



Evaluation of teacher readiness in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka in elementary schools

Nurul Laily Al Arsyadhi¹, Laksmi Dewi², Asep Herry Hernawan³

^{1,2,3}Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

laily.nurullaily@upi.edu¹, laksmi@upi.edu², asepherry@upi.edu³

ABSTRACT

Kurikulum Merdeka aims to elevate the educational standards in Indonesia, with its success hinging on educators' preparedness. This curriculum challenges teachers, particularly at the elementary school level. The study assesses teachers' readiness to understand and implement Kurikulum Merdeka using a qualitative approach involving interviews, observation, and literature review. Respondents were from six Sekolah Penggerak in East Jakarta, selected purposively. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques. Findings indicate several factors influencing teacher readiness: comprehension of Kurikulum Merdeka's concepts and principles, ability to design and conduct learner-centered learning, and support from schools and relevant agencies. The study suggests recommendations to enhance teachers' qualifications and readiness, including teacher training and professional development, improving school infrastructure, and fostering collaboration between schools and other relevant parties to support curriculum implementation. These research outcomes are expected to significantly contribute to improving the quality of education in Indonesia within the framework of Kurikulum Merdeka.

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ABSTRAK

Kurikulum Merdeka bertujuan meningkatkan standar pendidikan di Indonesia. Adapun keberhasilan pelaksanaan kurikulum ini bergantung pada persiapan para pendidik. Kurikulum Merdeka menjadi tantangan yang harus dihadapi guru. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi kesiapan para guru dalam memahami serta menerapkan Kurikulum Merdeka, terutama di jenjang sekolah dasar. Pendekatan kualitatif digunakan dalam penelitian ini, dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara, observasi, dan penelaahan literatur. Responden penelitian terdiri dari enam Sekolah Penggerak di Jakarta Timur, yang dipilih secara purposif. Data yang terkumpul dianalisis menggunakan teknik analisis konten. Hasil penelitian menyoroti beberapa faktor yang memengaruhi kesiapan guru dalam mengimplementasikan Kurikulum Merdeka. Faktor-faktor ini mencakup pemahaman tentang konsep dan prinsip Kurikulum Merdeka, kemampuan dalam merancang dan melaksanakan pembelajaran yang berpusat pada peserta didik, serta dukungan dari pihak sekolah dan instansi terkait lainnya. Implikasi dari penelitian ini meliputi sejumlah rekomendasi untuk meningkatkan kualifikasi dan kesiapan para guru. Rekomendasi tersebut termasuk pelatihan dan pengembangan profesional guru, perbaikan infrastruktur pendukung di sekolah, serta pembangunan kerja sama antara sekolah dan berbagai pihak terkait lainnya dalam mendukung pelaksanaan Kurikulum Merdeka. Selain itu, hasil penelitian ini akan memberikan kontribusi yang signifikan dalam upaya meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan di Indonesia, khususnya dalam konteks implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka.

Kata Kunci: evaluasi kurikulum; kompetensi guru; Kurikulum Merdeka; sekolah dasar

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INTRODUCTION

Kurikulum Merdeka is an educational concept that aims to provide schools with greater freedom and flexibility in designing their curriculum (Alimuddin, 2023). The objective is for schools to customize their education programs better to suit the current needs of their students and communities, while encouraging innovation and creativity within teaching and learning. The initiative is part of a broader effort to reform Indonesia's educational system, emphasizing a holistic approach to education focusing on skills development, character formation, and creativity. The Kurikulum Merdeka empowers schools to be proactive in designing their curriculum, considering local contexts, cultural values, and the diverse needs of students (Arifin et al., 2022). It also fosters collaboration among teachers, students, parents, and the broader community in shaping the educational experience, as its successful implementation relies significantly on the support of all stakeholders and policymakers (Cantika et al., 2022). While it is not yet a national curriculum, the government has begun implementing Kurikulum Merdeka on a limited basis, allowing schools to choose between Kurikulum 2013 and Kurikulum Merdeka, depending on each school's level of readiness.

Kurikulum Merdeka, as the Ministry of Education and Culture outlines, emphasizes the most essential information and aims to strengthen students' competencies. In other words, Kurikulum Merdeka also supports children in having more in-depth, meaningful, enjoyable learning (Retnaningsih et al., 2022). To create a learning environment that reflects the values of Kurikulum Merdeka, the teacher plays a key role as an agent of change, responsible for integrating the curriculum into day-to-day learning practices. The success of the curriculum greatly depends on the teacher's role as a planner, program implementer, and developer within the school setting (Kurnia, 2023). To effectively plan and implement a curriculum, teachers must understand students' psychology and be familiar with various teaching methods and procedures. Additionally, teachers serve as evaluators of both the learning process and student outcomes. As highlighted in previous research, curriculum development requires educators to demonstrate competencies in planning, designing, decision-making, and functioning as managers, administrators, researchers, evaluators, and more (Heryahya et al., 2020).

The crucial role of teachers extends not only to delivering knowledge but also to serving as leaders, mentors, and sources of inspiration for their students. The successful implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka largely depends on the readiness and competence of teachers in responding to its demands (Suryaningsih & Purnomo, 2023). However, many teachers face challenges adapting to the paradigm shifts and learning culture demanded by Kurikulum Merdeka. Moreover, the pandemic's impact has added to the complexity by introducing a new educational culture and increasing the need for a deeper understanding of Kurikulum Merdeka—including its concepts, instructional strategies, and assessment approaches—as an effort to address the phenomenon of learning loss (Nugraha, 2022).

Various factors contribute to teachers' unpreparedness to implement Kurikulum Merdeka. One of these is the lack of knowledge regarding effective teaching strategies, and that some teachers have not yet attained the necessary level of teaching proficiency (Erwinsyah, 2017). So some teachers encountered obstacles in accessing learning resources, including the internet, or faced difficulties due to unfamiliarity with using the internet. Additionally, the administration of Kurikulum Merdeka is often perceived as overly complex. Research findings conclude that teachers are less willing to implement Kurikulum Merdeka (Kurnia, 2023). The primary difference between this and previous research is the evaluation indicators used. The indicators in this research are divided into five key areas: 1) Conceptual understanding; 2) pedagogical skills; 3) lesson planning and assessment; 4) collaboration skills; 5) psychological and socio-emotional readiness. In particular, the number of samples in this research is also more extensive, involving more than one school, enabling more in-depth findings. Considering that evaluation is a crucial activity in assessing the success of curriculum implementation, this research was also conducted to

understand the extent to which primary school teachers have prepared themselves to implement Kurikulum Merdeka. This evaluation also aims to determine any barriers, challenges, and needs teachers may encounter while adapting to this new curriculum. The findings of this research can significantly contribute to understanding teachers' preparedness for the future implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka.

This research also addresses the significance of assessing how teachers perceive Kurikulum Merdeka. By assessing teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and preparation, attempts may be made to improve their implementation and ensure that these changes benefit the learning process and student development in primary schools. Consequently, this research aims to present a comprehensive overview of how teachers are prepared to implement Kurikulum Merdeka. The underpinning area of the teacher preparedness evaluation focuses on how paraeducators have comprehended, accepted, and adequately prepared for these upcoming changes.

The findings of this research can serve as a foundation for curriculum developers to develop maintenance programs and provide appropriate support to enhance teacher readiness and competence. This will help prepare teachers for the challenges of implementing Kurikulum Merdeka and ensure that teachers have the necessary tools and knowledge to provide high-quality education, following the objectives of Kurikulum Merdeka, namely, providing a meaningful and effective learning experience for students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Kurikulum Merdeka

Indonesia pioneered the Kurikulum Merdeka's educational philosophy based on Ki Hadjar Dewantara's thoughts (Dwipratama, 2023). The concept of Merdeka aims to provide the most inclusive and innovative educational experience, adequately preparing students to navigate the challenges of today's world. Kurikulum Merdeka is a curriculum with diversified intracurricular learning where the content will be optimized so that students have enough time to deepen their understanding of concepts and strengthen their competencies (Purnawanto, 2022). Teachers can consider various teaching tools, allowing their learning process to be adapted to their students' individual learning needs and interests. The project to strengthen the accomplishment of the Profil Pelajar Pancasila is developed based on a specific theme set by the government (Asiati & Hasanah, 2022). The project is not designed to achieve any particular targeted learning outcomes, so it is not directly tied to the subject content.

The Kurikulum Merdeka strengthens the orientation on character and competency development by simplifying content and providing flexibility. This curriculum enhances curriculum-based education, aligning with the context of education units previously regulated in the previous curriculum (Virgiyanti et al., 2023). The three main characteristics of the Kurikulum Merdeka are: 1) content simplification, focus on essential material; 2) collaborative, applicable, and cross-curricular project-based learning; 3) Formulation of the learning outcomes and the arrangement of lesson hours that provide flexibility for educational units to formulate educational and operational curricula following the capabilities of the students (Yahrif & Supardi, 2023).

Kurikulum Merdeka focuses more on developing soft skills and character, concentrating on essential material, and facilitating easy-to-adapt learning (Ledia et al., 2024). In response to specific challenges, the government has established initiatives to enhance the achievement of the Profil Pelajar Pancasila. These initiatives are not course-related or intended to achieve particular learning purposes. Three possible implementations of the self-directed curriculum—autonomous learning, self-directed change, and self-directed sharing—are also discussed (Ardianti & Amalia, 2022).

Kurikulum Merdeka in Primary Schools

The Kurikulum Merdeka in primary schools is integral to the Indonesian government's efforts to transform the education system and improve its quality and relevance (Dharma et al., 2022). This concept aims to grant schools greater freedom and flexibility in designing their curricula, enabling them to tailor their approach more closely to the specific needs of their students and communities. In the context of primary schools, the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka considers early childhood development stages and emphasizes well-rounded learning (Alimuddin, 2023). This includes academic aspects, such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, and the development of social, emotional, and creative skills. As we all know, at the primary school level, there are typically six levels of education, which include grades 1 through 6. Each grade represents the early years of formal education for children, approximately 6 to 12 years old. This is an essential stage in their academic, social, and emotional development.

Teacher Readiness in the Implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka

Implementing Kurikulum Merdeka in elementary schools requires careful preparation from teachers (Pawartani & Suciptaningsih, 2024). They would need to have a thorough knowledge of the underpinning philosophy, goals, and approaches of Kurikulum Merdeka and the ability to implement them in the context of learning. In extension, Wang in *"Dewey's influence on pedagogical professions. In John Dewey's Democratic Education and its Influence on Pedagogy in China 1917-1937"* states that teachers should also have strong material knowledge and adequate pedagogical skills to ensure effective and relevant teaching.

In the digital era, integrating technology into learning is also essential. (Gerhard et al., 2023). Muliani, in *"Mengatasi Hambatan Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi,"* clarifies that teachers also need to be prepared to manage a diversified classroom by acknowledging the differences in students' learning styles and backgrounds. Collaboration with peers in planning and implementing Kurikulum Merdeka-based learning is also strongly suggested. To complete the program, teachers must be continuously prepared for ongoing learning and have the ability to assess student learning holistically (Pantić & Wubbels, 2010). School and government support are also crucial factors in effectively implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka at the primary school level (Made et al., 2022). With careful preparation, teachers will be best equipped to face the challenges of implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka and achieve the expected instructional learning targets.

METHODS

A descriptive qualitative approach is used in this paper. It is interpreted as a collaborative research strategy to understand and describe events as a complete whole (Assyakurrohim et al., 2022). The underlying purpose is to represent a detailed and comprehensive explanation of a circumstance, occurrence, or particular condition without statistical analyses or making far-reaching generalizations. Creswell, in his book *"Research and Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches"* defines the qualitative approach as an investigation into and understanding of a certain number of individuals or groups in response to an ongoing societal issue. Documentary studies, observations, and literature review also supported the research. The primary participants in this research were six schools in East Jakarta, DKI Jakarta, Indonesia. Of the six schools, each is represented by one principal, two teachers, and one supervisor, totaling 30 participants. All of these participants have participated in competency enhancement training supporting the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in the Sekolah Penggerak program.

The following data were collected through interviews and a review of the literature. Creswell further elaborates that interviews consist of relatively few non-structured, usually open-ended questions that aim to elicit participants' thoughts and express their opinions. Interviewing is the primary method for orally obtaining data or information from an informant. During the interview with the informants, the researcher posed open-ended questions regarding the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka, the challenges encountered in the learning process, and also inquired about how educators compile instructional lesson plans and create modules for the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* within their respective educational units. A literature review collects facts and information from previously published sources, such as books, journals, or other scholarly study materials.

Throughout the research process, the researcher visited the six schools and observed their learning activities at each educational unit's grades 1, 2, 4, and 5 levels. The methodological procedures in this research include examining, assessing, and synthesizing previously published data. Sekaran and Bougie, in the book *“Research Methods for Business: A Skill-Building Approach,”* discuss Data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion inference as data analysis strategies employed in this case study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from the evaluation of teacher readiness to implement the Kurikulum Merdeka in elementary schools, which was conducted in East Jakarta in 6 driving schools that have implemented the Kurikulum Merdeka for two years, mainly state several things: 1) lack of understanding of curriculum concepts; 2) the need to improve pedagogical skills; 3) difficulty in preparing and conducting assessments; 4) lack of collaboration skills; 5) psychological and socio-emotional readiness.

Conceptual understanding of the Curriculum

According to the theory of constructivism, popularized over the years by Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, learning is achieved through students' reconstruction of knowledge based on their prior experiences (Habsy et al., 2023). To implement a learner-centered curriculum, teachers must understand the concepts and philosophy of the curriculum to create a learning environment that supports knowledge construction (Anjani et al., 2023).

The understandability of concepts is a prominent indicator of teachers' readiness to implement the Kurikulum Merdeka (Pertiwi & Nindiasari, 2023). This involves teachers understanding the concepts, principles, and objectives underlying the Kurikulum Merdeka. From the findings, it appears that some teachers do not understand the Kurikulum Merdeka's philosophy, which includes the values that will be embedded in education, such as freedom, independence, inclusion, justice, and lifelong learning.

During an ongoing interview session, one of the teachers said:

“Saya bingung apa yang dimaksud pembelajaran yang berpusat pada peserta didik, apakah guru harus mengikuti satu per satu keinginan peserta didik di kelas, sementara setiap kelas terdiri dari beragam karakteristik peserta didik” JO (2023).

The lack of understanding of the curriculum and its concepts has been demonstrated, showing that teachers have not fully internalized the fundamental values and standard principles of Kurikulum Merdeka. Likewise, teachers' confusion about learner-centered learning may reflect their limited understanding of the constructivist approach to education. This interferes with their ability to develop and implement learning activities correctly and effectively tailored to the students' needs and characteristics.

It is therefore necessary to provide intensive and continuous training on the constructivist philosophy and practice to help teachers understand and apply the curriculum concepts correctly..

The understanding of the Profil Pelajar Pancasila is only found in the activities of the Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila, and is not integrated into intracurricular learning in the classroom. At the same time, understanding the concept of the Profil Pelajar Pancasila is the implementation of holistic education, which emphasizes the development of all aspects of the individual, including intellectual, emotional, social, physical, creative, and spiritual elements (Masjudin & Suastra, 2023). The Profil Pelajar Pancasila is intended to recognize students who are faith-filled, self-critical, globally aware, cooperation-minded, highly creative, and independently motivated, in alignment with the principles of holistic education (Mulyani et al., 2023).

The finding that the Profil Pelajar Pancasila is only being implemented in project activities and not fully integrated into intracurricular learning demonstrates a lack of understanding of a holistic approach to education among teachers. Integrating the Profil Pelajar Pancasila values into each subject requires teachers' in-depth knowledge and careful planning (Mulyani et al., 2023). Training that emphasizes the integration of holistic values in the daily curriculum needs to be strengthened so that teachers can effectively develop the character and competencies of students following the objectives of the Kurikulum Merdeka (Armini, 2024). The teachers' lack of understanding of the curriculum was also evident in their difficulties in reading and comprehending the learning outcomes document. Teachers' challenges in reading the Capaian Belajar (CP) document are often attributed to a lack of understanding of effective instructional design and the curriculum concept (Nathasia & Abadi, 2022). Teachers who lack knowledge of the fundamental principles of instructional design may struggle to interpret learning objectives, design suitable learning activities, and assess student achievement (Pohan & Nelwati, 2024).

One of the grade 5 teachers stated that they did not understand the information and had not read the details of the Profil Pelajar Pancasila. Many new developments accompany the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka, so teachers may require more time to understand the curriculum's concepts fully. Some teachers also said it was difficult to read the CP provided by the government.

"Saya bingung membaca dokumen CP, akhirnya saya mencari saja di Google dan copy paste tujuan pembelajarannya" (LS, 2023)

Due to their complexity, comprehension difficulties in CP documents may also be caused by high cognitive load. The mental load theory, introduced by John Sweller, posits that cognitive load should be carefully managed throughout the learning process to determine how new information can be integrated with existing knowledge without overloading students' mental capacity (Yohanes & Yusuf, 2021). Such complex CP documents may create cognitive overload for teachers, hindering their ability to effectively process and implement the required information in the relevant learning contexts (Skulmowski & Xu, 2022). It can be seen from the observations of this research that teachers found themselves overwhelmed by technical terminology and unfamiliar structures, which made it difficult for them to apply the information in their daily teaching practices. While research has shown that teachers' understanding and creativity in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka are crucial, as they can help increase students' potential and character (Purwati & Arifin, 2023).

Pedagogical Skills

During the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka, it is evident that teachers face difficulties comprehending and implementing the expected learning approaches. Several approaches have been particularly challenging, including Project-based Learning (PBL), contextual learning, active learning, and integrating technology into the learning process. PBL is an experience-based approach that emphasizes

learning through practical hands-on experience, which was developed over time by John Dewey (Maida, 2011). PBL can engage students in complex projects requiring in-depth investigative work and co-operation, and allows these students to develop critical and creative thinking skills. In the field observation, it was discovered that teachers were confused and concerned about applying PBL because the duration of time was lengthy, and the cost of the equipment props was high.

One of the teachers revealed:

"Ibu, saya bingung kalau pakai proyek based learning satu materi saja akan memakan waktu lama, dan biaya alat peraga juga mahal" LS (2023).

It reflects a significant lack of appreciation of the importance of more efficiently integrating PBL into the curriculum, with no considerable expenditure in terms of time or cost, and a lack of understanding of how to do so.

In addition to PBL, contextual learning is also a challenge for teachers in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka (Fahlevi, 2022). Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) emphasizes the importance of connecting instructional content with the real-life contexts of students. Learning becomes significantly more meaningful when students can relate newly acquired concepts and knowledge to their experiences, social environment, and everyday situations contextually and reflectively (Suparlan et al., 2019). The research revealed that teachers are less able to construct learning activities that are both relevant and engaging for their students. Teachers are likely to provide too complicated instructions without relating them to contexts that students would recognize, as seen in the example of learning to read in grade 1. Students struggle to understand and follow the learning because it lacks relevance to their daily experiences.

For teachers, active learning, a feature of the Kurikulum Merdeka, hinders its implementation in their learning (Ardianti & Amalia, 2022). While active learning is an approach that encourages students to be directly involved in the learning process through discussions, group work, and hands-on activities, it also fosters greater learner engagement in the learning process (Capone, 2022). This principle is based on the idea that actively participating can improve students' understanding and retention (Kasi, 2023). However, based on observations, several teachers have not been able to develop and effectively implement active learning successfully. Teachers are still likely to use more traditional teaching methods in which students only have to listen and write without active interaction. This highlights the need to enhance teachers' ability to create a more dynamic and interactive learning environment.

Integrating technology in learning in the Kurikulum Merdeka is a must for teachers (Natalia et al., 2021). As described in Dr. Ruben Puentedura's SAMR (Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, Redefinition) theory, integrating technology in learning demonstrates how technology can alter and enhance the learning process (Abidin et al., 2021). Technology can be used as a support tool and as a means to redesign learning tasks, making them more challenging and engaging (Zahwa & Syafi'i, 2022). The findings have shown that teachers had difficulties fully integrating technology into learning, reflecting a relative lack of knowledge and skills in effectively using technological tools.

These findings show that teachers still have insufficient ability to select and use appropriate learning materials in the context of the Kurikulum Merdeka. This demonstrates that teachers need to be given more in-depth training in designing and implementing learning that fulfills the students' needs and stimulates critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration. This is essential for creating a more effective, engaging, and relevant learning and education environment for students and supporting the Kurikulum Merdeka's educational objectives.

Assesment

The principles of learning assessment in the Kurikulum Merdeka also include an oriented approach that encourages holistic, inclusive, and learner-centered learning (Salassa et al., 2023). The second batch of research in Sekolah Penggerak found that teachers have conducted formative and summative assessments. However, they face difficulties developing appropriate instruments that align with the competencies to be evaluated. These difficulties include selecting relevant assessment methods, such as written tests, projects, post-presentations, observations, or portfolios, and designing questions or tasks that align with the learning objectives and can measure multiple aspects of students' capabilities.

The theory of formative and summative assessment states that formative assessment is an evaluation conducted during the learning process to monitor and provide feedback that the teacher and students may use to improve their ongoing learning. In contrast, the summative assessment is an evaluation that is conducted at the end of the learning period to assess students' achievement of specific learning objectives (Mujiburrahman et al., 2023). Although teachers have begun to implement both formative and summative types of assessments in their classrooms, they continue to encounter several substantial challenges, particularly in the process of designing and developing appropriate assessment instruments that are accurately aligned with the specific competencies and learning objectives that are intended to be evaluated (Mawaddah, 2023).

Holistic and inclusive learning emphasizes an approach that considers various aspects of student development, including cognitive, emotional, social, and physical domains (Hidayatullah, 2024). Kurikulum Merdeka emphasizes that assessment should be oriented toward holistic and inclusive learning, with a learner-centered focus. This means that assessments should be capable of measuring various aspects of student abilities comprehensively and fairly (Salassa et al., 2023). The observations made in this research reveal that many teachers continue to face considerable difficulties in designing comprehensive assessment instruments that encompass a wide range of assessment methods and accurately measure the diverse aspects and dimensions of student abilities. For instance, in addition to traditional written tests, teachers are expected to utilize alternative assessment forms, such as projects, student presentations, observations, or learning portfolios, to gain a more complete and well-rounded picture of students' overall competencies. However, the persistent lack of adequate skills, specialized training, and in-depth knowledge in designing, developing, and implementing these various assessment instruments significantly hampers their ability to carry out truly holistic and inclusive assessment practices within the learning process.

Assessment theory also emphasizes using assessment results to enhance student learning (Mujiburrahman et al., 2023). Formative assessment results can be effectively utilized to provide detailed and constructive feedback that helps students gain a clearer understanding of their strengths and areas for improvement and offers meaningful guidance and specific recommendations on how they can gradually enhance their academic performance over time (Purnawanto, 2022). However, the findings indicate that teachers struggle using assessment results to improve student learning. This may be due to a lack of understanding of how to analyze assessment data and apply it in planning more effective instruction. Teachers may not yet be accustomed to using assessment results to inform differentiated teaching or to design appropriate interventions for students who require additional support.

From the findings of this research, it can be seen and understood that although teachers have gradually started implementing both formative and summative assessments within the framework of Kurikulum Merdeka, they still face several significant challenges, particularly in designing appropriate and effective assessment instruments, as well as in utilizing the assessment results to enhance the overall quality of student learning. The lack of sufficient skills and pedagogical competence in designing valid and reliable assessment tools, combined with ongoing difficulties in applying assessment results meaningfully to support instructional improvement, underscores the urgent need for more in-depth professional training and continuous, sustainable support mechanisms for teachers. A genuinely holistic, inclusive, and

learner-centered approach to assessment requires a comprehensive theoretical understanding and adequate practical skills to be implemented effectively and consistently in educational settings.

Collaboration Skills

Teachers' readiness to work collaboratively with peers, school staff, and other relevant parties is also an important indicator (Jannati et al., 2023). This aligns with several theoretical concepts and analyses that have been identified. First, it reflects the principles of collaboration theory in professional learning, where teachers demonstrate strong collaboration skills by sharing knowledge and experiences and discussing effective teaching strategies. Second, the learning communities in each educational institution serve as platforms where social interaction and the development of shared understanding occur, in line with social constructivist theory. Third, a strong culture of collaboration among teachers and stakeholders in the educational environment creates a conducive setting for teachers' professional growth and improved teaching quality. Finally, the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* seems to stimulate more intensive collaboration among teachers, demonstrating the curriculum's impact on collaborative dynamics within the educational environment (Aditiya & Fatonah, 2022; Kusumardi, 2024; Pawartani & Suciptaningsih, 2024). Regarding collaboration, six school principals agreed that teachers exchange knowledge and experiences, discuss effective teaching strategies, and work together to address challenges in implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka*. This is facilitated through learning communities present in each educational institution.

Psychological and Socio-emotional Readiness

When dealing with curriculum changes, teachers need to possess strong psychological and socio-emotional readiness (Ritonga et al., 2022). According to the Psychology of Learning theory, psychological readiness is a crucial factor influencing the effectiveness of teachers in adapting to curriculum changes (Amanulloh & Wasila, 2024). In a study involving 30 teachers, it was found that 60% of them felt psychologically unprepared for the changes. They were surprised by the rapid changes, such as the adjustments in the understanding of Learning Outcomes, which had undergone two changes in the last two years. However, the remaining 40% of teachers felt that the changes were not an issue and were willing to adapt to the ongoing developments. Data analysis showed that teachers' psychological readiness varies significantly and can be influenced by the pace of curriculum changes.

From a socio-emotional perspective, the Collaborative Learning theory can explain the importance of social support in facing curriculum changes (Maida, 2011). Some school supervisors stated that although some teachers feel psychologically unprepared, they are motivated to learn about *Kurikulum Merdeka*. The supervisors mentioned that teachers are enthusiastic about learning *Kurikulum Merdeka* through the Platform Merdeka Mengajar and attending workshops regularly organized by the Balai Besar Guru Penggerak. This reflects social support and a conducive learning environment, which can help teachers overcome the psychological challenges arising from curriculum changes. Therefore, the Collaborative Learning theory emphasizes the importance of social support and teacher collaboration in adapting to curriculum changes.

Overall, these findings suggest that teachers' psychological and socio-emotional readiness is crucial in adapting to curriculum changes. Theories such as Learning Psychology and Collaborative Learning can provide a deeper understanding of the factors that influence teachers' preparedness for curriculum changes and strategies that can be implemented to enhance this readiness through social support and collaboration among teachers.

CONCLUSION

Several critical findings were identified based on the evaluation of teachers' preparedness in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka at primary schools in East Jakarta. First, most teachers still face difficulties in understanding the underlying concepts and objectives of Kurikulum Merdeka, such as the values intended to be instilled in education. This lack of understanding can hinder the effectiveness of its implementation. Second, there is an urgent need to improve teachers' pedagogical skills, particularly in understanding and implementing teaching approaches that align with the principles of Kurikulum Merdeka. Third, although teachers have conducted formative and summative assessments, they still struggle with designing relevant assessment tools aligned with the competencies to be evaluated. Fourth, while there are indications that teachers possess good collaboration skills, these skills still need further development to enhance their effectiveness in supporting the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka. Lastly, some teachers are psychologically unprepared for the rapid curriculum changes, highlighting the need for additional support in both psychological and socio-emotional aspects. These findings can serve as a foundation for determining the next steps in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka. The actions may include efforts to prepare better teachers, students, and other school community members to ensure the successful implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* following the intended objectives.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The researcher declares that the publication of this paper does not contain a conflict of interest. The researcher confirms that the data and content of the article are free of plagiarism.

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