



Analysis of Teachers' Understanding of Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Primary Schools

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ABSTRACT

Since its launch in 2021, the Merdeka Curriculum has not been adopted in all schools. Schools are still allowed to consider the readiness of teachers, facilities, and infrastructure to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. This research aims to analyze elementary school teachers' understanding of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Research data was obtained through interviews and observations with second-grade teachers in six different schools. Interview and observation data are tabulated into assessment indicators. The research results showed that teachers have a good understanding of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. However, teachers have not received adequate support from schools to increase their competence in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. This limited support does not have a major impact on learning in classes that have implemented the Merdeka Curriculum because teachers have very good basic competencies in teaching. Apart from that, teachers have good skills in operating multimedia, which helps them to implement and learn independently regarding the Merdeka Curriculum. It can be concluded that implementing a Merdeka Curriculum does not only rely on teacher competence but also requires support from school facilities and infrastructure to make it more optimal.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a process of change that seeks to educate the nation's children. Quality education makes the Indonesian generation capable compete in global life (Rosidah et al., 2021; Jayawardana et al., 2022; Rizka & Pamungkas, 2023). Therefore, education in Indonesia needs to be taken seriously, because it will become our advantage compared to other countries. Education in Indonesia is all education that is carried out both structured and unstructured. To advance education in Indonesia, the government often replaces supporting programs with level changes, among others change curriculum.

The issue of educational unit curricula always arises when there is a change in curriculum and a change in the highest policy maker in the field of education, namely the minister of education (Suryani et al., 2023). Currently, in Indonesia a new curriculum implementation policy is being implemented, namely the Merdeka Curriculum. Issues related to the Merdeka Curriculum are still the subject of discussion and research from various academic circles because it was only been launched two years after the Covid-19 endemic in Indonesia. The curriculum change policy is projected to have a positive impact on the quality of education in Indonesia. However, too frequent curriculum changes intervals confuse teachers because they have to understand the new curriculum. In the field, there are still many teachers who experience difficulties in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, especially if teachers do not have adequate skills in operating digital media (Annisa Alfath et al., 2022; Ningrum & Suryani, 2022). However, teachers must understand the context of the curriculum used to implement it optimally (Putri & Handayani, 2021; Nasution, 2022). Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum philosophy will help them in designing teaching materials and implementing appropriate learning strategies.

Much research has been carried out regarding the Merdeka Curriculum, but this research focuses on three issues, including examining the role of teachers and school principals in the Merdeka Curriculum, developing teaching modules, and analyzing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. These three research issues can be categorized into the process of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Research conducted Hamdi et al. (2020) shows that the Merdeka Curriculum requires teachers to have good pedagogical competence. This pedagogical competency includes several things, including the teacher must understanding of constructivist learning theory, the teacher must ability to determine learning strategies to support the Pancasila profile project, and the teacher's ability to carry out assessments in learning. Furthermore, research conducted (Ardianti & Amalia, 2022) seeks to explore the role of teachers and school principals regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. His research shows that readiness is needed from school components, especially teachers and principals, to understand the planning process and learning process in the Merdeka Curriculum. Apart from that, teachers must have appropriate strategies in implementing the project to strengthen the Pancasila student profile. Other research shows that there are different learning principles in the Merdeka Curriculum, namely that learning is planned with students and the process is student-centered (Ramadina, 2021). Teachers must understand learning models that can activate the learning process and are student-centered (Arviansyah & Shagena, 2022; Fitriyah & Wardani, 2022; Suryani et al., 2023). Apart from that, teachers are also required to understand the concept of preparing Merdeka Curriculum teaching modules that are tailored to the needs and potential of students in the class (Cholilah et al., 2023; Maulinda, 2022; Rahmadayanti & Hartoyo, 2022).

Regarding the issue of the curriculum in Indonesia which frequently changes, the main key to successful implementation is the heavy responsibility of schools, especially teachers who

are the direct implementers. This is what we claim is missing from previous research trends regarding the Merdeka Curriculum, namely the understanding and ability of teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. We research this issue on the basis that no matter how good the program launched by the government will have no effect if the implementing unit does not have the understanding and basic competencies that support the success of the program. Teachers are the main instrument in the successful implementation of a Merdeka Curriculum, especially if they are equipped with adequate knowledge and understanding. Teachers must be able to translate in real terms the implicit and explicit goals in the Merdeka Curriculum in the learning process at school. Moreover, again, curriculum independence launched to repair the condition of education in Indonesia is considered a 'learning loss' that occurs during online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Merdeka, 2022). This shows that the curriculum must be capable answer challenge disappearance meaning education during the year pandemic.

This research aims to map teachers' understanding and abilities in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools. The teacher's understanding of a concept will be the difference in the implementation process. Teacher competency plays an important role in the success of educational programs in educational units, in general in Indonesia. This is what underlies the research we do at school. Changes to a program will be beneficial if each implementing component has adequate insight and a comprehensive understanding of the program being implemented. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration if teachers become the center of gravity in advancing and improving the world of education in Indonesia as a result of change drastic long-term learning pandemic.

2. METHODS

2.1. Research Design and Sample

The research uses a descriptive qualitative approach to produce the data needed regarding teacher competency in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. We implemented design Miles & Huberman's research consisted of four stages of research, including (i) data collection, (ii) data reduction, (iii) data presentation, and (iv) withdrawal conclusion.

2.2 Location

In our research, we determined six elementary schools from three different cities, namely Bandung, Bogor and Surakarta. School selection is based on several considerations, namely: (i) located in an urban area; (ii) have implemented the Merdeka Curriculum within 2 years; and (iii) have learning facilities that are not much different. The following criteria are short from schools visited (see **Table 1**).

Table 1. Criteria research location school.

School Code	Location	Type	IMC
1	Bandung	public school	2.5 years
2	Bandung	public school	2 years
3	Bogor	public school	2 years
4	Bogor	Private school	2.5 years
5	Surakarta	public school	2 years
6	Surakarta	private school	2 years

Note: IMC (Implementation Merdeka Curriculum)

Research data was obtained through current observation of learning taking place and interviews brief to six second-grade teachers. We group this data into an assessment scale

with a range of 1-5, which can be interpreted as meaning that the higher the number, the better the knowledge and understanding. The category is visualized in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Categories evaluation observation.

Mark	Category
5	Special
4	Very good
3	Good
2	Not enough
1	Bad

In general, there are several categories observed, namely 1) teacher competence in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and 2) school support to optimize the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. In our research, we used three observers who work as lecturers from two different universities. We display the data from the three observers in a bar chart which is the average result of the assessments. The average value obtained from the results evaluation of each observer is added and divided by the number of observers. We analyzed the data that emerged in the form of numbers to determine the teacher competency profile and school support for the success of the Merdeka Curriculum.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of observations and discussions carried out in six elementary schools obtained various information regarding teachers' understanding of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers have varying understandings about curriculum changes in educational units, especially the presence of a Merdeka Curriculum. The research data shown in **Figure 1** shows that teachers have sufficient competence to implement the Merdeka Curriculum in their schools. **Figure 1** is a visualization of research data from observations of teachers during classroom learning.



Figure 1. Basic teacher competencies for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

We need to remember that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in educational units nationally has only entered its second year there are still many schools that have just registered to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. This means that teachers can adapt well to new educational programs. These basic competencies are very important for teachers to be able to maximize educational programs launched by the government, especially the Merdeka

Curriculum. These basic competencies are related to the pedagogical competencies possessed by teachers in classroom learning activities (Alfath *et al.*, 2022; Hamdi *et al.*, 2022). Based on the data displayed, it can be seen that only one teacher in one school has a small score compared to other teachers. However, a score of 3 is still categorized as a medium score or the expected competency is still within the threshold.

Based on previous data, the qualified basic competencies of teachers show a correlation with the level of understanding regarding the Merdeka Curriculum. If you look more closely, two data (Figures 1 and 2) are the main components for teachers to be optimal in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The understanding in this data includes teacher knowledge about the concept of a Merdeka Curriculum and effective ways to implement it in the classroom.

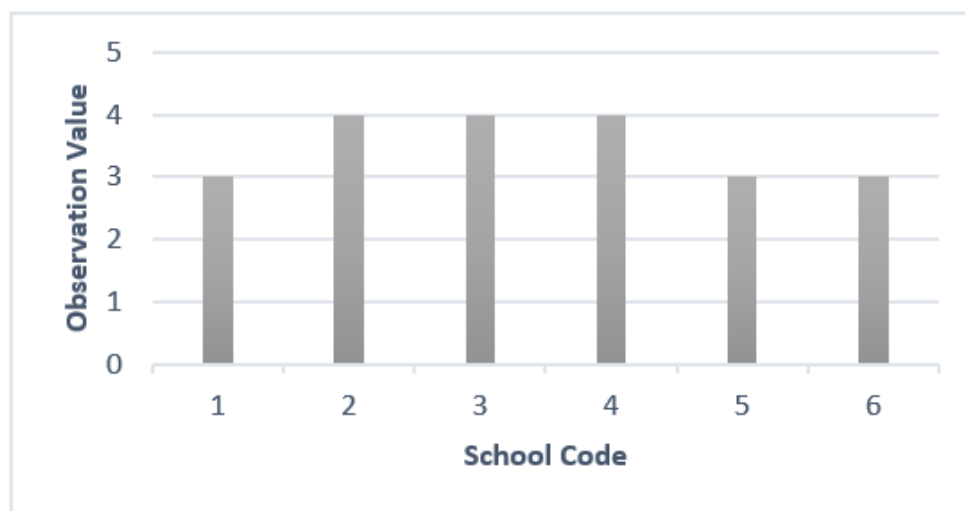


Figure 2. Teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Teachers are aware of several advantages that the Merdeka Curriculum has compared to the previous curriculum. The main thing that teachers realize is that the Merdeka Curriculum is by the terminology of the word independent, namely giving freedom to students to learn in class. Teachers also realized that they saw significant differences between classes that implemented the Merdeka Curriculum and classes that still used the 2013 curriculum. The fundamental difference was seen in the learning process which was more interactive and creative. This Merdeka Curriculum is more flexible and contemporary, so it is hoped that students will like this curriculum model (Jusuf & Sobari, 2022; Santoso *et al.*, 2024). It is flexible because it focuses on essential material and the development of student character and competence so that the main characteristics expected from this curriculum support the recovery of learning in Indonesia.

Another advantage of the Merdeka Curriculum that teachers realize is that there is a project to strengthen the Pancasila student profile, which was not available in the previous education unit curriculum. Pancasila student profile is very useful for introducing students to various positive things to become complete Indonesian people (Jannah *et al.*, 2022; Guru *et al.*, 2023; Suryani *et al.*, 2023). However, the success of the Pancasila student profile depends on the teacher's creativity in determining the learning process (Pertiwi *et al.*, 2022; Santoso *et al.*, 2024; Wiguna & Tristaningrat, 2022). Therefore, it is very important to have basic pedagogical competencies and a thorough understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum. Apart from that, in the Merdeka Curriculum, there is differentiated learning as a form of independent learning to maximize student potential (Gusteti & Neviyarni, 2022).

Differentiated learning is the flexibility provided to the teacher to set appropriate and appropriate learning with student abilities adapted to the local context and content (Aprima & Sari, 2022; Relevan et al., 2023). The data in **Figure 2** shows that teachers have an adequate understanding of the advantages of the Merdeka Curriculum, although no teachers received special marks.

Several advantages of the Merdeka Curriculum support teachers in providing innovative learning in the classroom. However, a number of these advantages will be disrupted if teachers do not have adequate competence in operating technological media, for example, laptops. This is based on the implementation of a Merdeka Curriculum dominated by the use of technology, such as the independent teaching platform which must be accessed on a web basis. We observed the teacher's ability to operate laptops and other technological media when learning took place. The results are visualized in **Figure 3**.

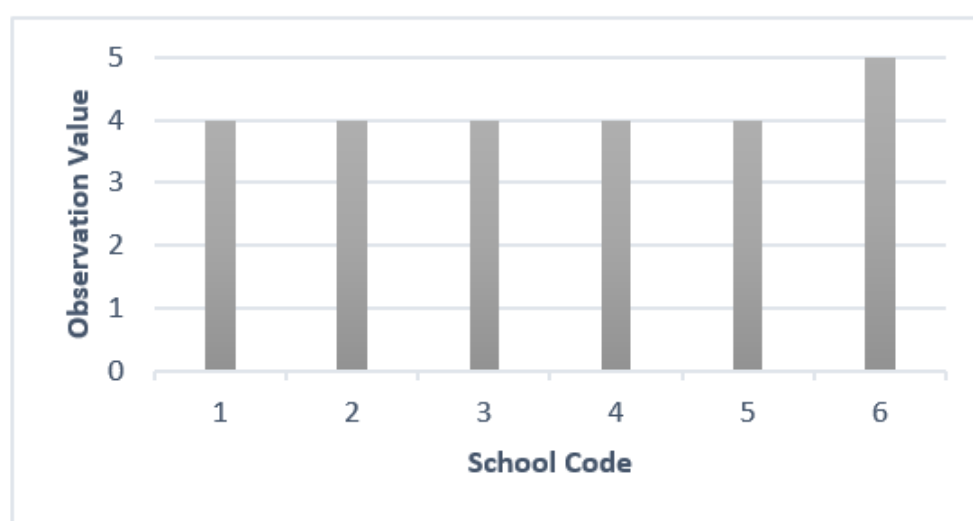


Figure 3. Teacher's ability to operate technology media.

The data shown in **Figure 3** shows that teachers have good abilities in operating technological media. This ability to operate is not interpreted as a basic ability, just being able to turn on the laptop, open office applications, etc. This technological capability is very useful for teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum because learning must be supported by technological media (Guru et al., 2023; Sylvia et al., 2023). The ability to operate technological media is also very beneficial for individual teachers (Jannah et al., 2022) because they can learn independently about the Merdeka Curriculum through the teaching platform. It is common knowledge that the Merdeka Curriculum requires teachers to be responsive to technological advances. This is also considered a positive value of implementing a Merdeka Curriculum in schools because it triggers teachers to improve their ability to operate technology. Teachers are required to be proficient in using technology, for example using the Canva application, creating and editing videos, and so on.

The ability to use good multimedia will provide a pleasant experience in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum (Priantini et al., 2022; Vhalery et al., 2022). We found good data when observing teachers in classroom learning activities, namely that teachers were familiar with the learning processes desired in the Merdeka Curriculum, for example, student-centered, utilizing technology, and implementing differentiation. It can be said that this school is still new to implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, namely less than two years on average. This is supported by adequate basic teacher competency and the teacher's desire to study the Merdeka Curriculum from several sources, including independent teaching platforms and

YouTube. This data is presented in **Figure 4** regarding teachers' experiences in the Merdeka Curriculum as follows.

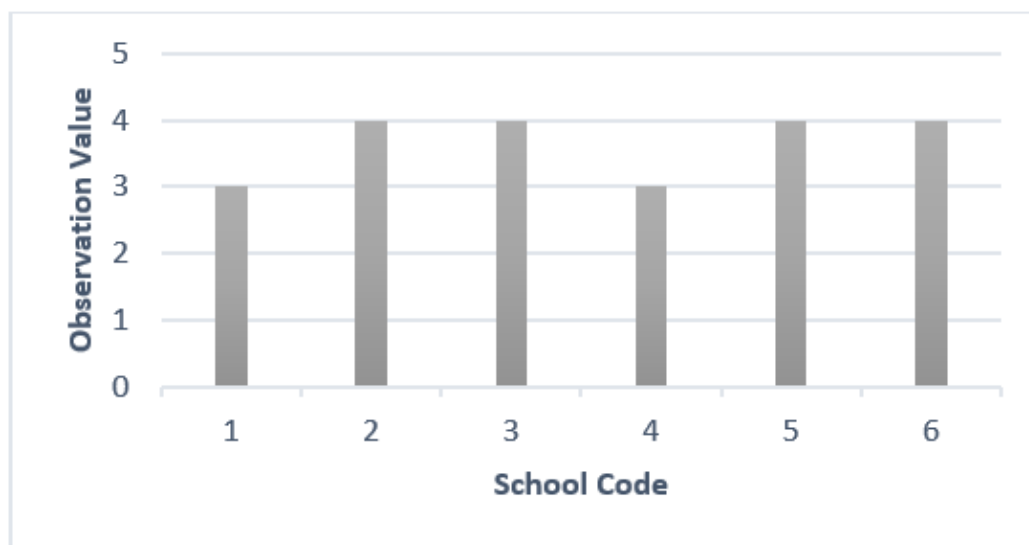


Figure 4. Teacher experience capabilities related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Based on the data displayed in **Figure 4**, it can be interpreted that teachers have good abilities in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. This is based on observation scores which reached grades 3 and 4. This data can also be interpreted as meaning that teachers have had pleasant experiences in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum because they feel the changes that occur in the learning process. Of course, this pleasant experience is also supported by the previous research data that has been explained, namely pedagogical competence, understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum, and the ability to operate technological media.

The data in **Figure 5** is very dependent on the teacher's understanding of the concepts and advantages of the Merdeka Curriculum (see **Figure 2**). We analyze that teachers' understanding of concepts supports the success of an educational program. Teachers' understanding of the concept of a Merdeka Curriculum will determine the success of the implementation process, but the opposite applies (Warsihna et al., 2023). The data in Figure 2 and Figure 5 show the integration of capabilities that come from the initial understanding that has been explained. Data on teacher understanding of the formulation of Merdeka Curriculum learning objectives is visualized in **Figure 5**.

Based on the data in **Figure 5**, teachers have a good understanding of the formulation of learning objectives expected in the Merdeka Curriculum. Understanding learning outcomes determines the ongoing learning process (Retnaningsih and Khairiyah, 2022; Marisa, 2021). Not only the learning process, but also has an impact on learning preparation, required teaching materials, and determining learning outcomes.

Learning objectives and learning outcomes are one flow of the formulation process because the objectives that have been set must have indicators of achievement. Based on this explanation, the data in **Figures 2, 5, and 6** show data harmony. This is evident, that the data in **Figure 6** shows observation values that are not too different from the two previous Figures (**Figures 2 and 5**). Data on teachers' understanding of the learning outcomes of the Merdeka Curriculum is visualized in **Figure 6**.

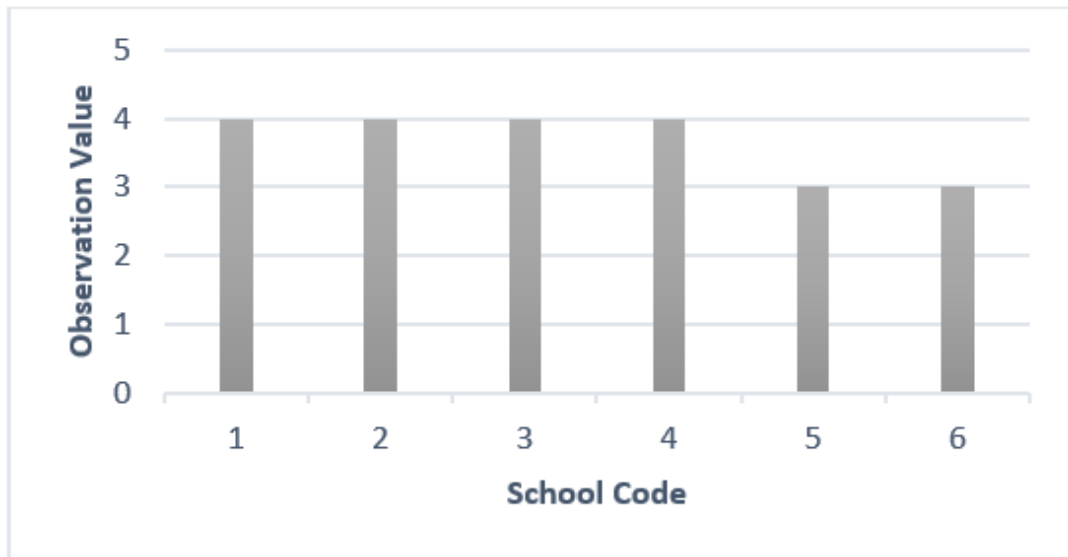


Figure 5. Teacher's ability to formulate learning objectives in the Merdeka Curriculum.

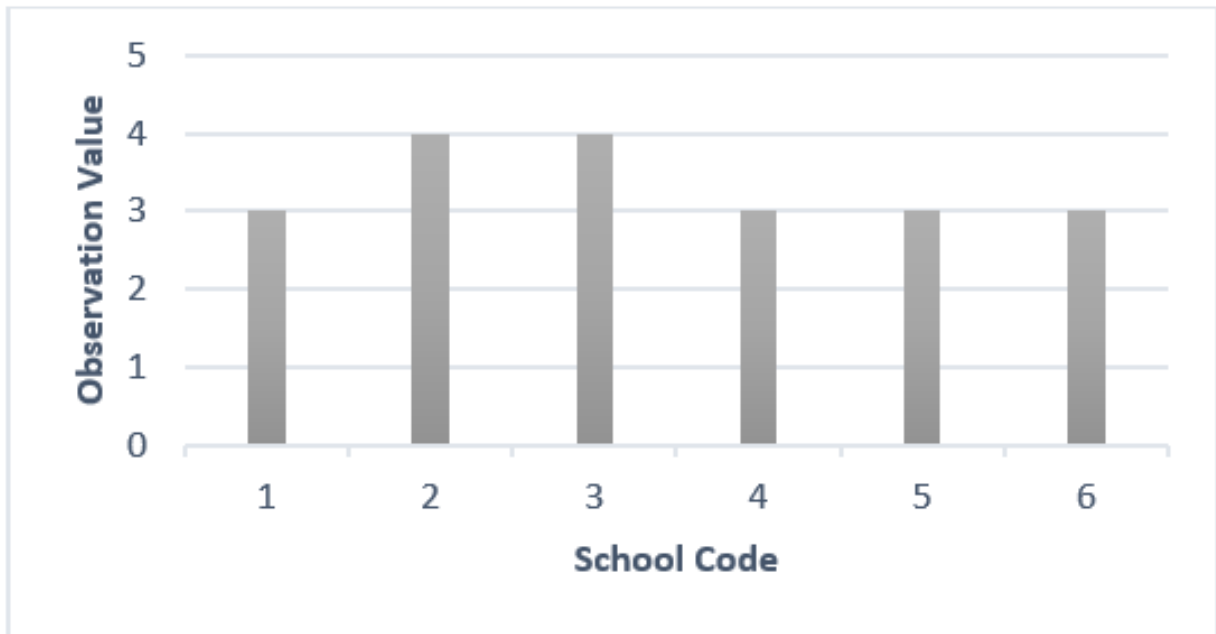


Figure 6. Teacher understanding regarding Merdeka Curriculum learning achievements.

The teachers understand the expected learning outcomes in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum because the scores obtained show good achievements (minimum score of 3). Understanding learning outcomes is an effort that must be made by teachers so that the learning process has a clear flow and direction. Learning outcomes will guide teachers to determine the types of assessments carried out to measure the achievement of learning objectives. Therefore, the main keyword in learning outcomes is being able to measure students' abilities with appropriate measuring tools. Moreover, in this Merdeka Curriculum, there are several learning characteristics, namely differentiated learning and a project to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students. Thus, based on the data in Figure 6, teachers have sufficient understanding to achieve the expected learning outcomes in the Merdeka Curriculum.

The teacher's understanding of the learning concept and other learning sets will have an impact on the resulting learning design. This is a systematic series so one and the other are

dependent on success. Based on the data in **Figure 7**, teachers have good abilities in designing learning.

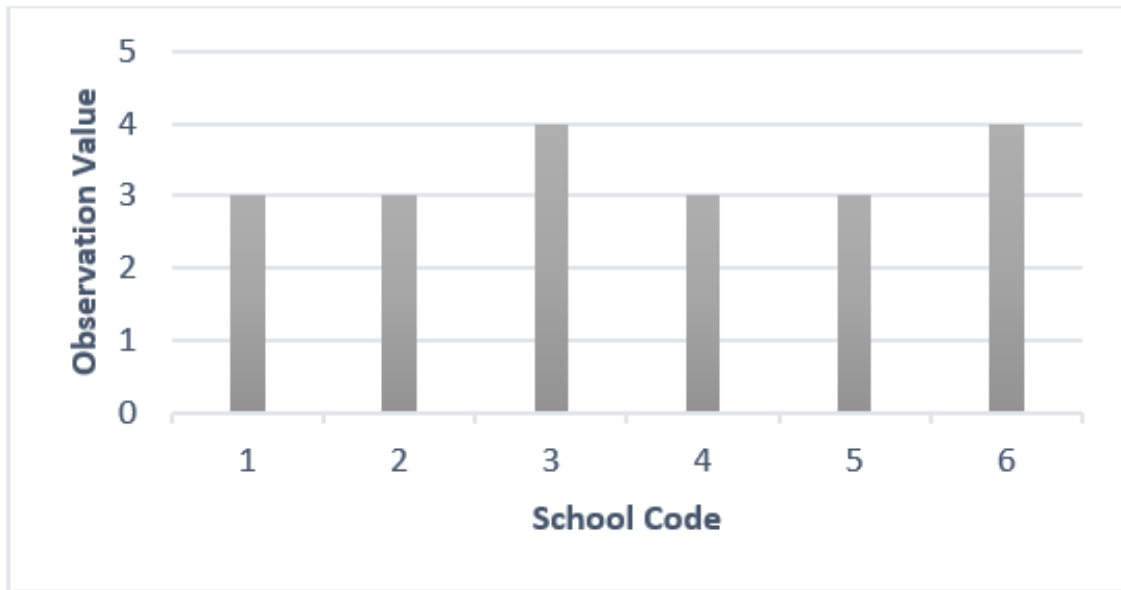


Figure 7. Teacher's ability to design learning in the Merdeka Curriculum.

Based on the data in **Figure 7**, it can be understood that teachers have good abilities in designing learning, but not in categories beyond that, for example very good or special. Teachers' ability to implement the Merdeka Curriculum can be maximized if they get full support from the school. This support takes the form of internal training carried out by schools to improve teacher competence in teaching. However, in reality, schools have not been able to facilitate teachers to improve their abilities in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. This data is visualized in **Figure 8** regarding school support in providing training to teachers.

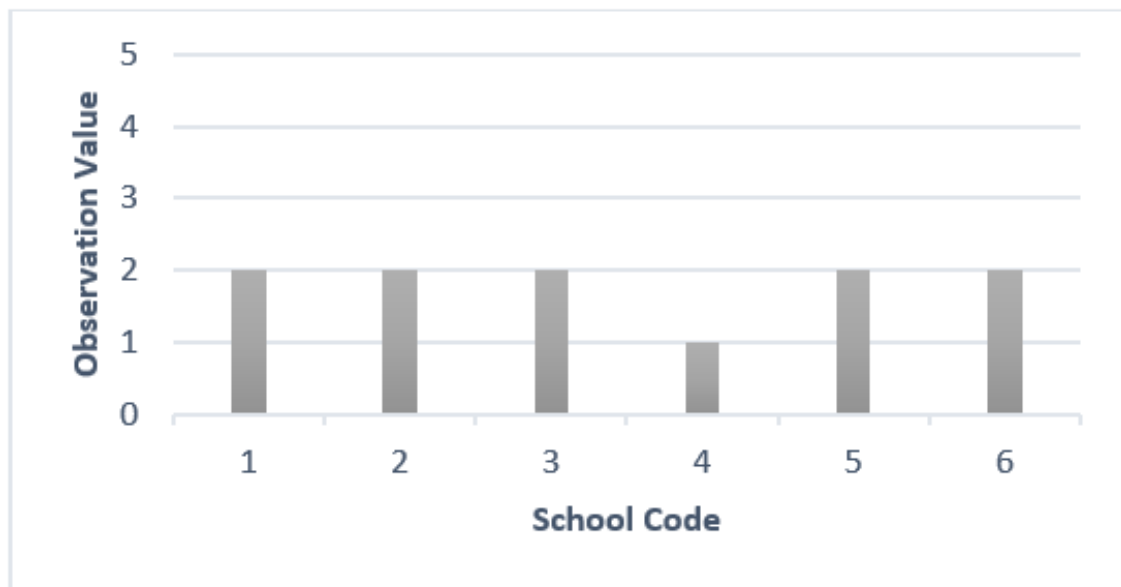


Figure 8. Schools provide training.

Based on the data in **Figure 8**, teachers do not receive enough attention from schools to improve their teaching abilities. This illustrates that schools are less proactive in providing internal training for teachers. The value obtained on this data shows below standard. Schools

should have a priority in developing human resources so that they get the latest teaching methods and follow the curriculum implemented in the school (Rusilowati et al., 2024). However, this condition does not dampen teachers' motivation to optimize their abilities, especially those that support the learning process. Teachers independently search for training information that is carried out online so as not to miss out on educational information programmed by the central government. The absence of training carried out by schools does not hinder the self-development process of teachers because they actively seek information. Unfortunately, there are still educational units that have not prioritized internal human resource development.

Developing teacher competency should be a priority for educational units because teachers must be able to provide meaningful learning (Hidayat et al., 2022). Even though teachers already have adequate basic competencies, this does not mean they stop learning. Moreover, the Merdeka Curriculum requires teachers who are creative and innovative so that independent learning can be achieved and learning outcomes are met. When a school has competent teachers, this advantage will become an advantage for the school.

Apart from that, it turns out that teachers also do not receive support for the facilities and infrastructure in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The need for a Merdeka Curriculum is not only the availability of technological media but also the need for creative and innovative teaching aids (Pada et al., 2021; Wulandari, 2024). Providing tools to support Merdeka Curriculum learning requires funding which is sometimes not included in school funding planning. Therefore, being a creative and innovative teacher is a necessity in implementing a Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers must be able to utilize various available objects as learning props. This explanation is based on the data shown in **Figure 9**.

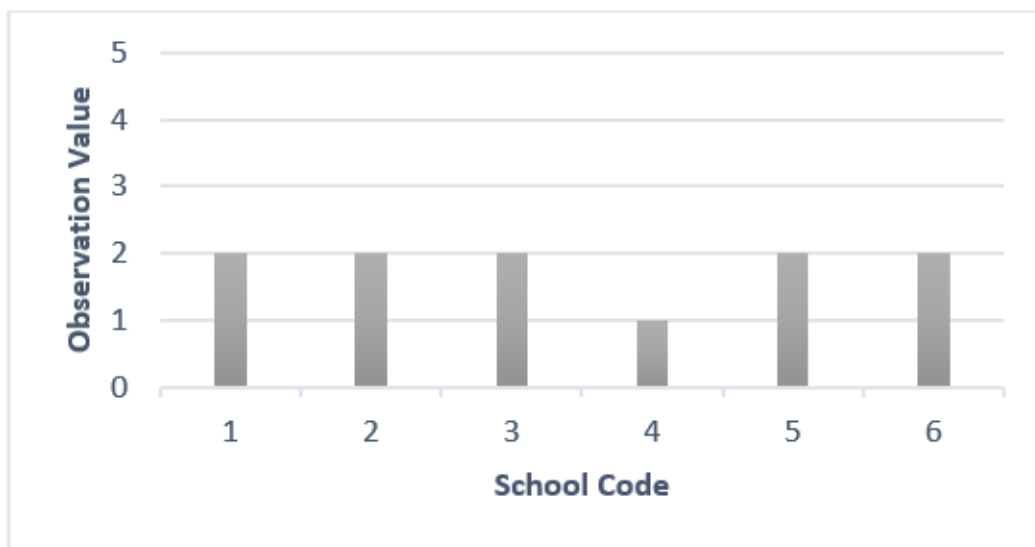


Figure 9. Availability of teacher needs.

Efforts to successfully implement the Merdeka Curriculum in educational units require synergy from various components in schools. The synergy of these school components must be harmonious to create a conducive learning environment and be able to achieve the expected outcomes (Indarta et al., 2022; Jannah & Rasyid, 2023; Rapang et al., 2022). When inequality occurs, you don't necessarily blame other parties, for example, schools have not optimally facilitated teachers' needs in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The limitations that occur must be worked around together to be able to come up with alternative solutions (Angraini et al., 2022).

Research data shows that teachers' abilities have met the requirements for implementing a Merdeka Curriculum in educational units. However, this ability can still be developed if teachers frequently receive training related to pedagogical competencies, learning methods that support the Merdeka Curriculum, and the learning strategies they use. If the teacher can develop competence in teaching, actually matters This will become a mark positive for the school Because have a good teacher. Competent teachers will change to breathe classroom learning (Saputra & Hadi, 2022; Syaripudin *et al.*, 2023) so that quality education can be jacked up. Therefore, it is time for educational units to prioritize developing teacher competency through their budget because teachers are the leading implementers of every educational program launched. Therefore, a series of learning must be carried out optimally from planning to the determination of teaching materials, and processes learning, up to achieve the expected learning outcomes.

5. CONCLUSION

Research data explains that basic competencies in teaching are a good foundation for every teacher to implement and support the success of educational programs. Having good pedagogical competence in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum does not necessarily have a good impact because, in the Merdeka Curriculum, learning is not only about conveying material but also teaching according to student's abilities and potential. Good basic competencies or pedagogical competencies must be supported by a comprehensive understanding of a series of concepts and indicators that must be achieved, especially in implementing the independent curriculum. Research shows that teachers have good competence and understanding in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum even though they have not received optimal support from schools. This is not a serious problem if teachers have high learning motivation by learning independently and accessing the latest information regarding educational developments. Solid synergy between lines in schools is needed to achieve national education goals.

6. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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