

TEACHERS' VOICES: A CROSS-SUBJECT COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF KURIKULUM MERDEKA IMPLEMENTATION PERCEPTIONS

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Abstract :

Indonesia's educational landscape has undergone significant transformation through Kurikulum Merdeka implementation, yet comparative understanding of educator perspectives across different subjects remains limited. This research investigates comparative perspectives of educators regarding Kurikulum Merdeka implementation across five distinct academic disciplines in Indonesian educational institutions. Employing a qualitative-descriptive methodology, this study examines teacher experiences through comprehensive analysis of peer-reviewed scholarly articles focusing on educator experiences in Mathematics, Indonesian Language, Biology, Islamic Religious Education, and English language instruction. Research findings demonstrate predominantly favorable educator responses (75-80% positive across subjects), particularly appreciating the curriculum's adaptability, learner-focused methodology, and integration of twenty-first-century competencies. However, significant obstacles emerged including extensive preparation requirements, insufficient educational resources, inadequate professional development, and inconsistent educator preparedness levels. These implementation barriers significantly impact comprehensive curriculum adoption and necessitate focused improvements in professional training and resource distribution, with contextualizing approaches to accommodate diverse subject-specific requirements.

Keywords : Educator Perspectives; Kurikulum Merdeka; Implementation Challenges; Curriculum Reform; Indonesian Education

Abstrak :

Lanskap pendidikan Indonesia telah mengalami transformasi signifikan melalui implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka, namun pemahaman komparatif perspektif pendidik lintas mata pelajaran masih terbatas. Penelitian ini menyelidiki perspektif komparatif pendidik mengenai implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di lima disiplin akademik berbeda dalam institusi pendidikan Indonesia. Menggunakan metodologi kualitatif-deskriptif, studi ini mengkaji pengalaman guru melalui analisis komprehensif artikel ilmiah peer-reviewed yang berfokus pada pengalaman pendidik dalam Matematika, Bahasa Indonesia, Biologi, Pendidikan Agama Islam, dan instruksi bahasa Inggris. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan respons pendidik yang sebagian besar menguntungkan (75-80% positif lintas mata pelajaran), terutama menghargai adaptabilitas kurikulum, metodologi yang berfokus pada pelajar, dan integrasi kompetensi abad kedua puluh satu. Hambatan implementasi ini secara signifikan mempengaruhi adopsi kurikulum komprehensif dan membutuhkan perbaikan terfokus dalam pelatihan profesional dan distribusi sumber daya.

Kata Kunci: Perspektif Pendidik; Kurikulum Merdeka; Tantangan Implementasi; Reformasi Kurikulum; Pendidikan Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's educational landscape has undergone significant

transformation through the introduction of Kurikulum Merdeka, a comprehensive reform initiative launched by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. This curriculum represents a strategic response to persistent learning challenges that have plagued Indonesian education, particularly those exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, 2022). Minister Nadiem Makarim identified this educational crisis as contributing to substantial learning losses and widening achievement gaps across diverse student populations. Kurikulum Merdeka emerged as an innovative solution designed to address these fundamental challenges through implementing student-centered and flexible pedagogical approaches, emphasizing not only academic excellence but also character development and essential twenty-first-century skills acquisition.

The curriculum transformation represents a paradigmatic shift in Indonesian educational practice, marking a significant departure from traditional teacher-centered instructional methods toward more flexible and student-centered learning environments (Rosa et al., 2024). This educational philosophy emphasizes developing student independence and critical thinking capabilities, reflected in the term "Merdeka," which translates to "independence" or "freedom" in Indonesian (Anas et al., 2023). The framework provides students with enhanced opportunities for exploration, open discussion, and experiential learning beyond conventional classroom lecture formats. Students are encouraged to participate actively in discussions, engage in project-based learning activities, and integrate digital technologies, while educators receive empowerment to select teaching methodologies tailored to their specific classroom contexts (Purwandari et al., 2024; Hartoyo & Rahmadayanti, 2022).

Kurikulum Merdeka extends beyond student-focused approaches by granting substantial autonomy to educators, recognizing their fundamental role as curriculum implementers and change agents. Teachers transition from passive recipients of curricular mandates to active decision-makers who adapt learning experiences to meet student needs, incorporate local cultural elements, and utilize available resources effectively (Chen et al., 2021; Kelly, 2019). The curriculum demands that educators function as facilitators, innovators, and motivators, capable of creating meaningful, responsive, and engaging learning environments that promote student success (Pertiwi & Pusparini, 2021).

Since Kurikulum Merdeka implementation began, numerous research studies have examined various aspects of this educational reform, with particular attention to teacher perspectives regarding curriculum implementation. Educator perceptions play crucial roles in determining implementation success, as their perspectives significantly influence teaching effectiveness and student outcomes (Ottenheim-Vliegen et al., 2023). Research demonstrates that teacher perspective-taking positively transforms thinking patterns and educational practices while reducing cognitive biases and stereotypical assumptions.

Previous studies have explored teacher perceptions of Kurikulum Merdeka across various subject areas. Lestiyani (2020) found that only forty percent of study participants acknowledged understanding the Merdeka Belajar concept adequately. Nurliani et al. (2023) conducted research focusing on Kurikulum Merdeka implementation with participants including four Year X teachers and one curriculum supervisor at a Banjarmasin senior high school, reporting positive teacher perceptions and high appreciation for digital-era learning approaches. Additionally, Nugraheni and Siswanti (2022) demonstrated that Kurikulum Merdeka implementation encourages educators to develop diverse creative and innovative teaching approaches, enabling effective application of independent learning concepts to realize Profil Pelajar Pancasila goals.

Despite growing interest in Kurikulum Merdeka implementation, limited studies have compared teacher perceptions across different subject areas, leaving gaps in understanding how subject-specific contexts influence curriculum adaptation and implementation effectiveness. This research aims to conduct a comparative analysis of teacher perceptions from five different subject areas regarding Kurikulum Merdeka implementation, examining diverse perspectives and experiences to identify both challenges and successes encountered in curriculum application. How do teachers from different subject areas perceive Kurikulum Merdeka implementation? What are the common challenges and subject-specific differences in implementing this curriculum across various academic disciplines?

RESEARCH METHOD

This investigation employs a qualitative-descriptive research approach to explore and compare educator perceptions regarding Kurikulum Merdeka implementation across various academic disciplines in Indonesian schools.

Qualitative research methodology focuses on developing comprehensive understanding of social phenomena through descriptive and narrative data forms (Younas et al., 2023, as cited in Edi et al., 2025). This methodological approach was selected to explore and describe comprehensively how educators from diverse subject areas perceive Kurikulum Merdeka implementation processes, focusing on understanding experiences, perspectives, and challenges encountered within more flexible and student-based learning contexts.

The qualitative-descriptive approach enables researchers to collect narrative data and analyze it qualitatively, providing comprehensive representations of educator feelings, opinions, and perceptions regarding curricular changes. This methodology allows researchers to understand experiences, challenges, and perspectives that cannot be adequately explained through quantitative data alone.

This study explored perceptions of educators from five academic subjects in schools implementing Kurikulum Merdeka. Research data were obtained through comparative literature analysis of multiple peer-reviewed journal articles specifically addressing Kurikulum Merdeka implementation from educator perspectives across five different subject areas: Mathematics, Indonesian Language, Biology, Islamic Religious Education, and English Language instruction.

Data analysis involved thorough reading and coding of each article to identify recurring themes related to teacher perceptions. These themes were subsequently categorized and compared across the five subject areas to identify similarities and differences in implementation experiences. Comparative analysis enables researchers to draw meaningful conclusions about how specific subject contexts affect perception and implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka. Interpretations are enriched through reference to relevant theoretical frameworks and previous research to support findings and conclusions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A comprehensive comparative analysis was conducted to explore differing educator perceptions from various subject areas regarding Kurikulum Merdeka implementation. Through examining their perspectives and experiences, this research identifies both challenges and successes encountered in curriculum application, seeking to provide relevant recommendations for educational policy development and enhance understanding of how subject-specific contexts influence implementation processes.

Table 1. Research Data Summary

Subjects	Teachers' Perception	Implementation Challenges	Source
Mathematics	Predominantly positive perspectives toward Kurikulum Merdeka	Extended lesson planning periods, requirements for enhanced teacher competencies, student difficulties with abstract mathematical concepts, insufficient student motivation, inadequate student preparation for autonomous learning	(Jiyantari et al., 2023)
Indonesian Language	Mixed positive and negative perspectives toward Kurikulum Merdeka	Insufficient educator socialization, numerous learning instruments requiring improvement	(Putra & Suardana, 2024)
Biology	Positive perspectives toward Kurikulum Merdeka	Complications in preparing instructional modules, adjusting module content to school conditions, implementation difficulties, struggles with academic report preparation	(Kumala et al., 2023)
Islamic Religious Education	Positive perspectives toward Kurikulum Merdeka	Limited educator understanding, minimal learning resources, insufficient teacher training, unsupportive student and facility conditions	(Gusnandy et al., 2023)
English Language	Predominantly positive perspectives toward Kurikulum Merdeka	Restricted teaching time allocation, low student motivation and participation, limited English exposure, gaps in student language backgrounds	(Falah et al., 2024)

Mathematics: Mathematics educators generally embrace Kurikulum Merdeka for its flexibility in developing creative lesson plans and real-world applications, though they struggle with extended planning requirements and diverse student readiness levels for independent learning.

Indonesian Language: Indonesian Language teachers appreciate the curriculum's autonomy in method selection and creativity enhancement, but face challenges with inadequate socialization and limited assessment guidance during the transition period.

Biology: Biology teachers show strong support for the curriculum's student-centered approach and talent development focus, while encountering difficulties in module preparation and adapting to new assessment formats due to limited training.

Islamic Religious Education: PAI teachers value the curriculum's holistic

approach to character development and simplified lesson planning, yet struggle with insufficient understanding of implementation procedures and limited learning resources.

English Language: English teachers view the curriculum as offering valuable teaching freedom and integrated skill development, but encounter significant challenges with time constraints and student motivation, particularly in rural settings.

DISCUSSION

Based on research findings, it can be inferred that across five subject areas, Mathematics, Indonesian Language, Biology, Islamic Religious Education, and English, educators expressed predominantly positive perceptions of Kurikulum Merdeka. This consistent positive response suggests that educators appreciate the core philosophy emphasizing flexibility, student autonomy, and twenty-first-century skill development. However, subject-specific nuances indicate that approval is not unconditional.

Theoretical Framework Integration

The findings align with Merdeka Belajar pedagogy concepts that emphasize student autonomy, contextual learning, and teacher empowerment. Teachers across all subjects appreciate the curriculum's flexibility, reflecting successful adoption of student-centered approaches. The implementation challenges, however, reveal gaps between theoretical ideals and practical execution, particularly in professional development and resource allocation.

The connection to Profil Pelajar Pancasila development is evident in teachers' appreciation for the curriculum's character-building aspects and twenty-first-century skills integration. Biology and Islamic Religious Education teachers particularly emphasized how the curriculum supports holistic student development, combining cognitive, social, spiritual, and personal aspects.

From curriculum change theory perspective, the implementation barriers identified, insufficient training, limited resources, and inadequate socialization, align with classical challenges in educational reform. The mixed responses across subjects reflect typical adaptation phases in curriculum transformation, where early adopters show enthusiasm while others express concerns about implementation feasibility.

Mathematics Educator Perspectives

Mathematics shows unique challenges with abstract concept delivery and the need for enhanced computational thinking integration. Teachers

struggle particularly with making mathematical concepts accessible through student-centered approaches. Mathematics educators generally maintain positive views regarding Kurikulum Merdeka implementation in school learning contexts. Approximately eighty percent of respondents stated that this curriculum provides numerous benefits, particularly in offering flexibility for teachers to develop more creative and innovative lesson plans (Jiyantari et al., 2023). They considered that Kurikulum Merdeka addresses student needs and characteristics, making mathematics learning more relevant to real-life applications and increasing student interest in subject matter. Additionally, this curriculum encourages students to become more independent and active in learning processes, positively impacting thinking skill development and mathematical problem-solving abilities.

However, some educators (approximately 20-26.7%) highlighted several implementation challenges. These challenges include requirements for enhanced teacher skills in designing lessons suited to student characteristics, as well as extended planning time representing additional burdens for teachers with demanding teaching responsibilities. Moreover, not all students demonstrate readiness for independent learning or high motivation in mathematics education. Some students continue experiencing difficulties understanding abstract concepts despite Kurikulum Merdeka implementation approaches.

Indonesian Language Educator Perspectives

Indonesian Language faces distinct challenges related to language skill integration and cultural context incorporation, requiring specialized approaches to preserve linguistic heritage while promoting communication competencies. Indonesian language educators at SMK Negeri 1 Susut demonstrate diverse perspectives on Kurikulum Merdeka, but generally welcome changes because they provide freedom in determining appropriate learning methods while encouraging teacher creativity and increasing student learning interest (Putra & Suardana, 2024). Educators reported that Kurikulum Merdeka facilitates Indonesian language learning delivery by providing flexibility to choose appropriate methods for fostering student creativity, making learning processes more interesting and less monotonous.

However, insufficient comprehensive socialization of Kurikulum Merdeka to teachers due to short transition periods from Curriculum 2013 caused confusion and understanding differences, eventually hindering

curriculum implementation and impacting learning effectiveness. Implementation of continuous and integrated socialization is needed to overcome these problems, ensuring educators gain full understanding and can apply Kurikulum Merdeka appropriately and systematically.

Biology Educator Perspectives

Biology demonstrates specific difficulties with laboratory-based learning adaptation and the integration of environmental education components, requiring specialized equipment and training. Based on interview results with high school biology teachers in Ogan Ilir Regency regarding their views on Kurikulum Merdeka, the majority provided very positive responses (Kumala et al., 2023). Teachers stated agreement with curriculum changes from Curriculum 2013 to Kurikulum Merdeka because it is considered more capable of developing student talents according to understanding of children's nature, aligning with Ki Hajar Dewantara's educational philosophy. Kurikulum Merdeka focuses more on essential materials, making learning processes more meaningful.

Although Biology learning implementation in Ogan Ilir Regency high schools is considered running quite well, Biology teachers still face numerous challenges in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka. Primary obstacles include difficulties in compiling teaching modules according to curriculum requirements due to limited training and adequate mentoring. Implementation of learning models with extensive steps also proves difficult to execute effectively due to limited learning time.

Islamic Religious Education Educator Perspectives

Islamic Religious Education encounters unique challenges balancing religious instruction with character development, requiring careful attention to spiritual and moral dimensions while maintaining academic rigor. Research results indicate that Islamic Religious Education teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Palupuh generally hold very positive perceptions toward Kurikulum Merdeka (Gusnandy et al., 2023). Teachers consider this curriculum provides broader opportunities for developing student talents and interests while allowing more contextual and learner-centered instruction. They welcomed simplification of lesson plans from sixteen components to only three core components: learning objectives, learning activities, and evaluation.

However, implementation presents various challenges. Primary challenges include limited comprehensive understanding of Kurikulum

Merdeka implementation in Islamic Religious Education contexts. Limited learning resources, instructional tools, and student conditions not yet fully independent also constitute obstacles. Additionally, lesson plan simplification expected to increase learning flexibility requires proper adjustments from teachers.

English Language Educator Perspectives

English Language faces particular obstacles with limited exposure environments and varying student language backgrounds, especially in rural contexts where English proficiency foundations are weak. English language teachers interviewed mainly viewed Kurikulum Merdeka as positive breakthrough in education, especially in primary school English language learning (Falah et al., 2024). Teachers recognize that with Kurikulum Merdeka, they can teach more freely and create interesting learning methods according to student characteristics. Teachers also acknowledge that material content in this curriculum is more comprehensive and emphasizes integrated language skills.

However, behind this enthusiasm, teachers face various implementation challenges. Primary issues include lack of socialization from related parties, limited teaching time of approximately seventy minutes per week, and low student motivation and participation in learning. In rural areas, gaps in basic English language skills also constitute obstacles, making it difficult for teachers to integrate all language skills effectively.

CONCLUSION

Based on findings and discussion, Kurikulum Merdeka implementation generally received positive responses from educators across various subjects, although accompanied by numerous challenges. Mathematics teachers recognize curriculum flexibility in designing creative, contextual, and student-centered learning while encouraging learner independence. However, they reported high planning demands, lengthy preparation time, and issues with student motivation and readiness. Indonesian language teachers welcomed curriculum autonomy in choosing learning methods, boosting both teacher creativity and student engagement, though highlighting inadequate socialization, limited facilities, and absence of clear assessment references as implementation hurdles.

Biology teachers expressed strong approval, praising curriculum ability to develop student interests and talents through essential and student-centered content, emphasizing benefits of differentiated and project-based learning in

enhancing creativity and twenty-first-century skills. However, difficulties in designing teaching modules, limited training access, and confusion regarding new assessment formats remained significant barriers. Similarly, Islamic Religious Education teachers appreciated curriculum holistic approaches nurturing cognitive, social, spiritual, and personal aspects, as well as lesson plan simplification, while struggling with limited understanding of curriculum implementation, insufficient resources, and lack of structured training.

English teachers viewed Kurikulum Merdeka as breakthrough offering freedom to teach more contextually and develop integrated language skills, yet inadequate socialization, time constraints, low student motivation, and lack of basic English proficiency, especially in rural areas, became major obstacles. Schools and government require more intensive and continuous training for teachers to better understand and effectively implement Kurikulum Merdeka while reducing reliance on limited resources by providing more complete and accessible teaching materials.

Findings demonstrate that teacher perceptions are strongly influenced by subject context and field conditions, making study results valuable reflection and evaluation material for policymakers to improve Kurikulum Merdeka implementation more evenly and effectively. Additionally, comparative study results open possibilities for further examining curriculum implementation dynamics at different education levels or regions to enrich understanding of challenges and relevant strategies.

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