

Teachers' Perspectives on the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools brings significant changes in learning approaches, assessments, and the role of teachers. The background of this change is based on the need for an education system that is more flexible, student-centered, and able to accommodate the diverse potential of students. **Method:** The study used the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method on articles published between 2020 and 2024. The SLR process was conducted in a structured, transparent, and replicable manner to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the literature synthesis. **Results:** The study results show that most teachers welcome the Merdeka Curriculum because it provides flexibility in designing contextual learning. However, various obstacles have also been identified, such as teachers' limited understanding of the curriculum content, insufficient ongoing training, difficulties in adapting to new learning tools, and limited infrastructure and policy support in some regions. These obstacles highlight the urgent need to strengthen teachers' capacities through training, mentoring, and the provision of adequate resources. **Novelty:** The uniqueness of this study lies in its methodological contribution, namely the comprehensive application of the Systematic Literature Review method to synthesize literature on teachers' perspectives on the Merdeka Curriculum. This approach is rarely used in similar studies, providing a comprehensive and evidence-based overview that can serve as a reference for policy and learning practices.

INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian education sector has undergone significant changes with the introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum policy initiated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbud) (Sari dkk., 2024; Yusmadi dkk., 2024). This curriculum is designed to provide flexibility for teachers and schools in designing student-centered learning that is relevant to the local context (Irsyad dkk., 2024; Lestari dkk., 2024). At the elementary school level, the Merdeka Curriculum serves as an important foundation for developing students' character and competencies from an early age (Fitria & Aulia, 2021; Montanero Fernández, 2019; Voroncova dkk., 2021).

Teachers, as the primary implementers, have a significant responsibility in ensuring the success of the Merdeka Curriculum (Arizona dkk., 2024; Perilla Granados dkk., 2020; Reigeluth & An, 2020). They are not only required to have a deep understanding of the curriculum content, but also need to develop creativity in line with the characteristics of their students (Alisauškiene dkk., 2020; Guimarães dkk., 2022; Paniagua & Istance, 2018). In addition, the ability to innovate in assessment methods is an important factor, so that the teacher's perspective has a direct influence on the effectiveness of the implementation of this education policy (Hamilton dkk., 2020; Toledo Castillo dkk., 2022).

The problem statement in this study is the need to understand how teachers in elementary schools interpret and implement the relatively new independent

curriculum. Although this curriculum offers flexibility and autonomy in the learning process, its implementation is not independent of the obstacles experienced by educators, both in terms of conceptual understanding, readiness for implementation, and technical and policy support. Thus, this study was designed to answer the main question, namely how teachers' perspectives on the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools are reflected in various previous research results.

A number of previous studies have shown that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum brings both opportunities and challenges. For example, studies by Saputri dkk., (2024) and Waluyo dkk., (2024) emphasize the flexibility of the curriculum, which provides space for teachers to innovate in designing contextual and project-based learning. Similar findings were also revealed by Fatkhurrohman, (2024) and Wahyuni dkk., (2024), who found that this approach encourages active learning and enhances student creativity. However, other studies such as Delimanugari & Sibawaihi, (2024) and Mohd dkk., (2024) highlight the limitations of teachers' understanding, administrative burdens, and lack of training, which cause resistance or difficulties in implementing the new curriculum principles.

From this description, it appears that teachers tend to welcome the flexibility of the Merdeka Curriculum positively, but readiness for implementation still varies due to limited resources, policy support, and conceptual understanding. Although there has been a lot of research on this topic, most of it is descriptive and fragmented, so it does not provide a comprehensive picture of teachers' perspectives. In other words, there is still a gap in the literature on how teachers' perceptions are systematically mapped to identify trends, key challenges, and opportunities for curriculum implementation.

This study offers novelty by presenting a comprehensive overview of teachers' perspectives on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools using a systematic literature review approach. Unlike previous studies that tended to highlight specific aspects separately, this study integrates various findings to identify four main focuses, namely teachers' understanding of the curriculum, the need for continuous training, policy and resource support, and various classroom learning practices. Through this mapping, this study provides a new perspective that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum needs to be understood holistically and across dimensions, so that it can become an important reference in efforts to improve the quality of basic education.

Based on this context, this study aims to systematically review teachers' perspectives on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools. This study is expected to provide a more comprehensive picture of the readiness, challenges, and teaching practices that have developed within the framework of the new curriculum, as well as serve as a reference for further policy and research.

Although the Merdeka Curriculum has been widely discussed in various studies in Indonesia, the findings are still fragmented and have not been analyzed comprehensively. Some studies show resistance from teachers due to limited training and inadequate understanding, while other studies highlight the difficulties teachers face in applying curriculum guidelines to classroom learning practices. This situation confirms the existence of a knowledge gap regarding how elementary school teachers interpret, respond to, and adapt to this relatively new curriculum. In other words, there is no comprehensive synthesis that provides a complete picture of teachers' views, readiness, and challenges in facing curriculum changes.

RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach was used. SLR is a research approach that focuses on a specific topic by formulating key research questions, which are then identified, evaluated, selected, and systematically concluded based on predetermined criteria (García-Holgado dkk., 2020). This method allows researchers to draw conclusions based on high-quality research relevant to the questions. The process of compiling a systematic literature review aims to enhance readers' understanding of the topic under study and enrich scientific knowledge with more structured and valid information (Kurniawan dkk., 2023; Loc dkk., 2023). The steps to be taken in compiling a literature review according to (Williams, 2018) are as follows.

In this study, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach was used. SLR is a research approach that focuses on a specific topic by formulating key research questions, which are then identified, evaluated, selected, and systematically summarized based on predefined criteria (García-Holgado dkk., 2020; Magin, 2023; Pol dkk., 2022). Articles were collected from the Google Scholar database using the keywords “Teacher Perspective,” “Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum,” and “Elementary School” with a publication range of 2020–2024. This database was selected to ensure the reproducibility of the search process. This method allows researchers to draw conclusions based on high-quality research relevant to the questions. The process of compiling a systematic literature review aims to enhance readers' understanding of the topic under study and enrich scientific knowledge with more structured and valid information (Kurniawan dkk., 2023; Loc dkk., 2023). The steps to be taken in compiling a literature review according to (Williams, 2018) are as follows.



Figure 1. Stages of Literature Review

This study focuses on a literature review of articles published in academic databases during the period 2019-2024. In May 2025, articles were searched on Scholar.google.com using the keywords “Teachers' Perspectives on the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Elementary Schools: A Systematic Literature Review.” Data was collected from Google Scholar, focusing on “article-based documents” organized by title and abstract, including terms such as Teacher Perspectives, Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, and Elementary Schools. The search process involved identifying articles, filtering or selecting articles, and analyzing them. The stages of this research are illustrated in Figure 2.

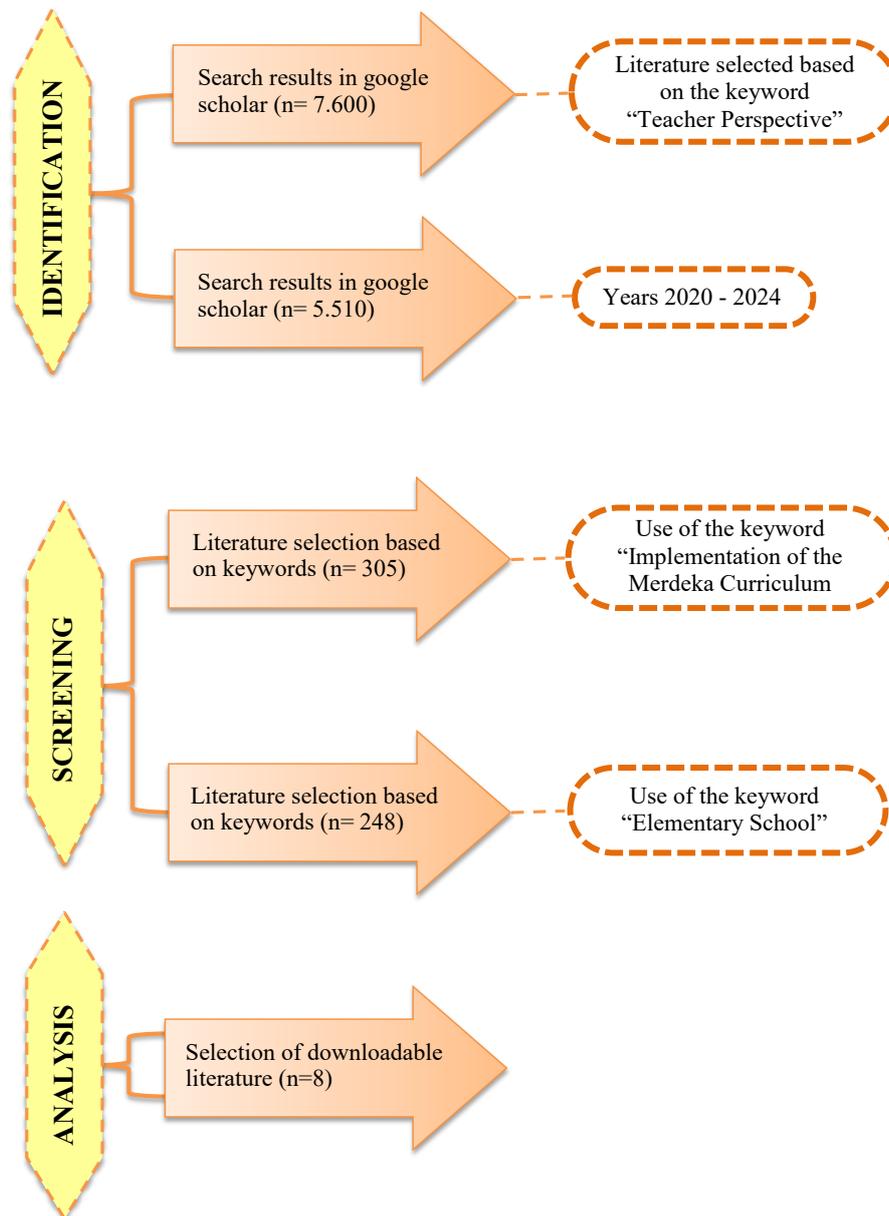


Figure 2. Process stages of article search and selection

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The first step in the article document search phase is to utilize access to the Google Scholar database through the Google Scholar page <https://scholar.google.com/>. The article search was conducted starting from May 2025. A total of 7,600 documents were collected from the literature search using the first keyword, "Teacher Perspective." This study focuses on articles searched using three keywords, namely "Teacher Perspective," "Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum," and "elementary school" during the period 2020–2024. The results of the article calculations obtained over the last five years are illustrated in Figure 3.

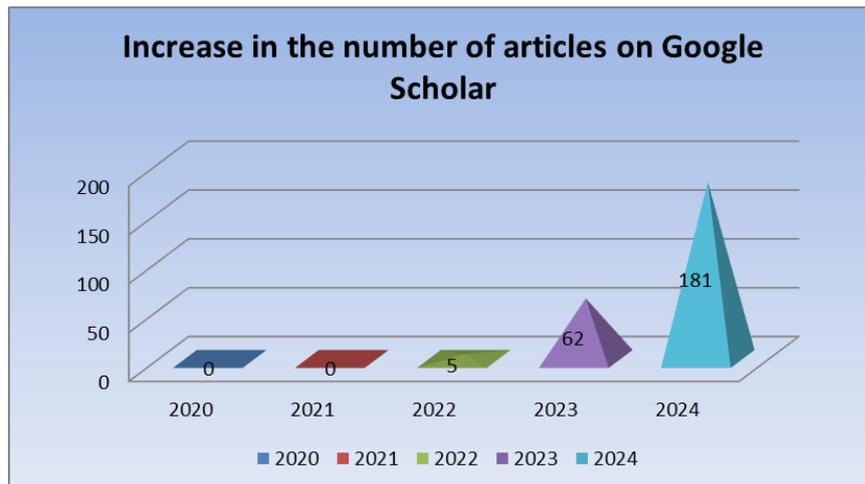


Figure 3. Article Calculation Results from 2020 to 2024

The graph above shows an increase in the number of articles published on Google Scholar from 2020 to 2024. In 2020 and 2021, there were no indexed articles, indicating that there was no academic publishing activity during that period. Entering 2022, there was an initial increase with 5 articles recorded. A significant surge occurred in 2023, where the number of articles increased sharply to 62. The most notable increase was seen in 2024, with a total of 181 articles successfully uploaded to Google Scholar. This data indicates an exponential growth trend in academic productivity, likely influenced by increased awareness of the importance of scientific publication, institutional support, or accelerated publication programs. Overall, this graph reflects positive developments in research activities and scientific contributions over the past five years.

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\text{Number of articles}}{\text{Number of years}} = \frac{248 \text{ article}}{5 \text{ years}} = 49,6 \approx 50 \text{ Article/years}$$

Thus, the average number of articles published each year in the Google Scholar database, when rounded, is approximately 50 articles. Through a literature review on Teachers' Perspectives on the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Elementary Schools, 7,600 articles with the keyword "teacher perspective" were obtained. The search was then narrowed down to articles published between 2020 and 2024, yielding 5,510 articles. After that, by adding the keyword "Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum," the number of articles found became 305 articles. The search was further narrowed down using the keyword "elementary school," yielding 248 articles. From the thousands of articles, eight (8) articles were selected as the most relevant for further analysis to examine the role of teachers in shaping students' character through science education in elementary schools. The eight selected articles will be reviewed in the following table.

Table 1. Previous Research Matrix on the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum

Nu	Title	Journal ID	Research results
1.	The Dynamics of Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum: The Perspective of Elementary School Teachers (Saputri dkk., 2024).	Al-Madrasah: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.	Teachers assess the curriculum in line with Merdeka Belajar (Freedom of Learning), providing the flexibility to design learning according to interests and talents, and emphasizing national values and local culture.



Nu	Title	Journal ID	Research results
2.	Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Science Education: Teachers' Perspectives in Schools Tegal Regency (Fatkhurrohman, 2024).	Jurnal Pendidikan MIPA Pancasakti	Teachers use the Ministry of Education and Culture's teaching modules, apply flexible and exploratory methods, and conduct continuous evaluation; this is considered to support active learning and 21st-century skills, although adaptation is needed.
3.	Analysis of Teachers' Views on the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Elementary Schools (Wahyuni dkk., 2024).	Pendas : Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar	Teachers view it positively because it provides flexibility, but there are obstacles in terms of understanding, resources, and administration; solutions are pursued through training and collaboration that impact student motivation and creativity.
4.	The Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum from the Perspective of Elementary School Teachers to Improve the Quality of Teaching in the Society 5.0 Era (Waluyo dkk., 2024).	Proceedings Series of Educational Studies	Teachers assess the curriculum as relevant to digital needs, encouraging the use of technology, flexible methods, and project-based learning to improve teaching quality.
5.	Analysis of Teachers' Perspectives on the Implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum and Its Impact on Learning in Probolinggo Regency (Winarsih dkk., 2023).	Discourse: Journal of Social Studies and Education	Teachers are optimistic, see opportunities for innovation, and this positive attitude has an impact on improving the quality of learning.
6.	Benefits and Challenges of the Merdeka Curriculum: The Perspective of Teachers at SDN Pandanwangi 2 (Maisa & Utama, 2024).	Jurnal Citra Magang dan Persekolahan (JCMP)	Teachers assess that the curriculum provides flexibility and encourages learning innovation (concrete media, active strategies), but faces limitations in facilities.
7.	Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in IPAS Learning at Mi/Sd (Wijayanti & Ekantini, 2023).	Pendas: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar	Teachers understand that the integration of science and social studies in IPAS aims to broaden students' knowledge, but in practice, the two subjects are still taught separately each semester. Adjustments are needed to ensure optimal integration.
8.	Teachers' Perceptions of the Merdeka Mengajar Platform: Responding to Educational Transformation in the Digital Age (Istiqomah dkk., 2024).	Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Citra Bakti	Teachers have a positive perception of PMM as a means of independent learning, improving competence, and providing learning references in accordance with curriculum requirements.

Discussion

The results of the study show that teachers' readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum is a fundamental issue that affects the success of learning in elementary schools. Several studies show that a lack of in-depth understanding often leads to resistance or confusion in implementing the new curriculum. This condition shows that readiness is not only a matter of mastering curriculum documents, but also includes teachers' attitudes, motivation, and skills in interpreting the direction of education policy.

This readiness is closely related to the availability of ongoing training and mentoring. Previous studies have confirmed that teachers who receive intensive guidance are better able to adapt their lesson plans to the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. Conversely, limited training makes teachers less confident in innovating in the classroom. This shows that there is a direct relationship between the quality of training and teachers' ability to adapt to curriculum changes.

Policy support and resource availability are important factors that influence teachers' success in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers who work in schools with adequate facilities and clear policies tend to be more prepared and confident to innovate. One form of tangible support from the government is the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM), which provides teaching modules, self-training materials, and examples of good practices that can be accessed flexibly. The existence of PMM helps reduce the limitations of face-to-face training and provides space for teachers to learn independently. However, the effectiveness of PMM is also influenced by contextual challenges, such as limited internet access, uneven digital skills among teachers, and limited time to optimize the available features. This shows that although PMM is an important form of support, its utilization still requires additional support in order to be used optimally in various school conditions.

The variety of learning practices carried out by teachers reflects the three previous issues. Teachers who are prepared, supported by training, and facilitated by adequate policies and facilities will find it easier to implement innovative strategies, such as project-based learning, the use of technology, and contextual learning. Conversely, limitations in any of these aspects will restrict teachers' creativity in the classroom.

Teachers' Perspectives on the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Elementary Schools

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary school level brings a new dimension to classroom instruction (Heliwasnimar dkk., 2024; Rahmayanti dkk., 2023). Teachers, as the primary actors in the educational process, have greater flexibility in designing teaching and learning activities that align with students' characteristics and local contexts (Gaižiūnienė, 2019; Uyun, 2023). This curriculum emphasizes learning freedom, character development, and the cultivation of competencies relevant to 21st-century life, such as critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration (Anipah, 2023; Heriman dkk., 2024).

From the teachers' perspective, the flexibility of the curriculum opens up opportunities for innovation in delivering teaching materials. Many teachers feel more at ease in choosing teaching methods, developing teaching media, and determining appropriate evaluation models (At Thariq dkk., 2020; Felayabi dkk., 2022). This helps increase student participation in learning activities and strengthens the relationship between teachers and students in creating a comfortable and enjoyable learning environment.

Although many teachers responded positively, the implementation process still faced various challenges. Not all teachers had a thorough understanding of the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. Some of them were still stuck in old habits, such as one-way learning and number-based assessment. The lack of adequate training and guidance also made some teachers feel confused and hesitant in implementing these changes.



In addition to limited understanding, technical and infrastructure issues also affect the effectiveness of curriculum implementation. Many elementary schools still lack supporting facilities such as digital devices, stable internet connections, or access to digital teaching materials (Aini, 2023; Andronic, 2023; Folostina & Simion, 2020; Yুদ্ধ, 2019). In certain areas, teachers must work hard to adapt curriculum ideas to the realities on the ground, which are far from ideal (Bangirinama dkk., 2019; Nurteteng dkk., 2024; Wang & Rahman Hz, 2023).

However, despite these challenges, teachers' enthusiasm for continuing to learn and develop has not waned. Many have begun actively participating in independent training, sharing best practices through learning communities, and using various online learning platforms as references. This adaptation shows that teachers have a strategic role in bridging the concept of the curriculum with its actual implementation in the classroom.

Support from school principals, education authorities, and the teaching community is a key factor in accelerating this adaptation process. Collaboration and open communication among education stakeholders can strengthen a healthy learning ecosystem. Teachers need the right platform to express themselves, learn, and develop their capacities so they can implement the Merdeka Curriculum optimally (Jasmine & Kamal, 2023; Kurniawan dkk., 2023).

Overall, teachers' perspectives on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools tend to be positive, mainly because it provides room for innovation and student-centered learning. However, continuous support in the form of training, mentoring, and infrastructure strengthening is still needed. Commitment and collaboration from all parties will be key in realizing independent, relevant, and meaningful learning for all students.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding: The majority of elementary school teachers view the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum positively because it is considered to provide flexibility, encourage innovation, strengthen character, and support 21st-century competencies through a contextual, project-based approach and the use of technology. **Implication:** Support in the form of ongoing training, adequate resources, and the use of digital platforms is needed to support teacher professionalism. **Limitation:** The number of articles analyzed was limited and the majority were descriptive in nature, so the results do not represent the overall situation. **Future Research:** Further studies need to be conducted with a broader scope, using quantitative and longitudinal methods, so that the impact of the Merdeka Curriculum can be assessed in greater depth.

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