July 2022. Based on the Decree, it is known that 140 thousand formal education units in Indonesia have started implementing the Independent Curriculum in the 2022/2023 academic year.

Replacing the 2013 Curriculum, there are several fundamental differences between the Merdeka Curriculum and the 2013 Curriculum, while these differences are as follows: (1) the term core competence (KI) in the 2013 curriculum changes to learning outcomes (CP), (2) basic competence (KD) which is a description of KI in the 2013 Curriculum, in the independent curriculum the description of CP is directly in the form of learning objectives, (3) In the Merdeka Curriculum it does not use the term learning syllabus but the flow of learning objectives (ATP) which is a specialization of learning objectives, (4) RPP changed to teaching modules, (5) strengthening character or behavior changed to strengthening student profiles of Pancasila, (6) distribution of material or competencies in the 2013 Curriculum was based on class level, whereas in the Merdeka Curriculum it was based on phases (phases A – F), (7) the minimum completeness criteria (KKM) in the 2013 Curriculum was replaced with the term learning objectives achievement criteria (KKTP) (Dani & Nurlizawati, 2023; Nathasia & Abadi, 2022).

In the aspect of implementing the assessment, both the Merdeka Curriculum and the 2013 Curriculum emphasize the application of authentic assessments. However, there are still some differences regarding the implementation of assessments in the two curricula. Particularly in the Merdeka Curriculum, a diagnostic assessment is implemented. Diagnostic assessment is carried out at the beginning of the learning process, which is usually done at the beginning when starting new material. This assessment aims to determine the basic abilities of students. By knowing the basic abilities of students, the teacher can make a learning design that is in accordance with the level of ability of the students, so that the learning that is carried out is not classical learning, but is a process that takes into account individual differences (Kemdikbud, 2020; UNY, 2023).

Furthermore, the Merdeka Curriculum does not only focus on learning outcomes for each subject but also focuses on strengthening students profile of Pancasila which has implications for improving the quality of education, improving student skills, and forming characters such as mutual cooperation behavior, independence, increasing creativity, critical thinking, and forming students’ attitudes of diversity (Indahwati et al., 2023). To strengthen the student profile of Pancasila, special time allocations are provided outside class hours, also directed to be carried out with a project-based learning model. The activities to strengthen the students profile of Pancasila also known as the P5 (Project of Strengthening Pancasila Student Profiles).

Since the beginning, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has been accompanied by programs that can support the successful implementation of that Curriculum. One of them is the existence of a “guru penggerak” program and an independent learning platform that can be assessed on the website https://guru.kemdikbud.go.id/. In the “guru penggerak” program, teachers need to take part in a selection before being able to join as a participant of “guru penggerak”, while in the independent learning platform, teachers can access and conduct train-
ing privately. To take part in online training activities via platform “Merdeka Mengajar” teachers must create an account belajar.id first. As for this account, teachers can have it by registering through the school operator. The existence of this curriculum training is expected to increase teacher confidence in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum (Harianto, 2023; Silvie, 2023; Wati & Jailani, 2016)

Nearly 2 years the Merdeka Curriculum was implemented with all its supporting programs, such as the “guru penggerak” program, the existence of an independent teaching platform that can be accessed online, as well as various in house training which is expected to make it easier for teachers to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. However, some research results still show that not all teachers have the opportunity to attend training related to preparing for the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Dani & Nurlizawati, 2023; Hulu et al., 2023; Ilhamsyah et al., 2023; Loilatu et al., 2022; Minarti et al., 2022; Rawi et al., 2023; Silvie, 2023). Apart from not having the opportunity to take part in various training related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, it turns out that teachers have low motivation in developing themselves optimally to make the Merdeka Curriculum successful (Hulu et al., 2023).

Teachers’ Perceptions of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

Based on several studies, teachers’ perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum are in the positive category (Anggaira, 2023; Fauziyah, 2023; Hardianto et al., 2023; Indahwati et al., 2023; Mayasari et al., 2023; Nadia, 2022; Salsabila & Wusqo, 2022; Siregar, 2022). As stated in Anggaira’s research results, that high school level English teachers in Metro Lampung City have a good perception of the Independent Curriculum (Anggaira, 2023). The same thing was also conveyed by Mayasari and Rahmatullah, they research result stated that teachers at SMA Negeri 4 Banjarmasin have a positive perception and appreciate the Merdeka Curriculum (Mayasari et al., 2023). Appreciation for the Merdeka Curriculum is given by the teacher because the teacher realizes that the Independent Curriculum provides opportunities for students to take part in learning according to their characteristics, as the result this condition will increase the opportunity for learning objectives to be achieved by students properly. The Merdeka Curriculum also emphasizes learning that utilizes IT, it allows both teachers and students to keep abreast of science and technology developments (Mayasari et al., 2023).

Although in general teachers appreciate the Merdeka Curriculum, the perceptions of teachers are different when examining further about teacher readiness in planning, learning and evaluating. The following is an explanation of the teacher’s perception of readiness in planning, implementing learning, and evaluating the Merdeka Curriculum.

Readiness in Planning

In the previous curriculum, lesson planning was carried out by the teacher by making lesson plans. Meanwhile, in the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers are no longer required to make lesson plans, but are required to use modules as lesson plans. Of the several changes that have occurred in the Merdeka Curriculum, one of the teacher’s difficulties is that teachers do not understand well about the changes from lesson plans to teaching modules (Apriatni et al., 2023; Dani & Nurlizawati, 2023; Lesilolo, 2022). References regarding the development of teaching modules are also still very limited, making it difficult for teachers to know what elements must be included in teaching modules. Even with changes to the format and simplification of lesson plans, there are teachers who think that this makes it difficult for teachers. Teachers find it difficult to choose which material is essential because according to the teacher all material is important (Lesilolo, 2022). Whereas, in fact the Ministry of Education and Culture has anticipated this problem by providing teaching modules, so that teachers who have not been
able to develop their own teaching modules can use the teaching modules provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

However, not all teachers express negative perceptions about readiness in planning learning, there are also other research results which show that teachers already have a good perception of the Merdeka Curriculum. Several teachers stated that they were ready to develop teaching modules for the Merdeka Curriculum, because according to the teachers, the elements that must be included in the learning plans in the Merdeka Curriculum were not much different from the 2013 Curriculum (Anggaira, 2023; Dukalang, 2021; Nathasia & Abadi, 2022; Sriwulandari et al., 2023).

Readiness in the Implementation of Learning

According to several studies, the readiness of teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is in the sufficient category (Apriatni et al., 2023; Deta, 2023; Hamdi et al., 2022). This is because at the beginning of the Merdeka Curriculum was implemented, it did not have a detailed explanation, so the teachers had quite a hard time implementing this Curriculum (Hulu et al., 2023; Putra, 2022; Susilowati, 2022). Another reason why the teacher’s readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum is only in the sufficient category because teachers still need to improve their pedagogical abilities, especially related to understanding constructivism learning theory and also skills in applying technology in learning (Hamdi et al., 2022; Hulu et al., 2023; Nurkholidha et al., 2023). However, it is no different from the previous curricula, in the Merdeka Curriculum it demands teacher creativity in determining models, methods and teaching techniques that are in accordance with the characteristics of teaching materials so that effective learning can be carried out (Ahsani, 2023; Gunawan, 2022; Nathasia & Abadi, 2022; Nurulaeni & Rahma, 2022; Samsudduha, 2023; Vica, 2023).

Furthermore, in its implementation in class, the learning activities in the Merdeka Curriculum are felt by the teacher to be different from the previous curriculum, this curriculum requires that learning pays attention to individual student differences so that the teacher has a tough task to design learning according to each student’s character. The implementation of learning like this according to the teacher is good, because it facilitates every student to be able to follow the learning well, but sometimes because each student learns in their own way makes the learning objectives that have been set not achieved (Lesilolo, 2022). One way for teachers to implement differentiated learning is to apply product-based learning. Where the teacher designs learning with the task of making different products, each student is asked to choose a product to be made according to student interests. However, it turns out that in practice, product-based differentiation learning is still constrained by limited time, besides that sometimes the majority of students choose to develop the same product so that the essence of differentiation learning is not carried out (Chotimah & Alwiyah, 2023).

Readiness in the Implementation of the Assessment

Some research results about teacher’s readiness to carry out assessments in the Merdeka curriculum state that teachers are also not ready to carry out authentic assessments in the Merdeka Curriculum, because there is no clear socialization regarding the implementation of the assessment (Apriatni et al., 2023; Minarti et al., 2022). One of the difficulties experienced by the teacher in carrying out the Merdeka Curriculum assessment is that it is difficult for the teacher to fill out the assessment form which has a different format from what teachers usually use (Samsudduha, 2023).

In the Merdeka Curriculum teachers are not only required to carry out authentic assessments, but also diagnostic assessments at the beginning of learning to determine students’
initial abilities. So that the teacher can design learning according to the initial ability level of
the student. And based on the research results it is known that teachers are not used to doing
this diagnostic assessment (Deta, 2023; Harianto, 2023)

On the other hand, when referring to the preparation of the ministry of education and
culture (Kemendikbud) itself as one of the institutions responsible for regulating the imple-
mentation of this curriculum, in fact there have been many guidebooks on the application of
authentic assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum, for example, there is the "Periodic Cognitive
Diagnosis Assessment Pocket Book" issued by the Assessment and Learning Center of the
Ministry of Education and Culture's Research and Development Agency and Bookkeeping since
2020. However, there may still be a lack of access for teachers to obtain guidebooks regarding
the implementation of assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum.

Some teachers who have carried out the assessment process in the Merdeka Curriculum
stated that the results of the assessment that the teacher gave were sometimes not in
accordance with the expectations of students' parents regarding assessment. For example,
parents of students tend to hope that the assessment will only be in the form of numbers, while
the current teacher according to the Merdeka Curriculum is not only in give
the assessment
result in the form of numbers but  also provide assessments in the form of descriptions of work
results, for example in portfolio assessment which aims not to see student success but to see
the process and development of students during learning (Lesilolo, 2022).

In addition to looking at teachers' percepti
ons of their readiness to implement the Merdeka
Curriculum, this article also examines teachers’ perceptions of the strengths, weaknesses, and
constraints of teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum which will be described as
follows:

Teachers’ Perceptions of the Advantages of the Merdeka Curriculum

Although in terms of teacher readiness in implementing the independent curriculum in
general it can be categorized as sufficient, if referring to the teacher's perception of the
advantages of the Merdeka Curriculum, several research results show that teachers agree that
the Merdeka Curriculum has various advantages including:

The Promotion of Differentiated Learning

Independent learning according to the Merdeka Curriculum means that students can learn
according to their interests and talents. Through this differentiated learning both teachers and
students will be able to develop their potential (Pasaribu et al., 2023)

The Merdeka Curriculum Focuses on Essential Material

Focusing on essential material according to the teacher can give the teacher the opportunity
to pay more attention to the learning process, the teacher can focus on the progress of each
student's so that it supports the implementation of learning that refers to individual differences
(Hardianto et al., 2023; Mayasari et al., 2023).

There are Special Study Hours for the Development of Soft Skills and Projects to Strengthen
the Students Profile of Pancasila

One of the main characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum is the existence of a project to
strengthen the students profile of Pancasila (P5), and in practice this P5 has its own study hours
outside of subjects so that the implementation is more focused. P5 is also carried out by project
based learning(DITPSD Kemdikbud, 2022; Hardianto et al., 2023; Ilhamsyah et al., 2023;
Mayasari et al., 2023).
Flexibility for Schools to Design their Own School Operational Curriculum

The Merdeka Curriculum also gives freedom to educational units to develop their own operational curricula referring to the local context and content. The existence of this freedom, according to teachers, has a positive impact because in addition to schools being able to develop their own operational curricula based on the inputs and facilities and infrastructure available at schools, teachers can also develop their own lesson plans or teaching devices referring to students' abilities which can be seen from the results of diagnostic tests without ignoring the CP that has been set by the ministry (Firdaus et al., 2023; Mayasari et al., 2023; Nathasia & Abadi, 2022).

Teachers' Perceptions of the Weaknesses of the Merdeka Curriculum

According to the teacher, although the Merdeka Curriculum has many advantages, there are also some weaknesses. Some research results show that in the Merdeka Curriculum there are discontinuities between one level and the next. For example, at the elementary school level, students are familiar with the subject of Natural and Social Sciences (IPAS), where natural sciences and social sciences are made into one subject. Meanwhile, at the high school level, subjects in natural sciences and social sciences are made more specific, so that students need to adapt to the form of presentation of material in the natural sciences and social sciences (Hulu et al., 2023; Ihsan, 2022).

Research on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in vocational schools also shows that the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes skills, so that the Merdeka Curriculum increases the allocation for vocational subjects, which was originally 60% to 70%. Even though this is seen as having advantages, because by doing so vocational schools really prepare students to have skills that can be directly applied in the world of work, on the other hand this makes students lack general knowledge (Hulu et al., 2023).

Teachers' Perceptions of Common Obstacles in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and how to Overcome Them

Common obstacles experienced by teachers related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum are limited facilities and infrastructure, especially infrastructure related to information technology (IT) that supports the implementation of learning, while IT itself is an integral part of the Independent Curriculum (Deta, 2023; Harianto, 2023; Sriwulandari et al., 2023; Vica, 2023). To overcome this obstacle, the things that schools can do are: 1) build a technology-based education ecosystem, carry out cross-stakeholder collaboration, and make technological innovation a policy reference and basis in the learning process.

It has been described above that the teacher’s perception of the Merdeka Curriculum varies, depending on the aspects assessed by the teacher. This difference in perception can be caused by various factors, including: teacher teaching experience, teacher education, teacher training, and teacher certification (Gusnandy et al., 2023; Indahwati et al., 2023). Teachers who have attended training generally have a better perception of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum than teachers who have not attended training. The level of teacher education also seems to have an effect, teachers with higher levels of education tend to adapt more easily and accept curriculum changes compared to teachers with a minimum education. Likewise with teacher certification status, certified teachers also show a tendency to accept curriculum changes better than teachers who are not certified.
CONCLUSION

Since 2022 the Merdeka Curriculum has been implemented in stages at every level of formal schools in Indonesia. In general, teachers at the senior high school level have a positive perception of the Merdeka curriculum, because teachers are aware of the essence of the Merdeka curriculum which aims to improve the quality of education in Indonesia. However, if referring to the teacher's perception of their individual readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum, it turns out that the teacher's perception is only in the sufficient category. High school teachers still feel the need to increase their knowledge about the Merdeka Curriculum in order to be able to apply the Merdeka Curriculum properly. The general obstacles faced by teachers when implementing the Merdeka Curriculum are related to the use of IT in learning.

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