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Teachers' Attitudes toward the Merdeka Curriculum in Elementary Schools in Pematangsiantar

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Abstrak

Penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka di Indonesia menandai perubahan signifikan dalam kebijakan pendidikan, dengan penekanan pada fleksibilitas dan pembelajaran yang berpusat pada siswa. Penelitian ini menyelidiki sikap guru sekolah dasar terhadap kurikulum baru ini di Pematangsiantar, bertujuan untuk memahami implementasi praktisnya dan tantangan yang dihadapi. Menggunakan pendekatan metode campuran, data dikumpulkan dari 20 guru yang dipilih secara acak melalui kuesioner Google Forms dan wawancara semi-terstruktur. Kuesioner, berdasarkan skala Likert 5 poin, terdiri dari 20 pernyataan yang menilai pemahaman kognitif, keterlibatan afektif, dan penerapan psikomotorik kurikulum. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa 80-90% guru mendemonstrasikan tingkat pemahaman yang tinggi dan keterlibatan positif dengan prinsip-prinsip kurikulum. Analisis kualitatif mengungkapkan antusiasme guru terhadap fleksibilitas kurikulum, namun juga menyoroti kekhawatiran tentang keterbatasan sumber daya dan kebutuhan akan pengembangan profesional berkelanjutan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa meskipun guru umumnya menerima Kurikulum Merdeka dengan baik, dukungan terarah dan sumber daya yang memadai sangat penting untuk implementasi yang sukses. Temuan ini memberikan wawasan berharga bagi pembuat kebijakan pendidikan dan administrator sekolah dalam menyempurnakan strategi implementasi kurikulum.

Kata Kunci: *Kurikulum Merdeka, Sekolah Dasar, Sikap Guru*

Abstract

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia marks a significant shift in educational policy, emphasizing flexibility and student-centered learning. This study investigates elementary school teachers' attitudes towards this new curriculum in Pematangsiantar, aiming to understand its practical implementation and challenges. Using a mixed-methods approach, data was collected from 20 randomly selected teachers through Google Forms questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire, based on a 5-point Likert scale, comprised 20 statements assessing cognitive understanding, affective engagement, and psychomotor application of the curriculum. Results show that 80-90% of teachers demonstrate a high level of understanding and positive engagement with the curriculum's principles. Qualitative analysis revealed teachers' enthusiasm for the curriculum's flexibility but highlighted concerns about resource limitations and the need for ongoing professional development. The study concludes that while teachers are generally receptive to the Merdeka Curriculum, targeted support and resources are crucial for its successful implementation. These findings provide valuable insights for educational policymakers and school administrators in refining curriculum implementation strategies.

Keywords: *Elementary School, Merdeka Curriculum, Teacher's Attitude*

INTRODUCTION

The Merdeka Curriculum, introduced by the Indonesian government, marks a transformative shift in the nation's educational framework, aimed at enhancing the quality of education through increased flexibility, student-centered learning, and a strong emphasis on character development. This curriculum is designed to address the evolving needs of both students and educators, moving away from the rigid structures of the previous 2013 Curriculum. While the 2013 Curriculum focused on standardized content and a subject-centered approach, the Merdeka Curriculum provides teachers with the autonomy to adapt teaching methods, learning materials, and assessments based on the unique needs of their students and local contexts. It stresses the importance of critical thinking, creativity, and collaborative skills, ensuring that students not only excel academically but also grow as responsible and active citizens. By embedding Pancasila values—such as independence, religious devotion, collaboration, and patriotism the Merdeka Curriculum aims to foster well-rounded individuals who can contribute positively to the country's social and economic progress.

The reform was prompted in part by the learning losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed the limitations of the previous education system and called for

more adaptable, inclusive learning frameworks. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (2022), the Merdeka Curriculum aims to provide a more holistic educational experience that addresses these gaps, allowing students to learn at their own pace, with greater engagement and individualized support. Furthermore, the curriculum promotes Project-Based Learning (PBL), a method in which students engage in hands-on projects that challenge them to solve real-world problems, fostering deeper learning and practical skills. This approach aligns with global trends in education that prioritize active learning over passive absorption of knowledge.

Research has shown that teachers' perceptions and readiness to implement such changes are crucial to the success of this curriculum (Andarwulan, 2023; S. M. N., 2022). Teachers are at the forefront of this educational transformation, and their attitudes, beliefs, and practices play a vital role in shaping how the Merdeka Curriculum is put into action. Previous studies have highlighted both positive and negative perceptions from educators regarding the Merdeka Curriculum's potential impact. For example, some teachers report feeling empowered by the increased autonomy to design their own lesson plans and assessments, while others express concerns about their preparedness for this new approach and the lack of sufficient training and resources (Checilia Fristiviona, 2024; Telaumbanua, 2024). These mixed responses suggest that while the Merdeka Curriculum holds promise, its full implementation may be hindered by various challenges at the school and classroom levels.

Teacher readiness, training, and institutional support are frequently cited as key factors that influence the success of curriculum reforms (Daryanto & Sari, 2023; Kurniawan & Prabowo, 2024). A major limitation of earlier studies is that they often focus on teachers in urban areas or larger schools, leaving out important regional perspectives. Moreover, while there is some research on the general implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, there is a lack of studies that examine how teachers in specific regions such as Pematangsiantar perceive and apply the new curriculum in their classrooms. Understanding these regional variations is crucial because the educational environment in smaller cities or rural areas may differ significantly from that in more urbanized regions. By exploring the experiences of elementary school teachers in Pematangsiantar, this research aims to fill this gap and provide insights into how these educators are adapting to and interpreting the curriculum in their unique contexts.

Furthermore, the literature on the Merdeka Curriculum also points to challenges such as insufficient resources, resistance to change, and gaps in professional development (Zidan & Q., 2023; Ubay & R., 2023). While the curriculum allows for greater teacher autonomy, this freedom can be overwhelming for some teachers who may lack the training or support needed to design effective and engaging learning experiences. The lack of access to technology and teaching materials also exacerbates these difficulties, making it harder for educators to implement the curriculum as intended. Teacher professional development, therefore, emerges as a critical component for the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Many studies stress the importance of ongoing training programs that focus on equipping teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to make the curriculum work in their classrooms (Daryanto & Sari, 2024; Rahman & Iskandar, 2024). Given these gaps in the existing literature, this study aims to investigate the perceptions and experiences of elementary school teachers in Pematangsiantar as they implement the Merdeka Curriculum. Specifically, this research will examine how teachers understand and interpret the curriculum's principles, the challenges they encounter in its implementation, and how they are adapting their teaching practices to align with its goals. Additionally, this study will explore the role of resources, training, and institutional support in shaping teachers' ability to effectively implement the curriculum. By addressing these issues, this study seeks to contribute to the broader body of knowledge on educational reforms in Indonesia and provide recommendations for improving the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation in the future. This research will fill a critical gap in the literature by focusing on a specific region, offering a more nuanced understanding of how the Merdeka Curriculum is applied in diverse educational contexts. The findings will not only shed light on the experiences of teachers in Pematangsiantar but also provide valuable insights for policymakers, educational stakeholders, and teacher educators working to support the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum across Indonesia. Ultimately, the study aims to enhance the understanding of teacher perceptions, preparedness, and challenges, contributing to the refinement of curriculum policies and professional development programs that better meet the needs of teachers and students alike.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilized a descriptive research design with a mixed-methods approach to evaluate elementary school teachers' attitudes toward the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Pematangsiantar. The research aimed to assess teachers' understanding, emotional engagement, and practical application of the curriculum while identifying challenges and opportunities for improvement. Quantitative data were collected through a structured 20-item questionnaire addressing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. Combining numerical data with contextual insights, as suggested by Creswell (2014), provides a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

Target Population and Sampling Method

The target population consisted of elementary school teachers in Pematangsiantar. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of individuals with relevant experience and expertise in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. This method, as recommended by Patton (2015), ensures the collection of information-rich data, particularly in understanding the various challenges and attitudes teachers face during curriculum implementation.

Data Collection Instruments

The instrument used in this study was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 20 items divided into three domains: Cognitive domain (5 items): Focused on teachers' comprehension of the curriculum's core principles and objectives. Example: "I understand the primary objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum." Affective domain (5 items): Measured teachers' emotional responses and attitudes toward the curriculum. Example: "I feel motivated by the flexibility provided in the Merdeka Curriculum." Psychomotor domain (10 items): Assessed the practical application of the curriculum in classroom teaching. Example: "I incorporate Profil Pelajar Pancasila in my classroom lessons." Each statement was rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." Data collection was facilitated through Google Forms, ensuring practical and accessible survey response gathering.

Participants

The research involved 20 elementary school teachers from Pematangsiantar. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure diversity in teaching

experience, school location, and familiarity with the Merdeka Curriculum. This selection aimed to capture varied perspectives on the curriculum's implementation and its challenges.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure involved three main steps. First, during the preparation phase, a structured questionnaire was developed, categorizing statements into cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. Participants were briefed about the study's objectives and assured of confidentiality before providing their consent. Second, during the distribution and response-gathering phase, the questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms to ensure practical and accessible survey response collection. The link to the Google Form was shared with purposively selected teachers to promote equal participation opportunities. Finally, data analysis techniques were employed. Quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, to summarize teachers' attitudes across the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). Recurring themes and patterns, such as resource constraints, training needs, and adaptation strategies, were identified. This analysis complemented the quantitative findings, providing a richer understanding of the study's results.

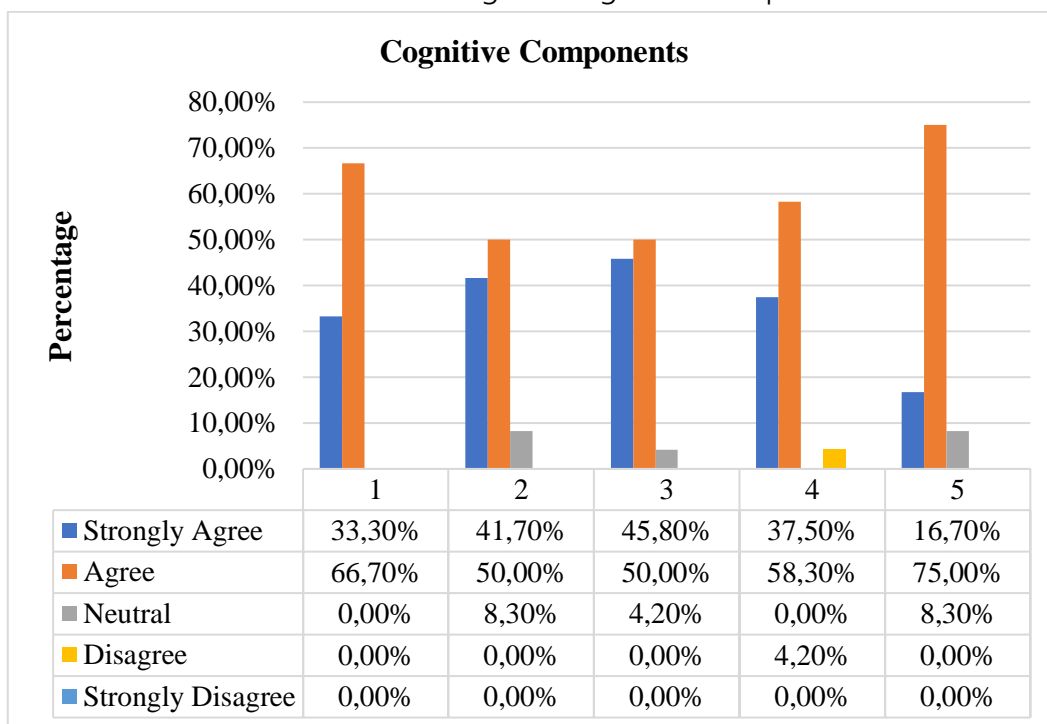
RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative Findings

This section presents the findings of the study, focusing on both quantitative and qualitative results to address the research questions regarding teachers' attitudes toward the Merdeka Curriculum. The results are categorized into three key dimensions: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor, which reflect distinct aspects of teachers' understanding, emotional engagement, and practical implementation of the curriculum. Descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations, were calculated to summarize the data and highlight patterns in teachers' attitudes across the three dimensions. Through these findings, this chapter provides a detailed analysis of how effectively teachers are adapting to and applying the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum in their classrooms. This discussion aims to shed light on the strengths and areas for improvement in the curriculum's

implementation, contributing to a better understanding of its overall impact on elementary education in Pematangsiantar.

Table 1. The Percentage of Cognitive Components



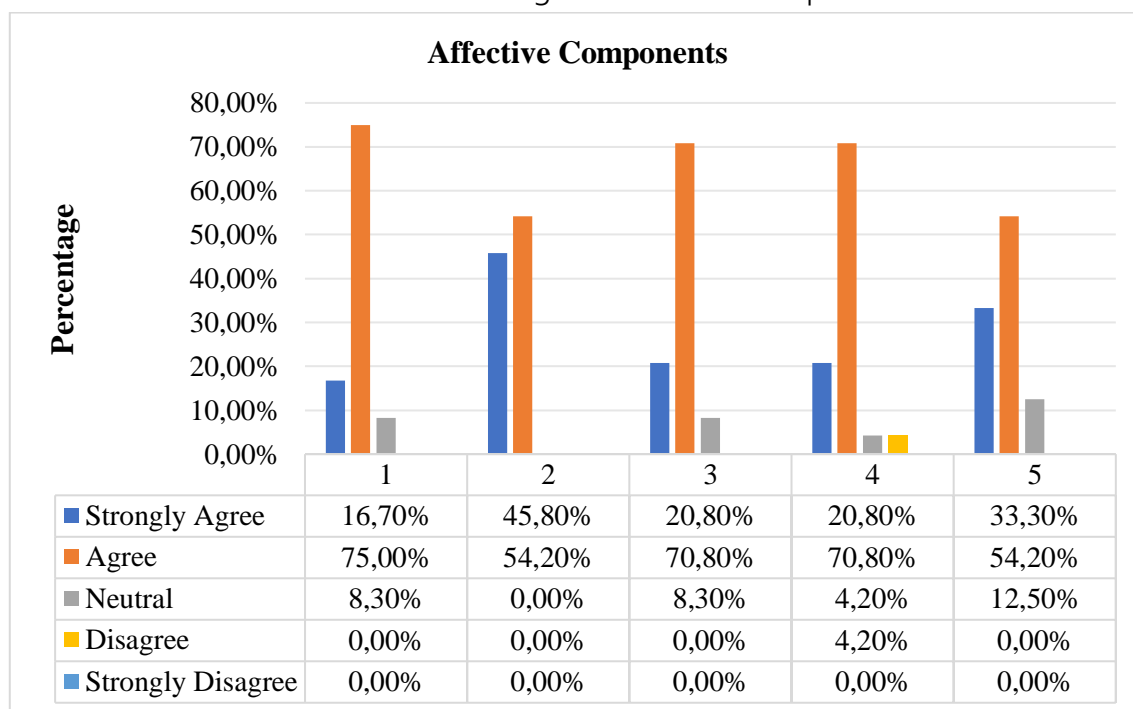
From Table 1 above, it can be seen that teachers who have a positive attitude demonstrate strong support and understanding of the cognitive components of the Merdeka Curriculum. There are 5 statements from the cognitive component, which highlight key aspects of their perceptions.

1. Understanding the Concept and Goals of Kurikulum Merdeka: Most respondents (100%) agree or strongly agree, indicating a comprehensive understanding of the main concepts and objectives of Kurikulum Merdeka.
2. Designing Learning Based on Students' Needs: A majority (over 90%) agree or strongly agree that Kurikulum Merdeka helps them create learning activities tailored to students' needs, showing its practical relevance.
3. Flexibility in Adjusting Learning Materials: Almost all respondents (95.8%) agree or strongly agree that Kurikulum Merdeka offers sufficient flexibility to modify and adjust teaching materials.

4. Confidence in Implementing Kurikulum Merdeka in the Classroom: A significant portion (95.8%) of respondents feel confident implementing the curriculum, though a small minority (4.2%) expressed doubts.
5. Understanding the Differences Between Kurikulum Merdeka and Kurikulum 2013: While 91.7% agree or strongly agree about understanding the key differences, only a smaller proportion strongly agree (16.7%) compared to other aspects.

These findings suggest that most respondents have a positive cognitive engagement with Kurikulum Merdeka, reflecting their readiness and adaptability to its implementation. However, minor neutral and disagree responses—particularly related to confidence in implementation and understanding the differences with Kurikulum 2013—highlight areas where additional support or training could further enhance their perception and application of the curriculum.

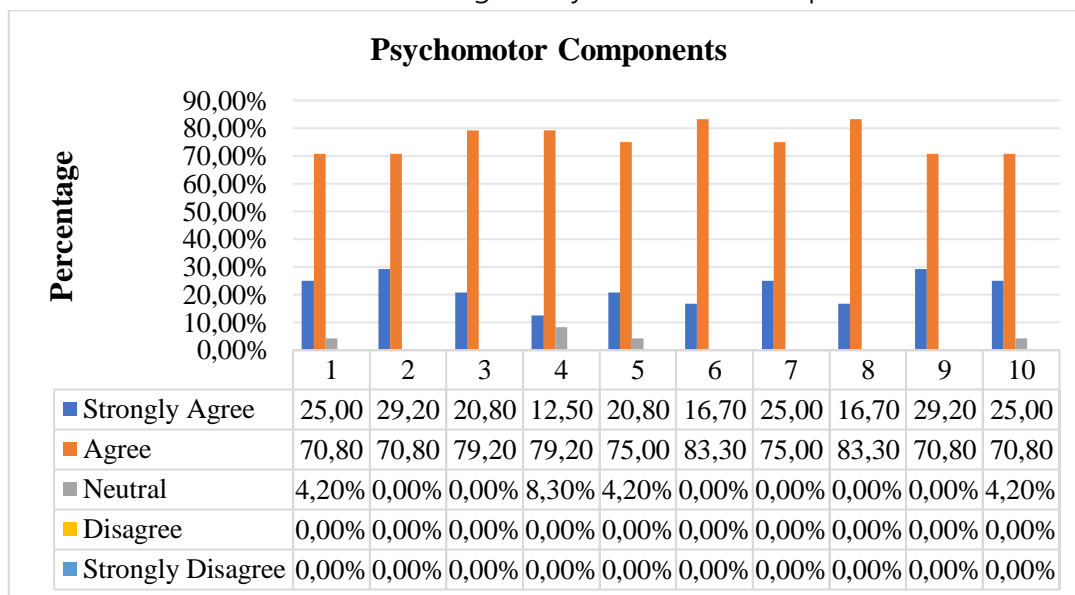
Table 2. The Percentage of Affective Components



From Table 2 above, the affective component is related to someone's feelings. The survey results demonstrate respondents' affective engagement with Kurikulum Merdeka, reflecting their motivation, creativity, confidence, and belief in its benefits for teaching and learning. There are 5 statements representing the affective component, summarized as follows:

1. Motivation from a More Flexible Approach: The majority of respondents (91.7%) agree or strongly agree that the flexibility of Kurikulum Merdeka motivates them, with 16.7% strongly agreeing and 75.0% agreeing. A small proportion (8.3%) remain neutral.
2. Encouragement for Creative Teaching: Most respondents (100%) agree or strongly agree that Kurikulum Merdeka allows for more creativity in teaching. This reflects high affective engagement with its approach to innovation in classroom practices.
3. Support for Enhancing Educational Quality: A significant portion (91.6%) agree or strongly agree that Kurikulum Merdeka supports quality improvement in education. However, 8.3% remain neutral, suggesting room for further clarification or reinforcement of its benefits.
4. Confidence in Teaching with the Merdeka Approach: Most respondents (91.6%) agree or strongly agree about feeling more confident teaching with this approach. Still, a minority (4.2%) disagree, indicating potential challenges in implementation for some educators.
5. Increasing Student Engagement in Learning: While a majority (87.5%) agree or strongly agree that Kurikulum Merdeka enhances student engagement, 12.5% remain neutral, highlighting a possible area for additional support.

Table 3. The Percentage of Pyschomotor Components



From Table 3 above, the psychomotor component relates to someone's actions or behavioral tendencies in response to a specific stimulus. The survey results demonstrate respondents' psychomotor engagement with Kurikulum Merdeka, reflecting their ability to

apply learning methods, adapt to new approaches, assess student progress, and foster collaborative learning. The following 10 statements represent key psychomotor aspects, summarized as follows:

1. Applying Learning Methods Aligned with Pancasila Student Profile (P5): A significant portion of respondents (95.80%) agree or strongly agree that they can implement learning methods that align with the Pancasila Student Profile, with 25.00% strongly agreeing and 70.80% agreeing. A small percentage (4.20%) remained neutral.
2. Using a Student-Centered Approach: The majority (100%) agree or strongly agree that they use a student-centered approach in their daily classroom activities, demonstrating strong engagement with this aspect of Kurikulum Merdeka.
3. Developing Collaborative Skills: Most respondents (100%) agree or strongly agree that Kurikulum Merdeka allows them to develop students' collaborative skills, showing a high level of engagement with collaborative learning practices.
4. Adapting to New Approaches: A large portion (91.70%) agree or strongly agree that they actively adapt to new approaches introduced by Kurikulum Merdeka, with 12.50% strongly agreeing, 79.20% agreeing, and a small percentage (8.30%) neutral.
5. Assessing Student Progress: The majority (100%) agree or strongly agree that they regularly assess student progress according to the goals of Kurikulum Merdeka, demonstrating a strong commitment to evaluating learning outcomes.
6. Using Diverse Teaching Materials: Most respondents (100%) agree or strongly agree that they are accustomed to using varied teaching materials to meet students' needs, indicating high engagement with the curriculum's flexibility.
7. Creating Active and Interactive Learning Activities: The majority (100%) agree or strongly agree that Kurikulum Merdeka helps them create active and interactive learning activities, reflecting a positive engagement with its pedagogical approach.
8. Evaluating Critical Thinking Skills: Most respondents (100%) agree or strongly agree that they regularly evaluate students' critical thinking skills, showing their commitment to fostering higher-order thinking in students.
9. Involving Students in Meaningful Project-Based Learning: The majority (95.80%) agree or strongly agree that Kurikulum Merdeka supports them in involving students in meaningful project-based activities, with 25.00% strongly agreeing and 70.80% agreeing, while a small percentage (4.20%) remained neutral.

10. Developing Analytical Skills: Most respondents (100%) agree or strongly agree that they feel capable of developing students' analytical skills according to the curriculum objectives, demonstrating a strong alignment with the intended learning outcomes.

The quantitative findings from the questionnaire are categorized into three domains: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor responses. These findings highlight the overall positive attitudes of elementary school teachers in Pematang Siantar toward the Merdeka Curriculum.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative analysis of interview data provided deeper insights into teachers' experiences with the Merdeka Curriculum, focusing on recurring themes.

1. Resource Needs:

Many teachers, especially in rural areas, struggle with a lack of teaching materials. This makes it difficult to use student-centered and project-based learning, which are key parts of the curriculum.

2. Professional Support:

Teachers want more professional development focused on the curriculum. They need training in differentiated instruction, critical thinking, and innovative teaching methods. Collaboration with peers and knowledge-sharing platforms would also be helpful.

3. Curriculum Adaptability:

While teachers appreciate the curriculum's flexibility, adapting it to different student needs is challenging. They suggest clearer guidelines and examples of best practices to improve implementation.

The findings of this study highlight key barriers that, if addressed, could improve the curriculum's impact in elementary schools in Pematang Siantar.

Comparisons with Previous Research

The results of this study supports previous research showing that teachers generally have a positive view of the Merdeka Curriculum (Fristiviona, 2024; Daryanto & Sari, 2024). All teachers in this study understood the curriculum's core objectives, confirming its clarity and relevance (Retnaningrum et al., 2023). However, it also reveals new insights:

- While 95.8% of teachers agree the curriculum encourages critical thinking, 4.2% struggle to apply it in class, supporting Henukh et al.'s (2024) claim that these skills need more time and support.

- Teachers are motivated to use student-centered methods (100% agreement), but resource shortages and different levels of readiness create challenges (Rahman & Iskandar, 2024).
- Unlike past studies, this research found unanimous agreement (100%) that the curriculum promotes collaboration and project-based learning, especially when aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile framework (Syahrani Nur Ubay, 2023).

Role of School Environment, Support, and Teacher Background

1. School Environment:

Schools with limited materials, especially in rural areas, struggle to implement the curriculum. This matches Hunaepi and Suharta's (2024) findings that resource shortages are a major challenge. However, teachers remain highly engaged, showing that the curriculum's flexibility helps them adapt.

2. Professional Support:

Teachers want more training in differentiated instruction, critical thinking, and innovative teaching methods. Kurniawan and Prabowo (2024) also stress the importance of targeted training. While 91.7% of teachers feel confident using new methods, they need more support for consistent implementation.

3. Teacher Background:

More experienced teachers feel comfortable using student-centered and project-based learning, while newer teachers need more guidance. This supports Telaumbanua's (2024) argument that experience impacts curriculum implementation, highlighting the need for mentorship and peer support.

Key Takeaways

The Merdeka Curriculum has great potential to boost creativity, critical thinking, and student engagement. However, challenges like resource shortages and the need for continuous training must be addressed. Schools, policymakers, and educators must work together to overcome these barriers.

A key finding of this study is that all teachers agree on the value of student-centered learning, reflecting a major shift in teaching methods. With proper support, the curriculum can drive meaningful education reform.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that elementary school teachers in Pematang Siantar exhibit a positive attitude toward the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in its promotion of student-centered learning, creativity, and critical thinking. However, challenges such as resource limitations and insufficient professional development hinder optimal implementation. This research advances the field by highlighting the need for targeted support systems and tailored training to ensure equitable curriculum adaptation. Future research should explore the long-term impact of the curriculum on student outcomes and investigate collaborative frameworks to address systemic barriers across diverse educational contexts.

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