

Reflection of Indonesian Educators on the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

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Abstract. Driven by a commitment to address challenges associated with the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation in Indonesia, this paper explores reflections and experiences of Indonesian educators. The researchers' anxiety, stemming from the need for effective application, underscores the study's motivation to enhance the educational experience for educators and students alike. Conducted through qualitative questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with fifteen participants, the research focuses on three reflective dimensions (in, on, and for) employing an exploratory case study design. In reflection-in-action, educators emphasize a shift towards student-centered learning, promoting active involvement, critical thinking, and self-directed learning. Reflection-on-action reveals educators perceiving the curriculum as highly interactive, but they acknowledged the need for patience and time in implementing significant changes, considering varying levels of receptivity among teaching staff. Reflection-for-action demonstrates educators actively evaluating the Merdeka Curriculum, employing strategies like fostering relationships and leveraging social media for knowledge sharing. Overall, the study highlighted the potential of the Merdeka Curriculum to enhance the overall quality of schools and contribute to the academic success of Indonesian students. The findings offer valuable insights for policymakers, curriculum developers, and educational practitioners seeking to refine the implementation process and enhance professional development programs. Ultimately, this research contributes to the ongoing efforts to empower educators and students and improve the effectiveness of education in Indonesia.

Keywords: Indonesian Educators, Merdeka Curriculum, Reflection

1. Introduction

The significance of education as a fundamental driver of progress and development in a nation is widely recognized (Belpaeme et al., 2018; Sukendro et al., 2020). Regarded as a paramount investment, education nurtures the prosperity and advancement of a country. Its impact on human resources is profound, as it plays a central role in equipping a nation to adapt to dynamic circumstances and thrive amidst global competition (Tayibnapi et al., 2018). In the 21st century, the value of high-quality education cannot be overstated, given the essentiality of a highly skilled workforce for a nation's survival (Anwar et al., 2020). The rapid pace of technological progress not only introduces cutting-edge innovations across diverse domains (Edirippulige et al., 2018; Caena & Redecker, 2019), but also intensifies competition in all spheres of life (Ashraf et al., 2018; Zafar et al., 2021). Consequently, educational institutions face the imperative of producing graduates with exceptional competence (Dziuban et al., 2019). As emphasized by Sluman et al. (2019), education serves as the primary determinant of career success. Therefore, a higher number of graduates who

are employable directly correlates with a lower unemployment rate, indicating a robust economy.

For a country's education system to be deemed successful, its outcomes must align with the stipulations outlined in the national curriculum (Mardjuki & Potradinata, 2017). In Indonesia, previous curriculums were often criticized for their rigidity and exhibition of certain aspects that were thought to be out of step with the changing demands of the world. Efendi and Hsi (2020) stated one notable example, which is the strong emphasis on rote memorization and a rigid examination-oriented approach. They claimed that previous curriculums prioritized the memorization of facts and information over the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This approach was believed to limit students' ability to apply knowledge in real-world scenarios and hinder their creativity (Andrian et al., 2018). In addition, the curriculum's uniformity across regions and schools may not have adequately addressed the diverse needs of students with varying backgrounds and skill levels (Akib et al., 2020). The educational system has also come under fire for being slow to adapt to technological advancements and changes in the global job market, leaving a gap between the skills taught in schools and the needs of the evolving economy (Efendi & His, 2020). The Merdeka Curriculum aims to address these issues by promoting a more flexible and learner-centric approach that encourages creativity, critical thinking, and a broader skill set.

Launched by the government, the Merdeka Curriculum aims to foster comprehensive learning grounded in Pancasila, the foundational philosophical theory of Indonesia (Pertwi & Pusparini, 2021; Nurhayati et al., 2022). Moreover, outstanding human resources must possess not only scientific and technological knowledge but also exhibit exemplary character traits (Irawati et al., 2022). Aligned with the five principles of Pancasila, the desired human character to be cultivated encompasses faith in and reverence for God Almighty, nobility, physical and mental well-being, knowledge, competence, creativity, independence, a democratic spirit, and a strong sense of responsibility. As the implementation model of the Merdeka Curriculum, the Minister of Education has also introduced an educational program known as Sekolah Penggerak or the Driving School program in English. Essentially, the Sekolah Penggerak program specifically strives to embody the vision and mission of Indonesian education by developing high-quality students oriented towards Pancasila (Mulyadi & Mardiana, 2022; Fathurrahman et al., 2022).

1.1. Problem Statement

In the process of learning, the teacher assumes the central role. The term 'central role' implies that the teacher not only imparts knowledge but also becomes a figure that is observed, emulated, and closely watched by the students (Tudor, 1993). Much like an actor who captivates an audience with their performance, the teacher's actions, behaviors, and demeanor have a significant impact on the students' learning experience (Heineke et al., 2015).

Students naturally look up to their educators as role models (Lunenberg et al., 2007). They draw inspiration and guidance from their words and actions (Lumpkin, 2008). The teacher serves as a source of knowledge, motivation, and guidance, shaping the learning environment and influencing the students' growth and development (Tudor, 1993). As the central figure in the classroom, the teacher sets the tone, establishes expectations, and creates an atmosphere conducive to effective learning (Rosala & Budiman, 2022). Given this critical role, it becomes evident that to be an effective teacher, one must possess not only a deep understanding of the subject matter but also exemplify admirable qualities and attitudes (Wall & Hall, 2016; Aktekin and Celebi, 2020). The teacher's knowledge, expertise, and exemplary behavior serve as pillars upon which successful learning experiences are built.

However, similar to all human beings, educators are not infallible. They too make mistakes and encounter challenges or difficulties in the execution of their responsibilities (Hagger et al., 2008). In such instances, one valuable avenue for self-improvement available to educators is reflection (Çimer et al., 2013).

According to Bowman (1989), self-reflection constitutes a fundamental aspect of professionalism. Reflection allows for introspection and growth. It enables educators to carefully consider all the actions taken throughout the learning process. Reflective thinking is a cognitive process that leads to the identification of areas that require attention to bridge the gap between learning situations (Choi and Oo, 2012). In other words, engaging in reflective thinking allows educators to examine the strengths and weaknesses of their instructional approaches, enabling them to address areas of improvement while maximizing their existing strengths (Slade et al., 2019). By engaging in introspection and thoughtful analysis of their teaching experiences, educators gain a deeper understanding of their students' needs, strengths, and challenges (Çimer et al., 2013; Aktekin & Celebi, 2020). Thus, it can be argued that in order to foster exceptional learning outcomes, educators must engage in reflective practices (Loughran, 2005). As claimed by Howard (2003), educators who regularly engage in reflection have the opportunity to enhance their quality and professionalism as educators.

The proposed research titled "Reflection of Indonesian Educators on the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum" seeks to address a significant research gap in the field of education. With the recent introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia, there is a need to understand and explore the perspectives of educators regarding its implementation. While the curriculum represents a transformative shift towards a holistic and student-centered approach, there is limited empirical research on how educators perceive and experience the implementation process. This study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by providing valuable insights into the reflections and experiences of Indonesian educators. By exploring their perspectives, challenges, and successes, this research will shed light on the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation process and offer recommendations for improvement. The findings of this study will be beneficial to policymakers, curriculum developers, and educational practitioners in refining the implementation strategies, enhancing professional development programs, and ensuring the successful integration of the Merdeka Curriculum into Indonesian schools. Ultimately, this research will contribute to the ongoing efforts to enhance the quality and effectiveness of education in Indonesia, empowering educators and students alike.

1.2. Related Research

Within the realm of educational research, numerous significant studies have enriched our comprehension of Merdeka curriculum implementation. For instance, Zidan and Qamari (2023) claimed that the course's improvement is a significant change to the Merdeka curriculum. The ease with which educational materials can be retrieved because to the widespread availability of online resources enables educators to provide students with a richer and more varied education. This sentiment is reinforced by Asrifan et al. (2023), who claim that the format and implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum stress the use of technology as effectively as possible to nurture every student. They highlight the curriculum's dedication to providing a holistic and inclusive approach to education, emphasizing creativity and critical thinking skills alongside academic knowledge. Additionally, Yatim et al. (2023) assert that for the successful implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, good habituation from teachers, schools, and students is required, as well as preparedness and awareness in understanding and interpreting it within a student-focused learning process. Specifically, teachers need to develop learning methods that support independent learning. These strategies include encouraging students to pursue their interests and talents, giving them creative and collaborative assignments, and providing helpful criticism.

There are still many other studies concerning the implementation of Merdeka curriculum, but the majority of them have concentrated on the implementation process rather than the educators' perspective within it. What distinguishes this research is its strong focus on reflective practices among educators. Unlike previous studies, this study explores teachers' reflective practices and how they process their experiences with the Merdeka Curriculum. The way that the perspectives of every actor possible are integrated is another unique quality because educators involved here are not only teachers, but also supervisors and principals. Thus, this research expands on findings from the most recent study on stakeholder views by taking into

account the opinions of educators as well as legislators, curriculum designers, and educational practitioners. This all-encompassing strategy seeks to provide a thorough grasp of the Merdeka Curriculum's application, thereby offering useful suggestions.

1.3. Research Objectives

The question of the research is "How do Indonesian educators reflect on and experience the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum?". Its aim is to comprehensively explore the perspectives of Indonesian educators on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and to discover challenges, successes, and reflections. By delving into the nuances of educators' experiences, the primary objective is to gain a profound understanding of the strengths and weaknesses associated with the curriculum's implementation, which, as a result, contributes valuable insights to the broader field of education. The research's significance lies in its potential to inform policymakers, curriculum developers, and educational practitioners and provide them with nuanced perspectives and data-driven recommendations. The contributions of this study extend beyond the immediate context by facilitating improvements in professional development programs and ensuring the successful integration of the Merdeka Curriculum, ultimately fostering positive changes in the Indonesian education landscape.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Merdeka Curriculum

In Indonesian, the term "Merdeka" translates to "freedom." This designation embodies the curriculum's focus on providing greater autonomy and flexibility to educators and learners throughout the educational journey (Mulyadi & Mardiana, 2022; Fathurrahman et al., 2022). The Merdeka Curriculum signifies a transformative shift towards a more comprehensive and learner-centric approach to education in Indonesia (Daga, 2021; Fazilla et al., 2023). It fosters active participation and cultivates critical thinking abilities among students, stimulating their inventiveness, problem-solving skills, and capacity for self-directed learning (Dian et al., 2023). Moreover, the curriculum encourages students to explore their passions, talents, and aspirations while fostering a sense of accountability and social consciousness (Simarmata & Mayuni, 2023). Recognizing the significance of digital literacy, the Merdeka Curriculum promotes the integration of technology in education (Imron et al., 2023), acknowledging its role as a valuable tool for learning, collaboration, and accessing information. Overall, the Merdeka Curriculum aims to empower students as lifelong learners, equipping them with the requisite knowledge, skills, and values to thrive in an ever-evolving world (Irawati et al., 2022). The scheme of Merdeka curriculum characters can be seen below.

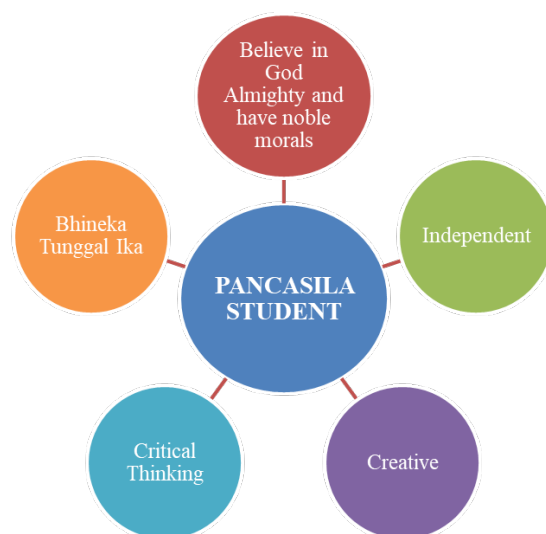


Figure 1. Scheme of Pancasila Student Profile

2.2. Reflection

In education, reflection is a deliberate and methodical process that entails contemplating, analyzing, and drawing conclusions from one's experiences, actions, and thoughts (Procee, 2006). As claimed by Anderson (2020), it is necessary for promoting both personal and professional growth. The act of reflection encourages individuals to critically evaluate their practices, choices, and outcomes, contributing to a deeper understanding of the learning process (Göranzon & Florin, 2012).

The importance of reflection in education cannot be overstated. First of all, it makes it easier for people to continue developing professionally by letting them see where they may make improvements and hone their abilities (Anderson, 2020). According to Newman (1996), reflection on experiences enables both teachers and students to draw links between theory and practice, which contributes to the learning process' increased significance. In addition, as people use their prior experiences to guide their present decisions, reflective activities help people make better decisions (Chang, 2019). Furthermore, by encouraging people to examine their values, beliefs, and motivations, reflection also fosters a greater sense of self-awareness (Göranzon & Florin, 2012). Furthermore, reflective thinking fosters effective problem-solving skills, as individuals learn to identify challenges, analyze them critically, and devise informed solutions. In short, the integration of reflection in education is critical to continuous improvement, meaningful learning experiences, and the development of well-rounded individuals.

In the realm of reflective practices, Murphy (2014) describes three different types, each with a specific function in the process of learning and development. Firstly, Reflection-in-Action involves the real-time adjustment of actions during an activity or task. It is similar to thinking quickly since people adjust dynamically to respond and meet demands in the moment. Secondly, Reflection-on-Action is the review of previous situations, actions, or events. This kind of reflection offers the chance to evaluate efficacy, pinpoint areas in need of development, and draw lessons from the results of accomplished tasks. Lastly, Reflection-for-Action is concerned with organizing and getting ready for future acts using knowledge from the past. In this situation, educators could utilize their own thoughts on previous teaching experiences to guide the creation of new lessons. By reflecting on the future, they can make sure that the activities are well-informed and customized to meet the changing requirements of our students.

Murphy's theory essentially highlights the fact that effective reflection is a dynamic activity that extends beyond post-event analysis. Reflection is basically a never-ending cycle that starts before, during, and ends with activities. By engaging in these reflective practices, educators can continually learn, adapt, and enhance their practices, ultimately contributing to the improvement of teaching and learning experiences.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

This study employs an exploratory case study design to investigate the reflections of educators on the activities of the Sekolah Penggerak program. Following the recommended guidelines by Glazer et al. (2004) for collaborative professional reflection, the research procedure involves educators participating in reflective practices collectively, sharing their thoughts, insights, and experiences in a collaborative manner. The process often consists of organized meetings in which educators participate in group conversations, exchanging their individual viewpoints, ideas, and experiences with the Merdeka Curriculum. By promoting a thorough and in-depth investigation of the topic matter, this cooperative approach hopes to highlight shared patterns and distinctive perspectives among educators.

3.2. Participants

The study sample comprises fifteen educators holding various positions, including teachers, principals/deputy principals, and supervisors, from both private and public schools in Riau, Indonesia. The demography of the research participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Gender	Employment Status	Length of Service	Position
T #1	Female	Non Civil Servant	25 years	Teacher
T #2	Female	Non Civil Servant	9 years	Teacher
T #3	Female	Civil Servant	21 years	Teacher
T #4	Female	Non Civil Servant	18 years	Teacher
T #5	Male	Civil Servant	40 years	Teacher
H #1	Male	Non Civil Servant	10 years	Principal/Vice Principal
H #2	Male	Non Civil Servant	26 years	Principal/Vice Principal
H #3	Female	Non Civil Servant	5 years	Principal/Vice Principal
H #4	Female	Civil Servant	23 years	Principal/Vice Principal
H #5	Male	Civil Servant	29 years	Principal/Vice Principal
S #1	Male	Civil Servant	24 years	Supervisor
S #2	Female	Civil Servant	27 years	Supervisor
S #3	Female	Civil Servant	33 years	Supervisor
S #4	Male	Civil Servant	32 years	Supervisor
S #5	Male	Civil Servant	34 years	Supervisor

3.3. Data Collection

The research data was collected through a qualitative questionnaire via Google form and a semi-structured interview where the participants shared their ideas and experiences in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum during the Sekolah Penggerak program. More specifically, in this study, the researchers addressed the following questions:

1. What do you consider the most extraordinary learning moment while implementing the Merdeka curriculum in the Sekolah Penggerak program?
2. In your opinion, how interactive and effective is this curriculum?
3. What (if any) changes would you make to the way you teach and behave in the future? What evidence supports this perceived impact?
4. In what ways do you maintain communication with the people you met and worked with during this program?

3.4. Data Analysis

To analyze the data, the researchers employed an inductive thematic analysis approach of Boyatzis' (1998) framework, also known as the "Boyatzis Skeleton." This framework led the analytical process through a series of systematic steps. The first stage involved thorough preparation where the researchers familiarized themselves with the data. After that, pattern recognition was applied, which lets the researchers to identify the repeated themes within the dataset. The data was then labeled and categorized using coding, which made it easier to identify important patterns.

Following the principles of the Boyatzis Skeleton, the researchers organized the participants' reflections into three types, drawing inspiration from Murphy's (2014) reflective practices:

reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection-for-action. Reflection-in-action focused on the participants' awareness of ongoing activities during the process. Reflection-on-action centered on their past situations and experiences, while reflection-for-action involved their plans for the future based on insights gained from reflection-on-action.

3.5. Validity and Reliability

To ensure the credibility of the findings, the researchers employed triangulation of data sources. The validity and reliability of the study findings were rigorously assessed through a couple of key measures, which is member checking and intercoder reliability (Patton, 2014). Member checking, which is a crucial step in ensuring internal validity, involved presenting participants with summaries or excerpts of their reflections and interview responses for verification. The results revealed a high degree of alignment between participants' perspectives and the researchers' interpretations, which confirms the accuracy and authenticity of the study's findings.

After that, intercoder reliability, which is essential for establishing the overall reliability of the study, was upheld by having multiple researchers independently analyze a subset of the data. The results indicated consistent coding decisions among the independent researchers, reinforcing the reliability of the study's analytical process.

These robust measures collectively affirm the validity and reliability of the study findings. Member checking and intercoder reliability tests consistently demonstrated the accuracy and consistency of the data interpretation process, instilling confidence in the credibility of the reported results.

4. Findings

4.1. Reflection-in-Action

Reflection-in-action occurs within the classroom setting, where educators engage in real-time observation and assessment of the ongoing teaching and learning process. It involves them being mindful of what is happening at the moment, assessing the effectiveness of their teaching strategies, and evaluating the performance of the students. As highlighted by Murphy (2014), reflection-in-action is characterized by the educator's awareness of the immediate conditions and occurs during the teaching process. It can be seen as the teacher's thoughtful consideration of the situation or circumstances they are currently experiencing (Wilson, 2008). In the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, the participants actively assumed their roles and shared their perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses of their implementation. They recognized the importance of their role as facilitators and motivators within the classroom.

Based on the participants' reflections on the Sekolah Penggerak activities, a significant majority expressed the belief that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has the potential to enhance the overall quality of schools and contribute to students' academic success. This sentiment was particularly emphasized by H #1, who highlighted the positive impact of the curriculum's thematic approach on the learning process.

H #1: *"You can really see the Merdeka Curriculum working when you have these themes and categories. It's not just about the subjects; it's about how you organize and plan things in Sekolah Penggerak. I've seen a positive impact, especially with the thematic approach."*

He specifically mentioned the value of having themes and categories in the curriculum, which facilitated the organization and planning of various stages within the Sekolah Penggerak program. However, it is important to note that while the curriculum and themes play a role, the participants acknowledged that the success of learning primarily depends on the quality of teaching and the competence of teachers, rather than solely relying on school facilities.

Similarly, S #3 claimed that regardless of the themes of the curriculum, exemplary teachers should be prioritized.

S #3: *"It's not just about the themes; it's about having great teachers. I mean, they should be the priority. Knowledge is one thing, but having a teacher who can inspire and motivate—that's what students need. It's about creating that positive learning vibe."*

According to her, students require teachers who are not only knowledgeable in theory but also possess the ability to inspire and motivate. These exceptional teachers play a vital role in fostering a positive and engaging learning environment. By instilling a passion for learning and providing effective guidance, they empower students to reach their full potential.

Additionally, T #1 emphasized that the impact of teachers goes beyond subject matter expertise.

T #1: *"Teachers are more than just walking textbooks. Our dedication shapes these students. So, investing in teachers' professional development is crucial for top-notch education."*

This is because their dedication and enthusiasm can greatly influence students' overall growth and development. Therefore, investing in the professional development and support of teachers is crucial to ensure that students receive the highest quality education. As a tangible manifestation of the Merdeka Curriculum, T #2 and T #3 underlined the importance of modifying teaching methods. They stressed the need for a shift from a teacher-centric approach to a student-centered one, acknowledging the importance of tailoring learning experiences to students' interests.

T #2: *"With the Merdeka Curriculum, we've got to change how we teach. It's not about us; it's about the students. Shifting from being the center to letting them take charge. That's where the real change happens."*

T #3: *"Student-centered learning is the way to go. It's about tailoring lessons to what they're into. That's what makes a difference in learning under the Merdeka Curriculum."*

This is in line with the reflections of school principals and vice principals who maintained that a notable positive impact of the Merdeka Curriculum lies in the implementation of differentiated learning. This shift can be observed through the transformation of teachers' mindsets, as they strive to enhance their teaching practices and ultimately elevate the overall quality of learning. Supporting this viewpoint, T #5 further added that when students have ample opportunities to interact with one another and actively contribute to their own learning; their interest in learning is greatly enhanced.

T #5: *"When students get involved, it's a game-changer. They're more into it when they're part of the action. It's like a domino effect of enthusiasm and learning."*

4.2. Reflection-on-Action

Reflection-on-action occurs once a teaching session or activity has concluded, prompting educators to retrospectively analyze their experiences and share their thoughts and perceptions. During the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the Sekolah Penggerak activities, participants critically examined their own perspectives in relation to the various learning moments throughout the program. All teacher participants (T #1, T #2, T #3, T #4, and T #5) expressed their deep satisfaction with the program activities, particularly highlighting the value they found in project-based tasks.

T #1: *"After each session, looking back on what went down really helps me grow. The Merdeka Curriculum activities were something else. Project-based tasks were a hit, and teaming up with other teachers—it's where the real magic happened. This program gave us a ton to absorb and use in our teaching for the long run."*

They emphasized that collaborating and exchanging ideas with their colleagues were profoundly meaningful aspects of the curriculum. They stated that the curriculum offered them a wealth of knowledge and experiences to assimilate, learn from, and apply in their future teaching endeavors, with the ultimate aim of enhancing students' learning achievements.

H #1 described his most extraordinary moment as the deepening of his knowledge regarding the Merdeka curriculum. This sentiment was echoed by H #2, who found the exploration of curriculum management highly stimulating.

H #1: *"The Merdeka curriculum was an eye-opener for me. Getting deeper into it was my standout moment. Learning more about how it works was like leveling up in my teaching practice."*

H #2: *"My standout moment? Digging deep into the Merdeka Curriculum. The more I got into it, the more I realized its potential."*

Meanwhile, both H #3 and H #5 identified the workshops and online learning sessions as their most remarkable moments during the Sekolah Penggerak program.

H #3: *"I think the workshops and online sessions were the highlights. That's where the real action was. It's like a crash course in how to make the Merdeka Curriculum work best for students."*

H #5: *"The online workshops is the most remarkable components of the Sekolah Penggerak program for me. These activities provided a rich learning experience."*

H #4 also voiced their enthusiasm and suggested the need for more creative implementation of such activities. From the perspective of the supervisors, S #1 and S #5 emphasized the significance of the curriculum implementation activities, particularly highlighting the effectiveness of the Program Management Office (PMO) practices and mentoring in fostering teachers' enthusiasm for learning and driving meaningful changes.

S #1: *"Our teachers got a lot out of the Merdeka Curriculum activities. The Program Management Office and mentoring really hit the mark. It sparked enthusiasm and brought about some meaningful changes."*

When considering the interactiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum, the majority of participants widely perceived the curriculum as highly interactive and effective. They enthusiastically endorse the continuation of the Sekolah Penggerak program in an ongoing manner. Though agreed with the statement, S #2 and S #3 expressed that implementing significant changes introduced by the curriculum requires patience and time.

S #2: *"The curriculum is interactive for sure. But, as everyone knows, change takes time. Some folks need more convincing than others. Patience is key."*

S #3: *"The Sekolah Penggerak program is great, but not everyone is on board with big changes. Some teachers are resistant, and that affects how well it works. It's a process, and it's about getting everyone on the same page."*

Not every member of the teaching staff is receptive to change, and some even exhibit resistance or reluctance to modify their established practices. As a result, the effectiveness of the program may vary depending on the openness and willingness of individuals to embrace change.

4.3. Reflection-for-Action

Educators aim to attain reflection-for-action as their ultimate goal. This type of reflection, akin to reflection-on-action, occurs after the completion of instruction but is more extensive and comprehensive as it integrates data gathered from reflection-in-action as well. By utilizing previously collected information or data, reflection-for-action strives to enhance the learning process by developing improved methods and applying them in future lessons. Uzum et al. (2014) highlight that reflection-for-action involves identifying weaknesses in educational process and proposing solutions to address those weaknesses.

As educators and participants engage in the process of reflection for action, they undertake an evaluation of the Merdeka Curriculum with the purpose of making informed decisions to improve the program and achieve better outcomes in the future. In this regard, S #1 suggested fostering close relationships and facilitating effective communication among colleagues.

S #1: *"Building close relationships and ensuring effective communication among colleagues is key. It helps us make informed decisions for improving the Merdeka Curriculum and achieving better outcomes in the future."*

The majority of participants agreed that sharing their learning experiences with others has proven instrumental in enhancing their knowledge and understanding of the curriculum. Leveraging the power of social media, participant H #5 mentioned the existence of an online community group as a means to maintain communication with colleagues.

H #5: *"We've got this online community group. It's like our virtual hub. Sharing our learning experiences through social media keeps us connected and informed about the curriculum."*

In addition, the participants also recognized the significance of incorporating technology into their teaching practices to enhance student engagement and motivation. S #4 maintained that technological devices are indispensable in facilitating seamless educational process.

S #4: *"Tech is a game-changer. It's not just important; it's indispensable. Integrating technology seamlessly into the educational process enhances engagement and keeps things flowing smoothly."*

5. Discussion

The Merdeka Curriculum represents a significant shift from a traditional teacher-centric approach to a more student-centered approach. This aligns with the perspectives of school principals and vice principals, who asserted that a significant positive outcome of the Merdeka Curriculum is evident in the execution of differentiated learning, placing the learners at the heart of the educational process (Mulyadi & Mardiana, 2022). In the traditional approach, teachers primarily acted as information providers and directed the learning activities. However, with the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, the focus has shifted towards actively engaging students in their own learning journey (Fauzan et al., 2023). Teachers now prioritize understanding students' individual interests, strengths, and learning styles, tailoring their instruction accordingly (Ibrahim et al., 2022). This student-centered approach encourages students to take an active role in their education, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and self-directed learning. By placing students at the center of the educational experience, the Merdeka Curriculum aims to create a dynamic and enriching learning environment that nurtures their growth, curiosity, and love for learning (Irawati et al., 2022).

However, several previous studies discovered that when it comes to implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, Indonesian educators are facing challenges and exhibiting reservations. A significant number of schools in Indonesia are not adequately prepared to adopt the new curriculum (Purwanti et al., 2020; Yuhastina et al., 2020; Amalia, 2021; Artonang et al., 2023). One of the main reasons behind this resistance is the requirement for teachers to adapt their teaching methods and integrate technology, for which many educators still lack the necessary knowledge and skills (Strom, 2021). Also, the fear of stepping out of their comfort zones and the disruption of established routines further contribute to their reluctance in fully embracing the Merdeka Curriculum (Asrifan et al., 2023). Moreover, the limited access to training programs focused on technology integration also plays a role in educators' perceived inadequacy and their tendency to rely on traditional teaching approaches (Ruhjana & Aeni, 2019; Irawati et al., 2022).

In addition, there are concerns regarding the adequacy of training and support provided to educators during the transition (Rosidah et al., 2021; Ibrahim et al., 2022; Fauzan et al., 2023), which has resulted in a lack of confidence in effectively implementing the new curriculum. Additionally, with the Merdeka Curriculum placing emphasis on a wide range of competencies and skills beyond the traditional academic subjects (Simarmata & Mayuni, 2023), Indonesian educators, burdened by limited instructional time due to numerous subjects, large class sizes, and administrative duties (Sunaengsih et al., 2019; Sulistiyo et al., 2020), have an additional burden as they are now required to incorporate new activities, projects, and assessments aligned with the curriculum's goals. Furthermore, the inadequate school facilities and infrastructure also contribute to educators' resistance to change, particularly in rural areas where many schools face limitations in terms of physical resources (Lase et al., 2022).

Furthermore, based on the reflection-for-action, it was observed that educators unanimously acknowledge the essential role of technological devices in facilitating a smooth educational process. This notion is supported by Lai and Bower (2019) who affirm the potential of technology to expedite the development of holistic and robust educational methods, which is in line with the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum. As key figures in the educational process, educators are generally expected to demonstrate creativity and innovation in fostering students' enthusiasm, attentiveness, and motivation for learning (Amtu et al., 2020). Hidayah et al. (2022) explain that education constantly evolves to meet the demands of the time, resulting in curriculum reforms that align with contemporary needs. However, these changes also bring challenges, particularly for educators who are directly impacted by curriculum revisions and new educational policies. As a result, educators must swiftly adapt to the updated curriculum and be prepared to face the accompanying challenges (Isrokatun et al., 2022).

To successfully implement the Merdeka Curriculum, educators have to develop strategies and become proficient in utilizing technology as a vital tool to support the teaching and learning process (Rohmah et al., 2023). As confirmed by Hämäläinen et al. (2021), thoughtful and targeted integration of technology in education has a profound impact on knowledge, attitudes, and skills of both students and teachers. Research by Amhag et al. (2019) and Li et al. (2019) further emphasize how digital tools can enhance motivation and significantly contribute to the organization of professional teaching experiences for educators.

Nevertheless, in order to accomplish this, educators undoubtedly require support from policymakers and education stakeholders. As maintained by Cahyono (2022), it is imperative for these key players to consider providing educators with adequate training as well as developing comprehensive instructional materials that align with the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum. Moreover, facilitating professional development opportunities for educators is crucial to enhance their knowledge and skills about the curriculum (Cahyono, 2022). By addressing these areas of improvement, the successful implementation and realization of the desired educational outcomes that align with the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum can be achieved.

6. Conclusion

On the whole, Indonesian educators hold favorable views regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Based on the findings, educators believe that the strengths of the new curriculum lie in its focus on providing greater autonomy and flexibility to educators and learners, fostering active participation and critical thinking abilities among students, and promoting the integration of technology in education. Meanwhile, the weaknesses lie in the challenges faced in ensuring widespread acceptance of change. Despite the positive views on the curriculum, there are difficulties in getting all teachers on board with the changes it introduces. This resistance to change can arise due to various factors, such as preference for traditional teaching methods, concerns about additional workload, lack of technological

skills, and uncertainties about the effectiveness of the new approach. Therefore, it is clear that further efforts are needed to support teachers in effectively implementing the curriculum.

Limitation

The limitation of this research lies in the small sample size of fifteen educators, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to a larger population of Indonesian educators. The study was conducted in a specific context, focusing on the perspectives and experiences of educators involved in the Sekolah Penggerak program. Therefore, the findings may not fully represent the diversity of educators across different regions and types of schools in Indonesia.

Recommendation

In light of the findings, we recommend that policymakers, curriculum developers, and educational practitioners continue to prioritize the roll-out and implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum throughout Indonesian schools. It is essential to provide ongoing support for educators by offering comprehensive instructional materials or guidelines through effective professional development programs, focusing on the development of teachers' knowledge and skills, and assessing the effectiveness of existing learning modalities. Additionally, education stakeholders should strive to create an ongoing culture of change that prioritizes innovation, collaboration, and lifelong learning, positioning Indonesian students as lifelong learners. Through these approaches, we hope to empower Indonesian educators and support their efforts to provide the highest quality education to students.

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Conflict of Interest

The Author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest.

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