

**KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' READINESS IN IMPLEMENTING
KURIKULUM MERDEKA**

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ABSTRACT

In order to address the education crisis, the government implemented Kurikulum Merdeka. Teachers must be able to adapt to changes in the curriculum in order for curriculum implementation to work smoothly. This study was conducted to get a knowledge of teacher readiness in implementing new curriculum, particularly in kindergarten schools. This research includes a type of descriptive research with a qualitative approach. To identify readiness, interviews were conducted towards teachers in TK Cendekia 2 Sidoarjo. According to the findings of the interviews, teachers are ready to implement kurikulum merdeka. Yet, there is still lack of awareness of the curriculum structure, and there is still a need of training about lesson plans preparation and teaching modules creation. They still don't have a clear concept of why it should be implemented. They also claimed requirements in trainings and times to understand how to integrate advanced technology into learning process.

Keywords: *Kurikulum merdeka, teachers' readiness, kindergarten*



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INTRODUCTION

Advanced education makes the nation advancing as well. The development of human potential can be processed through educational activities which are usually held by the government or private parties. Education can be said as a life process to develop all the potential that exists in individuals to be able to live and be able to carry out life fully so that they become educated individuals, both cognitively, affectively, and psychomotor. Education is a process of educating humans to become human beings who are useful for the homeland, nation and state (And nm mn mari, 2022).

Improving the quality of education is carried out in various ways by the Indonesian government, one of which is starting from including Indonesian students in PISA and make various breakthroughs through changes to the curriculum. Putrawangsa and Hasanah (2022) stated that in general, it was found that the achievements of Indonesian students in PISA decreased and shows a negative trend, which is decreasing and consistently with low achievements and always in the top 10 largest ranking group from below. Due to the low rank achieved in PISA, the government socialized *Kurikulum Merdeka* in 2021 as an effort to overcome the problem.

Kurikulum Merdeka is a curriculum with intracurricular learning diversity, the content will be more optimal for students to have enough time to explore concepts and strengthen competence. Teachers have the flexibility to choose various teaching tools so that learning can be adapted to learning needs and student interest. In line with Retnaningsih and Khairiyah (2022), they stated that *Kurikulum Merdeka* aimed to create an educational output which not only makes children skilled at memorizing, but wants to build sharpness in analyzing, reasoning and having a broad and complex understanding, and can also help children to develop themselves in various fields not only develop cognitively.

According to Aviansyah and Shagena (2022), the curriculum is always being changed, improved, and adapted to the changes and developments that exist today. *Kurikulum Merdeka* is replacing the previous one which called *Kurikulum 2013*. It strives to provide the next generation with the skills necessary to meet the demands of globalization.

Compared to K-13, *Kurikulum Merdeka* is different. It gives the student freedom to determine the learning method based on their interest (Madhakomala *et.al.*, 2022). The *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum idea is also a solution to issues with the education-practice process; educators are supported in administration and given flexibility in how they arrange and evaluate students' learning, as well as accessibility to all challenges they may face, such as creating lesson plans.

According to Fadillah and Hibana (2022), *kurikulum merdeka* is ideal for early childhood education learning because it gives teachers and students the freedom to develop their imagination and creativity through various learning activities. Cited from Retnaningsih and Khairiyah (2022), there are advantages of the independent curriculum compared to the previous curriculum in that the content and structure are simpler and deeper, more independent, and more relevant and interactive. Simpler and more profound means that the selected material is focused on important and essential material and focuses on how to develop students' competencies at the stages of their development. Learning activities are structured in a more in-depth, meaningful, less rushed manner and most importantly, learning activities are designed and applied in a fun way.

More independence means that students can choose according to their interests and talents, educators teach according to the stages of development and developmental achievements of children, and education units are free to develop and manage their curriculum and learning according to the characteristics of the educational unit and the

characteristics of their students. More relevant and interactive means that learning is carried out through project activities by providing wider opportunities for students to explore to support the development of children's character as well as the competency profile of Pancasila students (Retnaningsih and Khairiyah, 2022).

Curriculum changes are not only within the label, but also in the structure of the new educational plan, which includes numerous aspects such as how things are coordinated, the objectives to be accomplished in training, cycles of educating, learning, and assessments, and, finally, how the learning process is going to prepare future learners.

Every time there is a change in the curriculum, teachers must be able to adapt, starting from learning principles to the assessment process, as well as good cooperation between students, teachers, and parents so that curriculum implementation can run optimally. This is supported by the idea that, in essence, the teacher is the curriculum; as a result, if the teacher is unable to develop the relevant curriculum, the desired educational goals will not be met. As a result, the teacher's capacity of adaptation becomes crucial, even though it takes time (Nugraha, 2022).

Triayomi *et.al.* (2022) said since the teacher is the main executor of a collaboratively developed curriculum, educators or teachers have to show a responsible attitude when preparing this replacement curriculum. In fact, dealing with the renewal of the earlier curriculum with today's curriculum can be challenging for teachers. Thus, to deal with the situation, readiness is required.

Research conducted by Jamilah *et.al.* (2023) shows teachers and educational staffs of SDN 01 and 02 Gentungan, Central Java are 100% ready physically. They also stated that the teachers are psychologically ready for implementing the new curriculum. Yet, some older or senior teachers claim to be worn out because they have to get used to the new rules.

Another research conducted by Tricahyati and Zaim (2023) which focused on the readiness of english teacher in a certain school shows that teachers are ready to implement *Kurikulum Merdeka* but some improvements are still needed. They stated that those teachers found some difficulties in conducting lesson plan especially when they need to formulate the learning outcomes.

Lastly, research by Triayomi *et.al.* (2022) shows teachers in SD Xaverius 1 Palembang are ready and the curriculum already implemented well. This institution is equipped with a driving school (sekolah penggerak) status, a headmaster who has been certified as a driving school principal, and a number of teachers who are preparing to

become driving teachers. They concluded by observing teachers' pedagogic, personality, social and professional competencies.

The capacity to respond to anything is known as readiness, and if someone possesses readiness, responding will be less difficult (Jannah *et.al.*, 2020). Readiness to implement the new curriculum are including cognitive and metacognitive aspects. Yet, according to Jamilah *et.al.* (2023) more than just cognitive and metacognitive skills are involved in a school's preparation to implement the curriculum. But it also entails comprehending the subject matter, applying the curriculum, making sure the curriculum's philosophy aligns with the paradigm of the teacher, and upholding the learning principles.

In this situation, teachers' readiness in welcoming new curriculum and its implementation in schools are likely to differ. Trichayati and Zaim (2023) said teachers in particular may voluntarily participate in the development of new ideas, but others may find it difficult to adapt. This occurs when people are faced with changes in their traits and beliefs based on earlier experiences and routines.

Many have conducted research on the readiness in implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka* in elementary schools and above. It is still rare who conduct research on the readiness of teachers in kindergartens. This is in line with Irbah *et.al.* (2022) who said that *Kurikulum Merdeka* at the Kindergarten education level, as well as numerous literatures related to competency and teacher performance, are still not fully developed. And they research shows that the kindergarten school in Yogyakarta they observed is not yet fully prepared.

Based on the background described earlier, this research carried out to give an understanding about teacher readiness to implement the new curriculum namely *Kurikulum Merdeka*, especially in kindergarten school. According to Yusutria (2019), the growth and development of children is greatly aided by the work that kindergarten teachers do. Thus, we need to develop literatures about the kindergarten teachers' readiness in implementing the current curriculum. So that we can make sure that the new curriculum can be implemented properly and giving positive impact to the growth and development of the children. The purpose of this study is to ascertain the readiness of kindergarten school teachers in implementing the new curriculum namely *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

METHOD

This research includes a type of descriptive research with a qualitative approach. In accordance with Mukhtar's statement (2003), this type of research describes conditions that

are in accordance with the observed object and then the data obtained is written in the form of a report.

Researchers used TK A class and TK B class, each with one teacher as the research subject. The researcher chose TK A class and TK B class teachers as subjects because the initial stages of implementing *kurikulum merdeka* were begun in those classes. The instrument used was an interview. Interview is a tool used to find data according to the object under study with a small number of respondents (Sugiyono, 2016).

The data collection technique is to interview the teacher with questions directly related to the readiness of the teacher in implementing *kurikulum merdeka*. To identify readiness, interviews were conducted towards two teachers in TK Cendekia 2 Sidoarjo. One teacher from TK A class and one teacher for TK B class. Questions given were about four (4) indicators namely; 1) Understanding of curriculum structure, 2) Readiness of lesson plan, 3) Readiness of learning process, 4) Readiness of learning assessment. Next, data analysis is carried out, which is a process in which all the research data has been collected (Sugiyono, 2016). In this case, the data from the interviews with the teacher were collected and then analyzed. The data analysis used in this study is qualitative data analysis, which summarizes the results of the interview data that have been described.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The readiness of the kindergarten teachers at TK Cendekia 2 Sidoarjo in implementing *kurikulum merdeka* is explained in this section. Also, a detailed analysis of the interview data that has been obtained will be presented. Questions given were about four (4) indicators namely; 1) Understanding of curriculum structure, 2) Readiness of lesson plan, 3) Readiness of learning process, 4) Readiness of learning assessment.

Understanding of Curriculum Structure

The first is an indicator of understanding the characteristics and structure of the curriculum. The structure of *kurikulum merdeka* in early childhood education consists of intracurricular learning activities and projects to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). The intracurricular learning activities are designed with the aim that early childhood can achieve the abilities written in the Foundation Phase Learning Outcomes (Capaian Pembelajaran).

In essence, intracurricular learning is meaningful play as an embodiment of independent learning, independent play. The activities chosen must certainly be able to provide meaningful experiences and must also be fun for children. Learning activities are

structured using real learning resources that can be found in the environment around children, for example using living things, natural materials or loose parts. If learning resources cannot be presented in real terms, they can be presented through technological support such as learning VCDs or YouTube and can also be from children's reading books (Retnaningsih and Khairiyah, 2022).

The project to strengthen Pancasila student profiles is implemented to strengthen efforts to achieve Pancasila student profiles that refer to the Standard Level of Child Development Achievement. Pancasila is the foundation of the Republic of Indonesia. Every citizen is of course obliged to make Pancasila the guiding principle of life and always practice it in daily life within the nation and state. Pancasila is also closely related to the educational process. In the learning process at school, of course Pancasila is not only introduced as ordinary knowledge that must be known by students, but it is necessary to instill the values contained in it so that it can be implemented in real life (Indarta *et.al.*, 2022).

Indeed, it is essential to understand an independent curriculum's foundation and basic structure before proceeding. According to Fadillah and Hibana (2022), teachers need to be aware of the changes because: (1) *kurikulum merdeka* structure is more flexible, with lesson hours intended to be completed within a year; (2) the selected material is more focused and appropriate for the child's developmental stage; (3) the teacher is free to choose different teaching materials based on the needs and characteristics of the child; and (4) teachers are equipped with a variety of references that enable them to carry out teaching.

In accordance with the results of interviews with TK A and TK B class teachers showed that the teacher's understanding of the characteristics of the curriculum, peculiarities and structure of the curriculum in the Independent Curriculum was sufficient but did not really understand. The teachers know the basis of the structure of the Merdeka Curriculum well. But the result shows teachers' lack of the knowledge about curriculum structures. They didn't know what the structures are.

They claimed they still didn't get enough informed about the details of the new curriculum. The information was mostly delivered by the school principal who often attend workshops for *kurikulum merdeka* implementation. Most of the information provided is about technical implementation in the field. Fundamental matters such as the structure of an independent curriculum are rarely conveyed. However, the school principal has ordered teachers to study independently through the Kemendikbud website and via the internet.

Readiness of Lesson Plan

The institution's approach to the new curriculum, which necessitates modifications to the environment in educational institutions, is centred on planning. Therefore, the goal of any of these actions is to create effective and efficient learning strategies (Munawar, 2022). Lesson plans must be carefully prepared for a curriculum that is independent and gives schools the freedom to choose what will be taught to students.

Lesson plans are intended to assist teachers in carrying out lessons on a daily basis in order to attain a goal. As a result, the lesson plan is organised depending on the flow of goals. Educators utilise learning to make the form more detailed in contrast to the flow of learning objectives. It is important to remember that the flow of learning objectives is not prescribed by the government (Kemendikbudristek, 2022), thus one teacher may use patterns. Different learning objectives were pursued by various teachers, despite the fact that teaching participants studied at the same time.

Teachers, including early childhood education teachers, can utilise models or lesson plans with knowledge and technology to support early childhood development and ensure that young children have the creativity, critical thinking, and communication skills they need to adapt readily (Indarta *et.al.*, 2022). Based on the results of the interviews, teachers experienced difficulties in the process of preparing lesson plans. They encounter difficulties because they feel under pressure to be more creative, which includes coming up with engaging lesson plans for students.

They also stated in the interview session that they preferred the previous curriculum which emphasized reading, mathematics and numeracy skills. Even though the new curriculum adheres to independence in learning. They have point of view that implementing independent learning will eliminate these three aspects so that the output of learning will produce lower quality students.

The teachers' idea considered to be misled. Independent learning has a goal to develop children more than just those three aspects. According to Fadillah and Hibana (2022), the purpose of freedom of learning is not only to develop children's writing and reading skills, but also to assist them in honing problem-solving skills, encourage them to reason so that they have broad and complex understandings, and assist them in developing themselves in various fields, not just cognitive development.

Because of this point of view, teachers have difficulties in making lesson plans. In the past they were fixated on books and drilling in reading, writing and arithmetic.

Meanwhile as the new curriculum, they are expected to be able to modify learning to develop not only these three aspects.

The challenge is that teachers fail to comprehend or have experience generating literacy and numeracy teaching resources focused on challenges and projects. Based on an examination of the learning plans/designs, the majority of them continue to provide low-level learning outcomes, and the development of literacy and numeracy in learning is still confined to early literacy abilities and simple and incomplete expressive language. As a result, strategies that can assist teachers in producing problem- and project-based literacy and numeracy teaching resources are required (Sutama *et.al.*, 2023).

However, according to Sasi *et.al.* (2019), there have recently been misunderstandings and distortions about the nature and purpose of early childhood education in Indonesia, specifically that its main purpose is to instill character values and identity through play into classroom activities that emphasise reading, writing, and math as appropriate for elementary school students. This is due to parental demands that their kids learn to read, write, and count right away in order to pass the admission exam for their preferred primary school.

But in general, teachers already understand the format and administrative steps in making lesson plans or teaching modules. It was mentioned in the interview, regarding the technicalities of making teaching modules, they had been adjusted to the direction of the Ministry of Education and Culture. As well as there are many examples of downloadable teaching modules which are then modified and adapted to the needs of students at TK Cendekia 2 Sidoarjo.

Cited from Maulida (2022), there are three components in the teaching module, namely general information components, core components, and attachments. General information includes school identity, initial competencies, Pancasila student profiles, student targets, infrastructure suggestions, and learning models. While the core components include learning objectives, meaningful understanding, triggering questions, learning activities, assessment, and remedial and enrichment. In the last stage is the attachment which contains student worksheets. In the development of independent curriculum teaching modules, there are several strategies that teachers can apply, but it is necessary to know that the foundation for making teaching modules is to analyze the conditions and needs of students, teachers and schools.

Readiness of Learning Process

Furthermore, the third indicator relates to the implementation of learning. Considering the curriculum that will be used in the new curriculum, teachers need to adjust the learning process. According to Rakhmawati *et.al.*, (2022), the goal of *kurikulum merdeka* is to make the learning process enjoyable for everyone involved, including teachers, parents, and students. Early learning activities encourage play among the kids. Children who play are able to maximise all elements of their development (Yustine *et.al.*, 2022). *Kurikulum merdeka* allowed kids to select their own learning topics that adapted to their needs while they played. On the other hand, in order to accomplish meaningful learning and learning objectives, early childhood education should take into account its learning methodologies, tactics, and models.

The result of interviews with teachers at TK Cendekia 2 Sidoarjo shows that the learning process has been adapted gradually to the new curriculum. Process standards as regulated in Permendikbud No. 137 of 2014 include lesson planning, implementation of learning, learning evaluation, and monitoring of learning (Kemendikbud, 2014). These teachers also said that the implementation of the independent curriculum was to give students the freedom to choose the learning activities they wanted.

In TK Cendekia 2 Sidoarjo, the learning process is based on *Kurikulum Merdeka*, especially in Kindergartens A and B, by making gradual changes and starting with simple things. This aims to facilitate the adaptation of the curriculum for both teachers and students. This is supported by a claim made by Purani and Putra (2022). They propose that the transition phase should be carried out gradually in order to provide assistance in teachers and students' adaption.

According to Purani and Putra (2022), *kurikulum merdeka* can be implemented in stages. If the school unit will carry out independent learning, the education unit can apply part of the *kurikulum merdeka* without changing the existing curriculum. School party can carry out independent learning by creating their own learning tools.

At TK Cendekia 2 Sidoarjo, learning is still carried out with the 2013 curriculum in which there is independent curriculum learning. Some of the learning activities that have been implemented in each class are the application of a positive culture in schools, the application of class agreements before learning, and the use of literacy for children. It was stated during the interview that positive culture in children at Kindergarten Cendekia 2 Sidoarjo is based on Pancasila values by carrying out innovative activities for children and originating from religious values that are in accordance with the foundations of the

institution. The implementation of children's literacy in these institutions is also supported by books as the main source as well as knowledge from other media such as the internet and several works of teachers and children as literacy development innovations that support learning activities for early childhood.

Another program that is in accordance with the independent curriculum, namely TK Cendekia 2 Sidoarjo, has used activities with student centers and project-based learning, although not all themes use this method. In the complete independent curriculum, one class only chooses one to four themes for one semester and is carried out using project-based learning (Norhikmah et al., 2022).

However, based on the option of implementing the independent curriculum, Kindergarten Cendekia 2 Sidoarjo is in accordance with the specified choice, namely independent learning. Because even though it uses the old curriculum, it has included several independent curriculum principles in classroom learning activities. The independent curriculum is synonymous with 5P or projects to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students (Rachmawati et al., 2022). Children in Kindergarten Cendekia 2 are also taught about the six dimensions of the Pancasila student profile through songs. According to researchers, these activities can serve as a reminder and motivation for teachers and children to carry out learning in schools that are in accordance with the values contained in Pancasila.

Readiness of Learning Assessment

The last indicator is the learning assessment's readiness. Early childhood assessment is a process that is carried out for every educator in collecting and studying various information in a systematic, measurable, sustainable and comprehensive based on child growth and development aspects of child growth and development over a certain period of time (Hibana *et.al.*, 2022).

Based on the results of the interviews, it can be concluded that the teachers already have a comprehensive understanding of learning assessment. Formative and summative assessments are two forms of assessments outlined in *Kurikulum Merdeka* that may not be used at the same time. This was supported by Kemendikbudristek (2022) which claim that depending on the breadth of the learning objectives, neither of the two methods of assessment must be utilised in a learning implementation plan or teaching modules.

The teachers are aware of the distinctions between the two assessments. Each category is described in accordance with the guidelines provided by Kemendikbudristek (2022). Formative assessment is done to determine the students' learning requirements, any

obstacles or challenges they may be facing, as well as to discover more about their development. Meanwhile summative assessment is used to find out student development achievements and not as an evaluation result for determination grade promotion or graduation. Summative assessment in the form of a report containing learning outcomes learning achievement reports and can added with growth information and child development.

Teachers also understand different types of scoring formats such as rubrics, checklists, anecdotal notes, and progress charts. They mentioned that they used rubrics, checklists and anecdotal notes in conducting the assessment. This is in line with the Ministry of Education and Culture's claims in 2022 that early childhood education assessment techniques do not rely on written tests but rather a variety of approaches customised to the needs of early childhood education unit with an emphasis on observation of children in authentic learning environments. There are several ways to evaluate someone, including using checklists, portfolios, records, projects, sketches, stories, and so on.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results from the data analysis that has been carried out, it can be concluded that the teacher's readiness in implementing *kurikulum merdeka* seen from the results of interviews in general the teacher is ready to implement *kurikulum merdeka*. But TK Cendekia 2 Sidoarjo needs to improve some aspects. There is still a lack of understanding regarding the structure of the independent curriculum and still needs training regarding the preparation of lesson plan and creating teaching modules. The teachers still do not have a clear picture regarding the advantages of implementing the independent curriculum. The teachers are also considered to still need training and a learning period in integrating the latest technology in the learning process.

The level of readiness shown can be a consideration for schools to immediately respond to problems. In addition, the concept of an independent curriculum needs to be understood by all elements of educational institutions, so that in its application it can run optimally, effectively and efficiently and is able to achieve the goals of the independent curriculum itself.

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