
Teachers' adaptation to the implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum: A case study

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Abstract

The implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum represents a major reform in Indonesia's education system, emphasizing flexible learning and student-centered instruction. This study aims to examine teachers' adaptation to the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum at SD Negeri 8 Lubuklinggau. A qualitative descriptive case study design was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with ten teachers teaching in Grades 1, 2, 4, and 5, as well as documentation analysis of teaching modules and learning materials. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of qualitative analysis, which comprises data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that teachers have begun adapting by developing teaching modules, utilizing the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform, and implementing more student-centered learning strategies. However, challenges remain, including limited instructional media, diverse student learning abilities, and the need for continuous professional development to support effective curriculum implementation, which can hinder the *Merdeka* Curriculum's overall success in enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes.

Keywords

Case study, curriculum implementation, elementary school, *Merdeka* Curriculum, teacher adaptation

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Introduction

Education plays a fundamental role in shaping a nation's development and progress. The quality of an education system significantly influences the knowledge, skills, and character of its citizens. For this reason, many countries continuously reform their education systems to respond to social changes, technological development, and global challenges. In Indonesia, improving the quality of education has become a major national priority. One important strategy implemented by the government to achieve this goal is curriculum reform, which functions as a central guideline for organizing teaching and learning activities in schools.

A curriculum serves as a structured framework that determines educational objectives, learning content, instructional strategies, and assessment methods. According to the Indonesian National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003, the curriculum is defined as a set of plans and arrangements regarding learning objectives, content, materials, and methods used as guidelines for implementing learning activities to achieve national education goals. Through curriculum development, the government seeks to ensure that education remains relevant to society's needs and the demands of the modern world.

Historically, the Indonesian education system has undergone several curriculum reforms, including the curricula of 1947, 1964, 1975, 1984, 1994, the Competency-Based Curriculum of 2004, and the 2013 Curriculum (Kurikulum 2013). Each reform aimed to improve the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process and to respond to changing educational needs. However, rapid technological advancement, globalization, and evolving student characteristics require continuous innovation in educational policies, meaning the education system must adapt to incorporate new teaching methods, digital tools, and personalized learning approaches to meet the diverse needs of students. In response to these challenges, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology introduced the *Merdeka* Curriculum (Kurikulum *Merdeka*) as part of the broader *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) policy.

The *Merdeka* Curriculum represents a significant transformation in the Indonesian education system. This curriculum emphasizes flexibility in learning, competency-based education, and student-centered instructional approaches. Instead of focusing on completing large amounts of content, the *Merdeka* Curriculum prioritizes essential competencies such as literacy, numeracy, critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration. The curriculum also encourages deeper conceptual understanding by providing students with sufficient time to explore learning materials and develop their potential (Hakim et al., 2024).

One of the distinctive features of the *Merdeka* Curriculum is the emphasis on developing the Pancasila Student Profile, which serves as a framework for character education in Indonesia. The Pancasila Student Profile includes several key competencies such as faith and morality, global diversity, independence, critical reasoning, creativity, and collaboration. These competencies are developed through interdisciplinary learning activities known as the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5), which encourages students to engage in project-based learning and real-world problem-solving (Hanifah & Subiyantoro, 2023). Through these learning experiences, students are expected to develop both academic competencies and positive character values.

Although the *Merdeka* Curriculum offers opportunities for more flexible and meaningful learning, its successful implementation largely depends on teachers' readiness and adaptability. Teachers play a crucial role in translating curriculum policies into practical learning experiences in the classroom. Their understanding of curriculum principles, ability to design learning activities, and capacity to manage diverse student characteristics significantly influence the effectiveness of curriculum implementation. Previous studies indicate that teacher readiness is a key factor in determining the success of educational reform (Syofyan et al., 2024).

Several studies have examined teachers' readiness and the challenges of implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum in Indonesian schools. For example, research conducted by Sutinah, Riyadi, and Muftianti (2024) found that teachers generally hold positive attitudes toward the *Merdeka* Curriculum but still face challenges related to instructional resources and the preparation of teaching modules. Similarly, Reza and Aufa (2024) reported that teachers' understanding of curriculum structure and assessment methods plays an important role in determining the effectiveness of implementation. Other studies have also highlighted challenges related to limited facilities, diverse student characteristics, and the need for continuous professional development to support teachers during curriculum transition (Rahmawati et al., 2026), which are critical factors that can hinder the successful implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in various educational settings.

Despite the growing body of research on the *Merdeka* Curriculum, most studies focus on large-scale surveys or broader regional contexts. Studies that explore teachers' adaptation processes in specific school contexts, particularly at the elementary school level, remain relatively limited. Understanding how teachers adapt to curriculum reforms in real classroom environments is essential for identifying practical challenges and effective strategies in curriculum implementation.

Therefore, examining teachers' adaptation to the *Merdeka* Curriculum in individual school settings can provide valuable insights into how educational policies are implemented at the grassroots level. Elementary school teachers play a critical role in building students' foundational knowledge, learning habits, and character development. Their ability to adapt to curriculum changes significantly affects the quality of students' learning.

Based on preliminary observations conducted at SD Negeri 8 Lubuklinggau, the school has begun implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum under the *Mandiri Berubah* (Independent Change) scheme. This policy requires teachers to adjust their teaching strategies, instructional materials, and classroom practices to align with the new curriculum framework. However, the extent to which teachers are prepared to adapt to these changes and the challenges they encounter during implementation remain important issues that require further investigation.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze teachers' adaptation to the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum at SD Negeri 8 Lubuklinggau. Specifically, this research examines teachers' readiness, their strategies for adapting to curriculum changes, and the challenges they face during implementation. By exploring these aspects, this study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the implementation of curriculum reform at the elementary school level and to provide insights that may support the improvement of educational practices in Indonesian schools.

Literature Review

Curriculum reform and the Merdeka curriculum in Indonesian education

Curriculum reform is an essential process in education systems worldwide, enabling educational institutions to respond to changes in societal needs, technological developments, and global challenges. In many countries, curriculum reforms aim to enhance learning quality, promote critical thinking, and prepare students for the demands of the twenty-first century. In Indonesia, curriculum changes have historically been implemented to ensure that the education system remains relevant to national development goals and global educational trends. The introduction of the *Merdeka* Curriculum represents one of the most recent and significant reforms in Indonesian education policy.

The *Merdeka* Curriculum was introduced as part of the *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) policy initiated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. This curriculum was designed to address several limitations of previous curricula, particularly the issue of overloaded learning content and limited flexibility in instructional design. The *Merdeka* Curriculum emphasizes deeper conceptual understanding, essential competencies, and the development of students' character through project-based learning activities (Suhandoko & Nugroho, 2022). By reducing the volume of learning materials and focusing on key competencies such as literacy and numeracy, the curriculum aims to give students sufficient time to explore concepts more meaningfully.

One of the central components of the *Merdeka* Curriculum is the Pancasila Student Profile, which functions as a framework for character education. The Pancasila Student Profile includes six main dimensions: faith and morality, global diversity, independence, critical reasoning, creativity, and collaboration. These dimensions are implemented through interdisciplinary learning projects known as the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5). Through these projects, students are encouraged to engage in experiential learning activities that integrate knowledge, values, and real-world problem-solving (Rahayu et al., 2022). This approach reflects a shift from traditional teacher-centred instruction toward student-centred learning environments.

Another key feature of the *Merdeka* Curriculum is the increased autonomy granted to schools and teachers. Schools are given flexibility to design their own operational curricula, while teachers may select teaching strategies, learning resources, and assessment methods that best suit their students' needs. This flexibility is expected to promote innovation in classroom practices and enable educators to adapt learning processes according to local contexts (Fitriani & Setiawan, 2023). By empowering teachers to implement the curriculum rather than serve as passive policy followers, the *Merdeka* Curriculum aims to foster more dynamic and responsive educational environments.

However, implementing curriculum reform often involves significant challenges. Teachers must understand new curriculum structures, adjust their teaching strategies, and develop new learning materials that align with policy guidelines. Research indicates that curriculum reforms frequently encounter obstacles when teachers lack adequate training, institutional support, or professional development opportunities (Susanti & Hidayat, 2021). In

the context of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, teachers are expected to develop competencies in differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and formative assessment, which may require substantial changes in pedagogical practices.

Recent studies highlight that the success of the *Merdeka* Curriculum largely depends on how well teachers understand and implement its principles. According to [Rahayu et al. \(2022\)](#), teachers who receive sufficient training and institutional support tend to demonstrate greater confidence and effectiveness in applying the curriculum in their classrooms. Conversely, limited access to professional development and learning resources can hinder teachers' ability to fully adopt the new curriculum framework. Therefore, understanding how teachers adapt to the *Merdeka* Curriculum is crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of this educational reform.

Overall, the *Merdeka* Curriculum represents a transformative policy aimed at improving the quality of education in Indonesia. By emphasizing competency-based learning, student autonomy, and character development, the curriculum prepares learners for future challenges. However, the successful implementation of this curriculum depends largely on teachers' readiness and capacity to adapt to new educational practices, including their familiarity with competency-based learning and their ability to engage students in a more autonomous learning environment.

Teacher readiness and adaptation in curriculum implementation

Teacher readiness is widely recognized as a critical factor in the successful implementation of educational reforms. Curriculum changes often require teachers to adjust their teaching approaches, instructional materials, and assessment methods to align with new policy frameworks. As a result, teachers must possess not only adequate professional knowledge but also the ability to adapt to evolving educational contexts. Teacher readiness encompasses multiple dimensions, including pedagogical competence, professional commitment, technological literacy, and the ability to manage diverse learning environments.

In the context of curriculum reform, teacher readiness can be defined as the level of preparedness teachers have to understand, implement, and sustain new educational policies in classroom practice. According to [Darling-Hammond et al. \(2020\)](#), teachers' professional capacity plays a fundamental role in determining whether curriculum reforms achieve their intended outcomes. When teachers are adequately prepared through training, professional development programs, and institutional support, they are more likely to implement innovative teaching strategies effectively. Conversely, insufficient preparation may lead to confusion, resistance, or ineffective implementation of curriculum changes.

Implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum requires teachers to adopt new pedagogical approaches, particularly student-centered learning methods. Teachers are expected to facilitate collaborative learning, encourage critical thinking, and integrate real-world problem-solving into classroom activities. This shift from traditional teaching methods toward more interactive learning environments requires teachers to develop new instructional skills and strategies. According to [Hidayat and Machali \(2021\)](#), teacher adaptation is a dynamic process that involves continuous learning, reflection, and professional growth. Teachers who actively engage in professional development activities tend to adapt more successfully to educational reforms.

Professional development programs play an essential role in supporting teacher readiness during curriculum implementation. Workshops, seminars, and training sessions offer teachers opportunities to gain practical knowledge of curriculum design, instructional planning, and assessment strategies. In Indonesia, the government has introduced various initiatives to support teachers' readiness to implement the *Merdeka* Curriculum, including the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform, which provides digital learning resources, training modules, and collaborative learning communities for educators. Such initiatives aim to help teachers develop the competencies required to implement the new curriculum effectively.

Despite these efforts, several challenges continue to affect teachers' readiness to implement curriculum reforms. Research indicates that teachers often face difficulties related to limited instructional resources, heavy workloads, and insufficient institutional support (Pratiwi & Wuryandani, 2022). In addition, differences in teachers' professional backgrounds, teaching experience, and technological skills may influence their ability to adapt to new curriculum frameworks. These challenges highlight the importance of continuous professional development and supportive educational environments.

Teacher adaptation is influenced not only by individual competence but also by organizational and institutional factors. School leadership, collaborative culture, and access to learning resources can significantly affect teachers' ability to implement curriculum changes. According to Fullan (2020), successful educational reform requires strong collaboration among teachers, school leaders, and policymakers. Teachers are more likely to try new teaching methods when they feel supported by their schools and coworkers.

In summary, teacher readiness and adaptation are central elements in the successful implementation of curriculum reforms. Teachers must constantly improve their professional skills to keep up with the changing needs of education. Understanding how teachers adapt to new curriculum policies, such as the *Merdeka* Curriculum, is essential for identifying both the strengths and challenges of educational reform implementation.

Challenges and opportunities in implementing the Merdeka curriculum

Implementing educational reforms often presents both opportunities and challenges for teachers and schools. While curriculum changes aim to improve learning quality and student outcomes, they may also create new demands for educators who must adjust their teaching practices accordingly. In the *Merdeka* Curriculum, teachers are expected to adopt innovative learning approaches, integrate interdisciplinary projects, and support students' independent learning. These expectations create opportunities to improve educational practices, but they also pose challenges that require careful consideration.

One of the major opportunities provided by the *Merdeka* Curriculum is its flexibility in curriculum planning and instructional design. Unlike previous curricula that prescribed rigid learning structures, the *Merdeka* Curriculum allows teachers to adapt learning activities according to students' needs, interests, and local contexts. This flexibility enables teachers to design more creative and meaningful learning experiences that encourage active student participation. According to Suryaman (2022), the *Merdeka* Curriculum promotes a more humanistic, learner-centered educational approach, in which teachers act as facilitators rather than sole knowledge providers.

Another opportunity lies in integrating project-based learning through the Pancasila Student Profile Project. These projects encourage students to collaborate, explore real-world problems, and apply interdisciplinary knowledge. Such learning experiences help students develop critical thinking, creativity, and social responsibility. Research conducted by Nugraha et al. (2023) indicates that project-based learning within the *Merdeka* Curriculum framework can significantly enhance students' engagement and motivation in learning.

However, despite these opportunities, several challenges remain in effectively implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum. One of the most frequently reported challenges is the limited availability of instructional resources and learning media. Teachers may struggle to design innovative learning activities when they lack adequate teaching materials, technological tools, or classroom facilities. According to Rahmawati and Sari (2021), insufficient infrastructure can hinder the successful implementation of curriculum innovations, particularly in schools located in rural or underdeveloped regions.

Another challenge relates to teachers' professional readiness and understanding of curriculum principles. Teachers unfamiliar with student-centered learning approaches may find it difficult to implement project-based learning or differentiated instruction effectively. This issue is particularly relevant for teachers who have long relied on traditional lecture-based teaching methods. As noted by Yusuf et al. (2023), effective curriculum implementation requires continuous teacher training and mentoring to ensure that educators understand the pedagogical principles underlying the new curriculum framework.

Student characteristics also influence the success of curriculum implementation. Differences in students' learning abilities, motivation, and socioeconomic backgrounds can affect how they respond to new learning approaches. Teachers must therefore develop strategies to manage diverse classrooms and ensure that all students can benefit from the learning process. This task requires strong classroom management skills, empathy, and the ability to design inclusive learning environments. In conclusion, the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum presents both significant opportunities and complex challenges. While the curriculum encourages innovation, flexibility, and student-centered learning, its success ultimately depends on teachers' readiness, the availability of resources, and the support provided by educational institutions. Understanding these factors is essential for evaluating the effectiveness of curriculum reform and for identifying strategies to improve educational practices in Indonesian schools.

Methodology

Research design

This study employed a qualitative, descriptive case study design to explore teachers' adaptation to the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum at SD Negeri 8 Lubuklinggau. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to examine participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of curriculum implementation in depth. Qualitative research is particularly well-suited to understanding complex educational phenomena in their real-life contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The case study design was selected because the research focuses on a specific setting, namely SD Negeri 8 Lubuklinggau, where the *Merdeka* Curriculum has been implemented. This design enables the researcher to obtain detailed insights into how teachers adapt to curriculum changes within a particular educational environment.

Research site and participants

This research was conducted at SD Negeri 8 Lubuklinggau, an elementary school that has implemented the *Merdeka* Curriculum under the *Mandiri Berubah* (Independent Change) scheme. The school was selected because it represents one of the schools that have begun implementing the new curriculum and provides a relevant context for examining teachers' adaptation to curriculum reform.

The participants in this study were 10 teachers from SD Negeri 8 Lubuklinggau. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, a commonly used method in qualitative research that selects individuals with relevant experience related to the research topic (Patton, 2015). The selected participants included homeroom teachers from Grades 1, 2, 4, and 5, as these classes were among the first to implement the *Merdeka* Curriculum.

Data collection techniques

Interviews

The primary data collection method in this study was semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to explore participants' perspectives while maintaining flexibility in probing deeper into relevant issues that emerge during the conversation (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

The interviews were conducted with 10 teachers and focused on several aspects related to the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, including teachers' understanding of the curriculum structure, lesson-planning practices, the implementation of learning activities, the preparation of teaching modules, assessment strategies, and the challenges encountered during implementation.

Documents

A document analysis was conducted to obtain supporting data on the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum at the research site. The documents analyzed included teaching modules, lesson plans, curriculum guidelines, and other school records related to teaching and learning activities. Documentation serves as an important source of evidence in qualitative research because it provides written information that can support and validate findings obtained from interviews (Yin, 2018).

Data analysis

Data analysis in this study followed the qualitative data analysis procedures proposed by Miles et al. (2014), which involve three interconnected stages: data reduction, data display, and

conclusion drawing and verification. These stages were conducted systematically throughout the research process to ensure that the findings accurately reflected participants' experiences and perspectives.

Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, simplifying, and organizing raw data obtained from interviews and documentation. In this study, the researcher first transcribed all interview recordings into written form. The transcripts were then carefully reviewed to identify relevant information related to teachers' adaptation to the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum.

After the transcription process, the researcher conducted initial coding by labeling meaningful segments of data that reflected teachers' experiences, perceptions, and challenges in implementing the curriculum. Similar codes were then grouped into broader categories. These categories were further organized into key themes, such as teachers' understanding of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, adaptation of teaching practices, use of learning resources, and challenges in implementation. Through this process, irrelevant or repetitive information was filtered out, allowing the analysis to focus on the most significant data relevant to the research objectives.

After the data were reduced and categorized, the next stage was to present them in a structured form to facilitate interpretation. Data displays were created as descriptive narratives and in thematic organization, which allowed the researcher to clearly present the patterns and relationships identified in the data. The organized data enabled the researcher to compare responses from different participants and identify recurring themes related to teachers' adaptation processes. In addition, selected interview quotations were included to provide direct evidence of participants' perspectives and to strengthen the credibility of the findings. Through this process, the researcher gained a clearer understanding of how teachers interpreted and implemented the *Merdeka* Curriculum in their classroom practices.

The final stage of the analysis involved interpreting the patterns and themes identified during the data display stage and drawing meaningful conclusions from the findings. The researcher examined how the themes were interconnected and how they addressed the research objectives related to teachers' adaptation to the *Merdeka* Curriculum. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the conclusions were continually verified by re-examining the original data sources, including interview transcripts and documentation. The researcher also conducted member checking, in which selected participants reviewed the interpreted findings to confirm that the results accurately represented their experiences and perspectives. This verification process helped ensure that the conclusions drawn from the data were valid, consistent, and supported by sufficient evidence.

Trustworthiness of the data

To ensure the credibility of the research findings, member checking was conducted. This process involved presenting the interpreted data to the participants to confirm whether the findings accurately represented their experiences and perspectives.

In addition, data triangulation was applied by comparing information obtained from interviews and documentation. Triangulation strengthens the validity of qualitative research by ensuring that findings are supported by multiple sources of evidence.

Findings

The findings of this study describe how teachers at SD Negeri 8 Lubuklinggau adapt to the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Based on the analysis of interview data and documentation, several major themes emerged: teachers' understanding of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, adaptation of teaching practices, use of learning resources, and challenges in implementation.

Teachers' understanding of the Merdeka curriculum

The findings indicate that most teachers have begun to understand the basic concepts of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Teachers explained that the curriculum emphasizes flexible learning, student-centered instruction, and the development of essential competencies such as literacy and numeracy. Teachers also reported that they had participated in seminars, training sessions, and school discussions to improve their understanding of the new curriculum.

Several teachers stated that the *Merdeka* Curriculum provides greater flexibility in designing learning activities compared with the previous curriculum. One teacher explained that the new curriculum allows teachers to adjust learning strategies according to students' needs and characteristics.

“Kurikulum *Merdeka* memberikan kami lebih banyak kebebasan dalam merancang kegiatan pembelajaran. Kami bisa menyesuaikan materi dan metode pembelajaran dengan kemampuan siswa.” (In Bahasa)

“The *Merdeka* Curriculum gives us more flexibility in designing learning activities. We can adjust the materials and teaching methods according to students' abilities.” (Teacher interview, in English)

This statement shows that teachers perceive the *Merdeka* Curriculum as providing opportunities to create more adaptive and meaningful learning experiences.

Adaptation of teaching practices

Another important finding relates to teachers' adaptation in classroom teaching practices. Teachers reported that they have begun to shift from teacher-centered instruction to more student-centered learning approaches. These include group discussions, collaborative learning activities, and problem-solving tasks that encourage students to actively participate in the learning process. Teachers also stated that they have started preparing teaching modules (modul ajar) to meet the requirements of the *Merdeka* curriculum. These modules contain learning objectives, learning activities, and assessment strategies designed to support competency-based learning. One teacher described the change in teaching practices as follows:

“Dalam Kurikulum *Merdeka*, siswa lebih aktif dalam kegiatan belajar. Kami mencoba membuat kegiatan yang memungkinkan mereka berdiskusi dan bekerja sama dengan teman-temannya.” (In Bahasa)

“In the *Merdeka* Curriculum, students are more actively involved in learning activities. We try to create activities that allow them to discuss and collaborate with their classmates.” (Teacher interview, in English)

These findings indicate that teachers are gradually adapting their teaching practices to align with the principles of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, which emphasizes student-centered learning and collaborative activities.

Use of learning resources and digital platforms

The findings also reveal that teachers utilize various learning resources to support curriculum implementation. One of the resources frequently mentioned by teachers is the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform, which provides access to teaching modules, learning materials, and instructional guidance. Teachers reported that this platform helps them understand the structure of the *Merdeka* Curriculum and provides examples of teaching modules that can be adapted to classroom contexts. In addition, teachers also collaborate with colleagues through school meetings and informal discussions to share experiences and teaching strategies related to the new curriculum. One teacher explained:

“Kami sering menggunakan Platform Merdeka Mengajar untuk mencari contoh modul ajar dan ide kegiatan pembelajaran.” (In Bahasa)

“We often use the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform to find examples of teaching modules and ideas for learning activities.” (Teacher interview, in English)

These collaborative and digital learning resources help teachers gradually improve their confidence in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum.

Challenges in implementing the Merdeka curriculum

Despite the positive adaptation observed among teachers, several challenges were identified in the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. One of the major challenges mentioned by teachers is the limited availability of instructional media and learning facilities. Teachers explained that the lack of teaching aids sometimes makes it difficult to conduct interactive and project-based learning activities, which are essential for engaging students and enhancing their learning experience.

“Salah satu kendala yang kami hadapi adalah keterbatasan media pembelajaran, sehingga terkadang sulit membuat kegiatan belajar yang lebih menarik.” (In Bahasa)

“One of the challenges we face is the limited availability of learning media, which sometimes makes it difficult to create more engaging learning activities.” (Teacher interview, in English)

Another challenge relates to students’ diverse learning abilities and backgrounds. Teachers stated that differences in students’ academic readiness and socioeconomic conditions sometimes influence their participation in learning activities, which can lead to disparities in engagement and achievement among students.

“Kemampuan siswa di kelas sangat beragam, sehingga kami harus menyesuaikan metode pembelajaran agar semua siswa dapat mengikuti pelajaran.” (In Bahasa)

“Students in the classroom have very diverse abilities, so we need to adjust our teaching methods to ensure that all students can follow the learning process.” (Teacher interview, in English)

Overall, the findings indicate that although teachers have begun to adapt to the *Merdeka* Curriculum and show positive attitudes toward its implementation, several obstacles remain. Continuous professional development, adequate learning resources, and institutional support are essential for teachers to implement the curriculum effectively, as these factors directly influence their ability to adapt teaching methods and engage students in line with the curriculum's goals.

Discussion

Teachers’ understanding of the Merdeka curriculum

The findings of this study indicate that teachers at SD Negeri 8 Lubuklinggau have gradually developed an understanding of the fundamental principles of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, including flexible learning structures, competency-based education, and student-centered instructional approaches. Teachers reported that their understanding was mainly developed through training programs, professional discussions, and independent learning through digital platforms such as the *Merdeka* Mengajar Platform. These findings suggest that teachers’ conceptual understanding of curriculum reform is strongly influenced by access to professional development opportunities.

Previous studies emphasize that teacher understanding is one of the most critical determinants of successful curriculum implementation. Teachers who clearly understand curriculum goals, learning outcomes, and instructional strategies are more likely to apply them effectively in classroom practices (Sutinah, Riyadi, & Muftianti, 2024). Similarly, [Syofyan et al.](#)

(2024) argue that teacher readiness in curriculum reform depends not only on pedagogical competence but also on teachers' ability to interpret policy changes and translate them into meaningful instructional practices.

The gradual development of teachers' understanding observed in this study reflects the transitional nature of curriculum reform. When a new curriculum is introduced, teachers often require time to internalize its principles and integrate them into their teaching practices. Rahmawati et al. (2026) note that teachers' comprehension of curriculum structures and learning outcomes significantly influences their confidence in implementing new learning approaches. Therefore, continuous professional learning is essential to support teachers during the transition from previous curricula to the *Merdeka* Curriculum.

Adaptation of teaching practices

Another significant finding of this study is the transformation of teachers' instructional practices toward more student-centered learning approaches. Teachers reported that they have begun implementing collaborative learning activities, discussions, and problem-solving tasks that encourage students to participate more actively in the learning process. This shift reflects the core philosophy of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, which emphasizes meaningful learning experiences and active student engagement.

Student-centered learning has been widely recognized as an effective approach for improving students' critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2020), learning environments that encourage student participation and collaboration can significantly enhance students' cognitive and social development. In the context of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, teachers are expected to act not only as knowledge transmitters but also as facilitators who guide students in exploring concepts and constructing knowledge independently.

The findings of this study also show that teachers have begun preparing teaching modules (modul ajar) as part of their adaptation to the new curriculum framework. Teaching modules play an important role in organizing learning objectives, instructional strategies, and assessment activities in a systematic manner. Purwanti et al. (2024) highlight that teaching modules provide structured guidance for teachers to design competency-based learning activities that align with curriculum goals.

However, the transition from traditional teacher-centered instruction to student-centered learning requires significant pedagogical adjustment. Teachers must develop new classroom management strategies, design interactive learning activities, and accommodate diverse student learning needs, which may include differentiated instruction and the use of technology to enhance engagement. As noted by Hidayat and Machali (2021), teacher adaptation to innovative pedagogical approaches is a gradual process that requires continuous reflection, experimentation, and professional support.

Role of learning resources and professional collaboration

The findings also highlight the importance of learning resources and professional collaboration in supporting teachers' adaptation to the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Teachers reported

that the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform serves as an important source of teaching materials, instructional guidance, and examples of teaching modules that help them implement the curriculum in practice.

Digital platforms have increasingly become essential tools for supporting teachers' professional development and instructional innovation. According to Kemdikbudristek (2022), the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform was developed to provide teachers with access to digital learning resources, training modules, and professional learning communities that facilitate the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. By providing teachers with practical examples of instructional design and assessment methods, the platform helps reduce uncertainty during curriculum transitions.

In addition to digital resources, collaboration among teachers also plays an important role in implementing the curriculum. Teachers in this study reported frequently sharing experiences, teaching strategies, and learning materials through informal discussions and school meetings. Fullan (2020) emphasizes that collaborative professional cultures within schools significantly contribute to the success of educational reforms. When teachers engage in collaborative learning, they are more likely to develop innovative teaching strategies and overcome implementation challenges, such as resistance to change and lack of resources, which are critical for the successful adoption of new curricula like the *Merdeka* Curriculum.

Challenges in implementing the Merdeka curriculum

Despite the positive adaptation observed in this study, several challenges remain in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum. One of the main challenges identified is the limited availability of instructional media and learning facilities. Teachers reported that insufficient teaching aids sometimes hinder their ability to conduct interactive and project-based learning activities, which are essential for the successful implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum.

Limited educational resources have frequently been identified as a major obstacle to curriculum reform in developing educational contexts. Yunitasari and Suastra (2023) found that inadequate learning facilities and instructional resources often prevent teachers from fully implementing innovative teaching approaches promoted by the *Merdeka* Curriculum which are essential for fostering student engagement and improving learning outcomes. Similarly, Rahmawati and Sari (2021) argue that effective curriculum implementation requires adequate infrastructure and access to teaching materials that support active learning.

Another challenge identified in this study relates to the diversity of students' learning abilities and socioeconomic backgrounds. Teachers reported that differences in students' academic readiness and access to learning resources sometimes influence students' participation in classroom activities which can lead to disparities in engagement and achievement among students from different backgrounds. This finding highlights the importance of differentiated instruction, which allows teachers to adapt teaching strategies to students' diverse needs. According to Tomlinson (2017), differentiated instruction enables teachers to provide flexible learning opportunities that accommodate students' varying learning abilities, interests, and learning styles.

Furthermore, teachers emphasized the need for continuous professional development to strengthen their competence in designing project-based learning activities and

implementing competency-based assessments. Ndari and Mahmudah (2023) emphasize that sustained professional development programs are essential for ensuring that teachers can effectively implement new curriculum policies. Without continuous training and institutional support, teachers may struggle to translate curriculum principles into effective classroom practices, which can hinder the overall success of the *Merdeka* Curriculum implementation.

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that teacher adaptation to the *Merdeka* Curriculum is a dynamic process influenced by multiple factors, including teacher understanding, professional learning opportunities, institutional support, and the availability of educational resources. Strengthening these factors is essential for ensuring the successful and sustainable implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in Indonesian elementary schools.

Conclusion

This study examined teachers' adaptation to the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum at SD Negeri 8 Lubuklinggau. The findings indicate that teachers have begun to adapt to the new curriculum by improving their understanding of its principles, adjusting their teaching practices, and using a range of learning resources. Teachers demonstrated awareness of the *Merdeka* Curriculum's main characteristics, including flexible learning, student-centered instruction, and competency-based learning. Participation in training programs and professional discussions has contributed to teachers' understanding of the curriculum and supported their efforts to implement it in classroom practices.

The study also found that teachers have started to modify their instructional approaches by implementing more interactive and collaborative learning activities. The preparation of teaching modules and the use of the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform have helped teachers design learning activities aligned with the goals of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. These findings indicate that teachers are gradually transitioning from traditional teacher-centered instruction to more student-centered learning practices.

However, several challenges remain in the implementation process. Teachers reported difficulties related to limited instructional media, diverse student learning abilities, and the need for additional training in designing project-based learning activities and conducting competency-based assessments. These challenges suggest that the successful implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum requires continuous support for teachers. Based on these findings, this study highlights the importance of ongoing professional development, adequate learning resources, and institutional support in facilitating teachers' adaptation to curriculum reform. Schools and education authorities should provide regular training programs, improve access to teaching resources, and encourage collaborative professional learning among teachers to support effective implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Future research may explore the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in different educational contexts or examine students' learning experiences and outcomes under this curriculum to provide a more comprehensive understanding of its impact on educational practices.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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