

EXPLORING TEACHER PERCEPTION ON THE *MERDEKA BELAJAR* CURRICULUM IN TAPOS DISTRICT ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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Journal info

Jurnal Pendidikan Glasser

p-ISSN : 2579-5082

e-ISSN : 2598-2818

DOI : 10.32529/glasser.v9i1.3786

Volume : 9

Nomor : 1

Month : 2025

Keywords: *independent curriculum, teacher perception, and implementation*

Abstract.

This study explores teachers' perceptions of the Merdeka Belajar (Independent Learning) curriculum and the challenges they face in its implementation. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected through a questionnaire survey administered to elementary school teachers in the Tapos District, Depok, West Java. The results indicate that 24% of teachers found the curriculum good, while 76% rated it very good. These findings suggest that the majority of teachers have successfully implemented the curriculum, which emphasizes character education based on the Pancasila Student Profile. Despite positive feedback, some challenges remain, such as limited facilities, insufficient teacher training, and technological barriers. This study highlights the need for targeted teacher support and infrastructure improvements to optimize curriculum implementation.



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A. INTRODUCTION

Martin and Simanjourang (2022) state that the curriculum has an important position and role in education, this is because the curriculum is a guideline that directs so that the objectives of the planned learning can be achieved. If the curriculum is not formed, education will not run well and educational goals will not be achieved. Oemar Hamalik in (Martin and Simanjourang, 2022) states that the curriculum has 3 important roles in education, namely: (a) Conservative role, that the curriculum can be used as a means to transmit the values of cultural heritage in the past that is still in harmony with the present to the next generation of the nation. (b) Creative

role, that the curriculum can help students in developing the potential and skills of themselves in accordance with the needs of the present and the future. (c) Critical and Evaluative Role, that the curriculum not only plays a role in passing on social / cultural values but also assesses and selects which social values or cultural values can be inherited and meet the needs and conditions of today's generation.

A well-designed curriculum is essential for successful educational outcomes. However, along with the times and technology that is developing increasingly rapidly, the government must design a curriculum that can

meet the demands of education based on changes in the present. The renewal of the curriculum is carried out as an effort to create quality education, so that it can produce quality human resources, creative and ready to compete in the 21st century. Related to meeting the demands of education in an increasingly developing era, an independent curriculum has been designed and developed by the Indonesian government as a concrete step to improve the quality of education (Mantra et al., 2022).

(Bulqis, 2023) argues that the independent curriculum focuses on learner activities related to social emotional and physical and focuses on character education. The independent curriculum is a curriculum with an educational concept in which students are freed to develop their potential, skills, and knowledge and also give full freedom to teachers in designing the learning process (Mantra et al., 2022). In implementing this independent curriculum, school policies do not limit students and teachers from exploring learning as long as they are still based on learning outcomes. With the concept of a new independent curriculum education that is different from the previous curriculum, of course, teachers as a role in curriculum implementation will have diverse opinions and perceptions. This is because teachers are the main role in implementing the independent curriculum.

Etymologically, the curriculum comes from the Greek language which consists of two words namely *curir* and *surare*. *Curir* means runner and *surare* means racing place. The term

curriculum is still used today, but in the context of education. According to S. Nasution in (Bahri, 2011) the curriculum is a guideline that is prepared for the implementation of a smooth teaching and learning process under the guidance and responsibility of educational institutions and teaching teachers. This curriculum also has a relationship with various activities and social interactions in the surrounding environment. So that the curriculum has an important role in achieving the educational goals of a country.

The independent curriculum is a curriculum that emphasizes diverse intracurricular learning, where the content is designed to be more optimal so as to provide students with sufficient opportunities to explore concepts and strengthen competencies, Indrawati et al in (Ujang et al, 2022). According to the official source of the Ministry of Education and Culture, the characteristics of the independent curriculum are firstly the development of soft skills and character, strengthened through the Pancasila Student Profile project. Second, focusing on essential material, teachers provide material so that students can develop creativity and innovation to achieve basic competencies. Third, flexible learning, teachers are given the flexibility to carry out learning according to the stage of achievement and diverse student development and insert it with the context of local content. Thus, the independent curriculum is the new face of Indonesian education that prioritizes character education listed in the Pancasila Student Profile.

According to the large dictionary of psychology, “perception” is defined as a process of observing one's environment using the senses so that it becomes aware of its environment. Asrori explains perception as a learning process in which a person associates and gives meaning to environmental stimuli. (Viarti, 2018). According to Sarlito Wirawan Sarwono in (Fauzi, 2009), Perception involves the ability to organize observed information, encompassing the skills of discrimination, categorization, and selective attention. Therefore, individuals can perceive the same object differently. In general, perception is a person's opinion about something that is obtained from observing his five senses and then applied through actions or attitudes that are carried out. This is influenced by each individual's personality.

Teachers' perceptions of the importance of an independent curriculum show from a survey with a number of teachers in primary schools that the implementation of this curriculum requires more detailed socialization. The curriculum change was well received by some teachers, while others were less enthusiastic. Welcoming is beneficial as the context of the lesson plans to be implemented will be obtained, allowing more attention to achieving the learning objectives that are actually expected. Teachers are also less enthusiastic because they will have to revise teaching materials and also the way of assessment will change. Some teachers interviewed stated that this independent curriculum is one of the alternatives used to

harmonize the goals of Indonesian education and global demands while maintaining the characteristics of Pancasila (Fitriyah and Wardani, 2022).

Based on official sources from the Ministry of Education and Culture, there are several teacher opinions regarding the importance of an independent curriculum, namely “Learning assessments are effective enough to help me map student needs. As a teacher, I can develop learning methods and strategies that suit students' interests and profiles. Coupled with collaborative learning in the form of projects that aim to develop the Pancasila Student Profile through learning experiences,” said Anggi. Thus, this can develop the potential of each student and be strengthened by instilling character in the Pancasila Learner Profile. Curriculum changes follow the times and the need for education. The urgency of education lies in the increasingly crisis character of students. For this reason, the government is transforming the curriculum reform in Indonesia.

Several previous studies relevant to the topic of this research have been conducted in the context of teacher perceptions of the implementation of the independent curriculum in elementary schools. In the first journal written by Fauziah⁷ et al and published on August 15, 2023, the study used a qualitative descriptive method by providing a questionnaire as a data collection technique. The results show that in general, teachers' perceptions support the implementation of the independent curriculum, however, several

obstacles such as the need for teacher debriefing, lack of facilities and infrastructure, and understanding of learning models that are often used by teachers are identified. The second journal, written by Sunarni and published in February 2023, used qualitative methods and revealed teachers' positive perceptions of the independent curriculum. Obstacles identified included the important role of teachers, lack of socialization, some teachers who have not implemented the independent curriculum, limited IT skills, and internet instability. An update from the previous study is that this study uses quantitative methods to analyze more systematically and statistically. And the results can be generalized because it covers a representative sample, namely several teachers in Tapos sub-district, Depok.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah metode kuantitatif dengan survey deskriptif. Penelitian survey termasuk ke dalam metode kuantitatif karena peneliti memberikan beberapa pernyataan kepada responden mengenai keyakinan dan argumen (Neuman Lawrence, 2003). Metode kuantitatif digunakan untuk mengukur tingkat pemahaman guru terhadap implementasi kurikulum merdeka di sekolah dasar dengan menggunakan gambaran statistika. Adapun teknik pengumpulan data yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini ialah through a questionnaire survey. Thus, data will be obtained based on teacher responses in the questionnaire. The subjects in this study were elementary school teachers in Tapos District,

Depok, West Java. The technique used in this sampling is purposive sampling technique. While the data analysis is descriptive analysis, by calculating the number of percentages of teacher perceptions.

The purpose of this study is to examine elementary school teachers' perceptions of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum in the Tapos District, Depok, West Java. Specifically, it aims to understand their views on the curriculum's implementation and to identify the challenges they face during its application. By analyzing these perceptions, the study seeks to provide insights into the effectiveness of the curriculum and recommend strategies to enhance its implementation, ultimately contributing to the improvement of education quality in Indonesia.

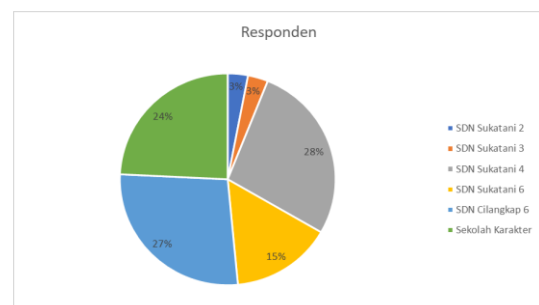
C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The following is a description of the results of the research.

a. Respondent Description

The questionnaire respondents were 33 respondents consisting of teachers who implemented the independent curriculum in elementary schools in Tapos sub-district,

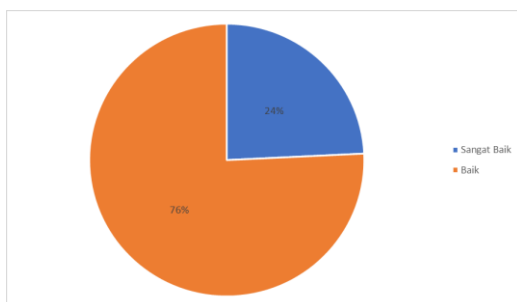


Depok.

Based on the research results, there were 3% (1) respondent from SDN Sukatani 2, 3% (1) respondent from SDN Sukatani 3, 28% (9) respondents from SDN Sukatani 4, 15% (5) respondents from SDN Sukatani 6, 27% (9) respondents from SDN Cilangkap 6, 24% (8) respondents from Character School. The research questionnaire explains the indicators that show teacher perceptions of the independent curriculum, the questionnaire was filled out by grade 1, 2, 4 and 5 teachers. The statements in the questionnaire consist of 5 alternative answer categories, namely strongly agree (SA), agree (A), neutral (N), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD).

b. Overview of Teachers' Perceptions of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

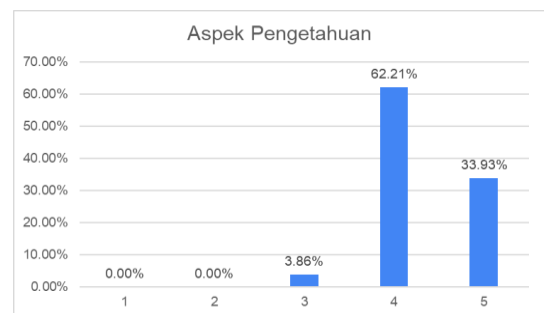
An overview based on the results of the questionnaire of primary school teachers who have implemented the independent curriculum in Tapos District, Depok.



Based on the results above, 28% (8) respondents were found in the very good category and 72% (25) respondents in the good category. So that the results show that the teacher's perception of the

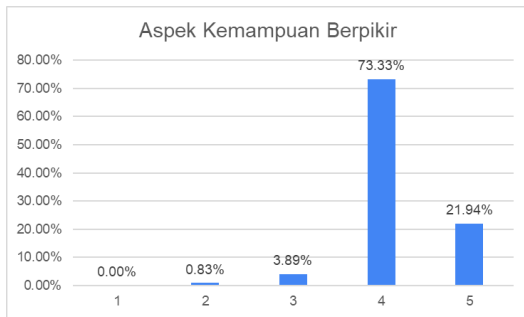
implementation of the independent learning curriculum at elementary schools in Tapos sub-district, Depok is in the good category.

Teacher Perception in Knowledge Aspect



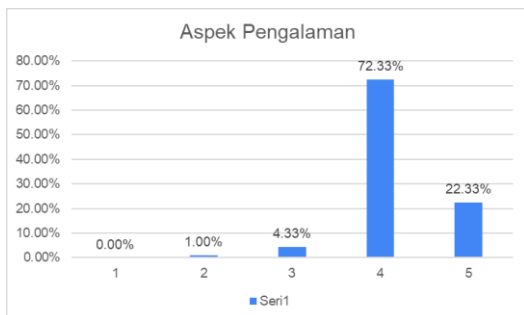
The results of the statement showed an answer of 33.93% in the strongly agree category, 62.21% in the agree category, and 3.86% in the neutral category on the aspect of teacher knowledge in learning the independent curriculum. This aspect consists of several statements to measure understanding of teachers' knowledge of the independent curriculum. As well as having received information about curriculum changes, learning implementation, and assessment assessments in accordance with the independent curriculum. The chart above shows that teachers have good knowledge of the independent curriculum.

c. Teacher Perceptions on Thinking Skills



The results of the statement showed an answer of 21.94% in the strongly agree category, 73.33% in the agree category, and 3.89% in the neutral category, 0.83% in the disagree category towards the aspect of the teacher's thinking ability in learning an independent curriculum. This aspect consists of several statements to measure the teacher's ability to integrate learning with the independent curriculum. The results show that teachers with good categories in integrating varied learning designs, using learning media, according to indicators, fun methods, integrating with daily life, and integrating assessments in accordance with the Pancasila Student Profile.

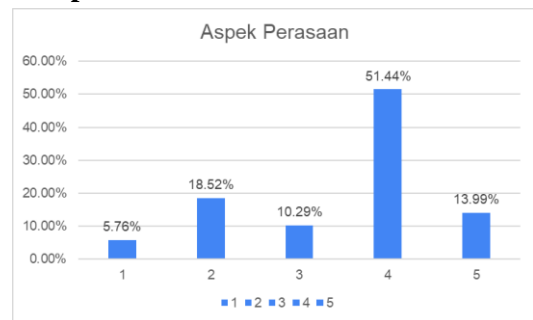
d. Teacher Perceptions in the Experience Aspect



The results of the statement showed an answer of 22.33% in the strongly agree category, 72.33% in the agree category,

and 4.33% in the disagree category on the aspect of teacher experience of learning with an independent curriculum. This aspect consists of several statements to find out the teacher's experience in implementing learning based on an independent curriculum. The results show that teachers already have experience with lesson design, learning implementation, and assessment of learning outcomes in accordance with the independent curriculum.

e. Teacher Perceptions in the Feeling Aspect



The results of the statement showed an answer of 13.99% in the strongly agree category, 51.44% in the agree category, and 10.29% in the neutral category, 18.52% in the disagree category, 5.76% in the strongly disagree category on the aspect of teacher feelings in learning with an independent curriculum. This aspect consists of several statements to measure teacher perceptions of the independent curriculum. The results show that teachers have a good perception of the independent curriculum. such as this program is very easy to implement, develops character

skills, focuses on essential material, and has flexible learning.

This result is the same as previous research. In previous research, in a journal entitled “Perceptions of class teachers towards the implementation of an independent curriculum in elementary schools”, written by Mai Sri Lena et al. It is explained that teachers must contribute thoroughly in implementing an independent curriculum so that the curriculum can be implemented successfully. Overall, the research shows that teacher perceptions are good, thus supporting elementary schools to implement an independent curriculum. However, there are many obstacles such as, teacher debriefing is still needed, lack of facilities and infrastructure, and describing the learning models that teachers often use. This obstacle is in accordance with the results of the answers to the statements, namely 1). Limited classrooms are an obstacle with the most results, namely 44% of answers agreeing, 2). Lack of school facilities with the highest result of 36% agreed answers, 3). Technology barriers with the most results 52% of answers agreed. From these results it can be interpreted that 76% of teachers in Tapos sub-district have agreed on the implementation of the independent curriculum. Based on the data from the general description of teacher perceptions of the implementation of the independent

curriculum, namely 24% in the very good category and 76% in the good category.

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that most teachers in elementary schools in Tapos District, Depok, have a positive perception of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. A total of 76% of teachers stated that the curriculum is very good, while 24% rated it as good. These perceptions reflect the teachers’ understanding, integration skills, experience, and feelings that support the effective implementation of this curriculum.

1. Teachers' Understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum

The data shows that 33.93% of respondents strongly agree, and 62.21% agree that they have a good understanding of the concepts and implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This indicates that most teachers have received sufficient information about curriculum changes and understand key elements such as learning oriented toward the Pancasila Student Profile. This finding aligns with research by Fitriyah and Wardani (2022), which states that understanding the new curriculum is crucial for its successful implementation.

2. Teachers' Ability to Integrate Learning

A total of 21.94% of teachers strongly agree, and 73.33% agree that they can integrate learning in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers demonstrated the ability to design engaging lessons, use relevant media, and connect learning to everyday life. This finding is consistent with the views of Mantra et al. (2022), who stated that flexibility in

learning is one of the key characteristics of this curriculum.

3. Teachers' Experience in Curriculum Implementation

A total of 22.33% of teachers strongly agree, and 72.33% agree that they have positive experiences in designing, implementing, and assessing learning based on the Merdeka Curriculum. These experiences reflect the teachers' readiness to adapt their teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of students, as noted by Bulqis (2023).

4. Teachers' Perceptions of the Curriculum

Although most teachers have a positive perception, 18.52% disagreed, and 5.76% strongly disagreed with certain aspects of the Merdeka Curriculum. This reflects challenges such as the need for further training, limited facilities, and technological constraints, as identified in previous research by Fauziah et al. (2023). These challenges need to be addressed to improve teachers' acceptance of the curriculum.

5. Relevance to the Pancasila Student Profile

The Merdeka Curriculum aims to develop student competencies in line with the Pancasila Student Profile. Teachers acknowledge that this curriculum supports students' character development through project-based learning and essential materials. As highlighted by the Ministry of Education and Culture, the flexibility in learning design allows teachers to adjust teaching strategies according to students' needs.

D. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Merdeka Belajar curriculum has been well-received by elementary school teachers in Tapos District, Depok, with 76% of respondents rating the curriculum as very good and 24% as good. Teachers demonstrated a strong understanding of the curriculum's goals, its integration into learning processes, and its emphasis on character education through the Pancasila Student Profile. The curriculum's flexibility and focus on essential material are key strengths appreciated by educators. However, challenges remain, including limited school facilities, insufficient teacher training, and technological barriers, which hinder its full implementation. These obstacles highlight the need for continuous support, including infrastructure development, targeted professional development programs, and enhanced access to educational technology. To further support the effective implementation of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, it is recommended that future studies incorporate qualitative methods, such as interviews and direct classroom observations, to capture a deeper understanding of teachers' experiences. Such insights can inform policymakers and stakeholders in developing comprehensive strategies to strengthen the curriculum's implementation and ensure its alignment with the evolving needs of Indonesia's education system.

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