Key factors for successful implementation of the independent curriculum: examining teacher readiness

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Article Info

ABSTRACT

The Merdeka Curriculum that prioritizes student autonomy in the learning process was chosen as a solution to overcome the learning crisis exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the implementation of this curriculum faces challenges, especially related to teacher readiness. This study aims to analyze factors that affect teacher readiness in implementing the "Merdeka" curriculum, including teacher understanding of curriculum steps, lesson plan readiness, and supporting and inhibiting factors. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design involving grade 1 to 6 teachers who have implemented the "Merdeka" curriculum. Data were collected through interviews, observation, and documentation, and analyzed using inductive models. The results of the study explained that although teachers have a good understanding of the seven steps in implementing the curriculum, there are still challenges in realizing planned learning due to the dominance of lecture teaching styles. Several inhibiting factors were identified, including lack of pedagogic competence, limited facilities and infrastructure, and insufficient number of teachers. On the other hand, supporting factors such as school funding, teacher working groups, and collaboration among teachers have been shown to contribute to successful implementation. The implications of this study emphasize the need for targeted professional development programs, adequate funding and infrastructure support, and the value of collaboration among teachers.

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Introduction

The quality of learning in Indonesia is still very low and can be said to be experiencing a learning crisis which is a big challenge for the development of Indonesian education today. The Covid-19 pandemic has further exacerbated this situation by impacting the teaching and learning process which has changed to online or distance learning (Chan et al., 2021; Rulandari, 2020). This causes learning loss, where students lose learning abilities that have previously been mastered and affect students' communication and social skills (Yusra, 2023) As many as 66% experienced learning loss (Azhar et al., 2023; Suyadi et al., 2023). As an effort to overcome the learning loss and learning gap, the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud) provides flexibility for education units to implement the 2013 curriculum in full, use the emergency curriculum, or independently simplify the curriculum (Arifah, 2022). One of the options given is to implement the Independent Curriculum which emphasizes giving autonomy to students in managing their learning process. This curriculum approach allows students to choose topics, learning methods, and programs that align with their interests and needs, thus

encouraging a more engaging and personalized learning experience (Rosnelli Rosnelli, 2023; Rev. Purnomo et al., 2023)

The Merdeka curriculum was chosen as the right solution because it has proven to be successfully implemented in several developed countries such as Finland and Singapore its curriculum is carefully aligned with national frameworks, emphasizing on solving mathematical problems and ensuring a narrow gap between the established and enforced curricula, largely due to the use of highly aligned textbooks (Kumar, 2022; Stillman, 2013). This curriculum gives teachers and schools greater flexibility and autonomy in designing learning that suits the needs and characteristics of students. In addition, the Merdeka Curriculum also encourages the development of 21st century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication, which are indispensable to face future challenges (S. Hadi, 2021; Jayadi et al., 2023; Swandana et al., 2023). However, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Indonesia still encounters several obstacles, especially related to teacher readiness. Previous research has shown that each school has a different level of readiness in implementing the Independent Curriculum, especially the level of teacher readiness in the teaching and learning process in the classroom (Lubis et al., 2022; Puspitasari &; Utami, 2023; Yulianti &; Hadi, 2023). This is reinforced by a preliminary study, namely observations made at SDN Sidorejo 02 Saradan, which found limitations in preparing the Merdeka curriculum such as the lack of ideal teachers to implement the Merdeka Curriculum optimally; as well as from the infrastructure.

Teacher readiness is a key factor in the success of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, because teachers are the spearhead in the learning process. Opinion (Irwahyudi et al., 2023; Lubis et al., 2022, 2022; Ruaya et al., 2022), Readiness can be described as a control tool that allows the achievement of learning objectives. This is in line with the results of the analysis of (Hashemi &; Ghorianfar, 2023; Sa'adah &; Anjarwati, 2022) There needs to be an effort by teachers to prepare lesson plans well so that the quality of learning as a basic principle in education becomes good. This results in a lack of preparation can hinder the achievement of learning objectives in the classroom. As previous research revealed by (Huang et al., 2023; Nguyen & Zimmerman, 2020) Indications of low quality of classroom learning are strongly influenced by teachers' lack of readiness, greater intrinsic motivation, and knowledge of their pedagogical content. In addition, in previous studies, there was a problem when registering schools to implement the independent curriculum, namely that some teachers did not understand the independent curriculum. Therefore, (Wesley Giankeke Sb et al., 2023) recommend teachers to conduct training independently through the page provided or Platform Merdeka Mengajar. In previous research, it has not been explained how teachers are prepared to implement an independent curriculum for their schools in a typical manner. This is because each school has unique characteristics influenced by natural factors, local wisdom, different cultures and languages (W. Lestari et al., 2023). It looks simple but if it is not used in preparation for teaching by educators, it becomes useless.

Based on the analysis of problems and limitations of previous research, this study focuses on analyzing teacher readiness factors in implementing the curriculum in one of the schools in East Java. Aspects to be reviewed include teacher readiness in implementing the Merdeka curriculum; readiness of the Merdeka curriculum learning plan; inhibiting factors for the implementation of the independent curriculum and supporting factors for the independent curriculum. This research has the urgency of research to strengthen the supporting factors of teacher readiness, so that appropriate strategies and policies can be formulated to improve teacher readiness in implementing the Independent Curriculum. Through the limitations of previous research, this research strengthens and complements, especially in the comprehensive analysis of teacher readiness factors, which has not been done much in previous studies.

The purpose of this study is to investigate teacher readiness in the implementation of the independent curriculum. The results of this study are expected to contribute in the form of recommendations for schools and policy makers in formulating strategies to increase teacher readiness so that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum can run optimally and minimize previous weaknesses based on research findings in the field. This research contribution is an effort to provide input for education policy makers, both at the regional and national levels, in formulating policies and programs that can encourage the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum. This input can be in the form of improving implementation guidelines, increasing funding and facility support, or strengthening the training assistance system, workshops, increasing learning innovation and supervision for schools and teachers, as well as conducting workshops to improve learning innovation.

Method

The research uses a qualitative approach with a case study type. This research took place at SDN Sidorejo 02. The reason for choosing this location is based on the initial observations of SDN Sidorejo 02 Saradan District, Madiun Regency. East Java, School selection is based on problem analysis, namely there is a phenomenon in the form of a shortage of ideal teachers so that there have been problems with parents so that learning is disrupted during the covid period; The occurrence of lost learning causes some material that should be completed to be not mastered; One of the schools that began to implement a new curriculum was the independent curriculum so that it was in accordance with the problems studied.

Data was collected by selecting all teachers who implemented the Merdeka curriculum in the school, namely grade 1,2,4,5 teachers as well as Islamic religious teachers and sports teachers. Primary data were collected in the form of all information, facts and findings from interviews, field observations and documentation from key informants. Interviews were conducted with one of the all teacher for key informan chosen because they had implemented the Merdeka curriculum. Interviews and observations were conducted twice for each teacher. Each interview and observation was carried out for 60-100 minutes. Secondary data includes information data and realities that occur in the research field and are relevant to the main data. Before taking data on interview and observation instruments, validation is carried out first to experts, so that valid instruments are obtained according to the researcher's goals. The implementation of the research was carried out in January 2024 and February 2024. To increase the accuracy of the research and the validity of the data, an FGD (Forum group discussion) was conducted to the principal and several students to confirm the research data collected previously.

Once the data is collected, the information is displayed proportionally. It is then analyzed using an inductive model. This model is intended to clarify the data reduction process to create meaning in the basic information collected. These findings were obtained to interpret raw information; The researchers used interviews to follow up on the results. Interviews were conducted to find out the problems that occurred. The interview used is a structured interview. Interviews were held for 60 to 100 min, with an average interview time of 90 min.s. This study used Miles and Huberman's theory to analyze the data: 1) Data reduction (reduced selection and focus) and changed the data obtained from field notes. This data came from questionnaires, interviews, observations, and respondent documentation. Then, the summary is made more accessible to analyze the data and move on to the next step. 2) Data display (displays organized compressed data from a collection of information so that it is possible to infer later. In this step, the researcher shows or displays the data according to the data that has been prepared)—obtained and presented sequentially. 3) Concluding (after completing data reduction and displaying the data obtained, the researcher concludes the findings in the field and is based on the research problem.(M. B. Miles, 2014). The grid of observation and interview items can be seen in Tables 1 and 2. All factors, both supporting and inhibiting, are found when observing the object of research.

Table 1. Research interview grid

Object	Aspect	Indicatoor
Teacher	Teacher understanding of the 7 steps to implementing an independent curriculum	Teachers understand/have KOSP design, ATP planning, learning and assessment, and the application of P5, as well as the application of learner-centered learning.
	Readiness of independent curriculum learning plans	Teachers understand/have CP then formulate learning objectives and compile ATP to be able to plan learning and assessment
	Learning material module readiness	Teachers prepare or provide textbooks, modules, learning materials, and companion books according to the material in the independent curriculum
	Readiness of facilities and infrastructure	Teachers are able to use existing facilities and infrastructure in schools for independent curriculum learning
	Learning assessment readiness	Teachers are able to plan and apply diagnostic, formative and summative assessments to students in independent curriculum learning
	Factors of teacher readiness to implement an independent curriculum	All factors, both supporting and inhibiting, are found when observing the object of research

Table 2. Research interview grid

Object	Aspect	Indicator
Teacher	Teacher understanding of the 7 steps to implementing an independent curriculum Readiness of independent curriculum learning plans	Teachers understand the design of KOSP, ATP planning, learning and assessment, and the application of P5, as well as the application of learner-centered learning. Teachers understand CP then formulate learning objectives and compile ATP to be able to plan learning and assessment
	Learning material module readiness	Teachers prepare or provide textbooks, modules, learning materials, and companion books according to the material in the independent curriculum
	Readiness of facilities and infrastructure	Teachers are able to use existing facilities and infrastructure in schools for independent curriculum learning
	Learning assessment readiness	Teachers are able to plan and apply diagnostic, formative and summative assessments to students in independent curriculum learning
	Factors in teacher readiness to implement an independent curriculum	All supporting and inhibiting factors found were found when conducting interviews with the object of study

Results and Discussions

Based on research data that has been collected from interviews and observations at SDN Sidorejo 02 Saradan, researchers poured the results of the study into several sub-chapters as follows

Teacher Readiness in the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum

Teacher readiness in implementing the curriculum begins with reviewing teacher understanding in implementing the steps to implement the independent curriculum. The results showed that all teachers had understood well the 7 steps of implementing the independent curriculum, which included: Preparation of the Operational Curriculum for Education Units (KOSP); Understanding the Learning Objective Flow (ATP); Learning preparation and assessment; Preparation of teaching tools equipped with strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile (P5); P5 reinforcement project planning; Implementation of P5 strengthening projects; Application of student-centered learning. This is in accordance with research from (F. Lestari &; Triayomi, 2023) that the independent curriculum is declared valid to have fulfilled 91.1% of teaching modules, syllabi, and ATP, with 100% conformity with the Learning Objectives in its elements. Then corroborated by the results of interviews with class I and II teachers, namely Mrs. A and B, he said that.

"The preparation of the operational curriculum or KOSP for our school was carried out in a meeting, so the principal chaired the meeting at the beginning of the new school year to compile the curriculum together. Usually, there is already a draft from the Department in general, ma'am, so we are in schools, uh, I mean each school has the right to adjust according to school needs."

"For ATP I analyze from the learning outcomes from the center, making it easier for me to compile ATP"
"Before teaching, I always prepare learning tools according to the curriculum, ma'am, what is different during this independent curriculum is that in the assessment there is a new assessment, namely diagnostics, I just read how to make it when I will change this curriculum"

"Well, in the independent curriculum, we now have to prepare a project to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students (P5), if I think this is the same as character education, it's just that this has a project. Children are given projects and then put them into practice on a work degree. If in elementary school here, maybe the name is the same as another elementary school, namely market day. Our elementary school has held the market day several times as a P5 work title for children. Mom's son."

"Student-centered learning for an independent curriculum, in my opinion, teachers must first understand the character of students like what and then the learning carried out must be in accordance with the abilities of their students"

The statement was also corroborated by the results of an interview with class IV teacher Mrs. A V Mr. B, he said that:

"KOSP I attended the making meeting, ma'am, during the meeting I proposed some learning ideas using simple projects, mom. If it is approved by fellow teachers, then the idea will be accepted, if it is not accepted, I have no problem."

"For ATP, I also prepared it, ma'am, I have printed it. The content is similar to the syllabus."

"Before teaching, I have prepared teaching tools that Insha Allah complete, not only teaching modules but there are P5, there are assessments too, ma'am."

"I did the assessment for diagnostics once when I first entered, the rest of the formative assessment was in the teaching module only. For summative, the sub-district has been coordinated, so the problem is that one area is the same."

"Every lesson I have planned is student-centered learning bu **(Class V teacher)."**

"The operational curriculum of the education unit that I understand so far is a curriculum made together at the beginning of the BU academic year. The teachers and the principal usually discuss the school program as well. Every year we always have meetings, mom, but during covid it's a holiday so there are no meetings".

"about ATP I follow an example on the internet, which I know ATP is a substitute for the syllabus mom".

"For learning and assessment, I compiled it in a lesson plan, it used to be called RPP now the teaching module".

"The teaching module that I have is from the results of my writing from the internet, mom. In it there is already a project to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students, almost similar to character education".

"One of the P5 projects in this school is market day, maybe in other schools it is the same, children get entrepreneurial projects selling their work, mom"

"Child-centered learning, I understand that children must be active in learning and the teacher explains a little in class during learning bu **(Class IV teacher).**

However, in its implementation, not all planning can be realized according to the teaching tools that have been prepared. Research findings show that learning is often still dominated by lecture methods, so it tends to be monotonous and less in accordance with the demands of an independent curriculum that prioritizes student-centered learning. Although teachers at SDN Sidorejo 02 Saradan Madiun have understood the steps to implement the independent curriculum and developed appropriate teaching tools, there is still room for improvement in their pedagogic competence. Pedagogic competencies that need to be improved include the ability of teachers to design and implement interesting, creative, and innovative learning in accordance with the spirit of the independent curriculum. Interesting learning can be achieved using a variety of learning methods and media, so as to stimulate student interest and motivation. Teachers need to improve their skills in utilizing information and communication technology (ICT) to develop interactive and interesting learning media. Teacher creativity also needs to be improved in developing learning strategies that encourage students to think critically, creatively, and innovatively. Teachers can use problem-based learning, project-based learning, or inquiry-based learning to train students' higher-order thinking skills.

Learning innovation can be done by integrating various disciplines (integrative thematic learning) and relating them to students' real-life contexts. Teachers need to explore various learning resources outside the textbook, such as the surrounding environment, local wisdom, or current issues relevant to the learning material. One of the hallmarks of the independent curriculum is the emphasis on project-based learning. Project-based learning provides opportunities for students to apply the knowledge and skills learned in producing authentic products or works. However, project-based learning does require more effort, time, and cost compared to traditional learning. Overall, teacher readiness in implementing the independent curriculum at SDN Sidorejo 02 Saradan Madiun is in the ready category, as can be seen from the teacher's understanding of the implementation steps and efforts to prepare appropriate teaching tools. However, improving teacher pedagogic competence and optimizing the implementation of learning still need to be pursued so that it can be more in line with the demands of an independent curriculum.

Factors affecting Teachers' Readiness to Implement the Independent Curriculum
Various factors affect the success of implementing the independent curriculum in schools, especially related to teacher readiness in implementing it. This study succeeded in revealing the existence of inhibiting and supporting factors found at SDN Sidorejo 02 Saradan Madiun. Barriers and supporting factors were found when conducting interviews with grade 1, 2, 4, 5 teachers and even subject teachers. There are examples of interview results that show the factors that influence teacher readiness in implementing the independent curriculum.

Based on the results of interviews with class 1 and 2 teachers, data was obtained regarding the obstacles they faced as follows:

"Teaching two classes made me exhausted, ma'am, too tired and not optimal. I hope to soon get an additional teacher to teach class 2, so that I don't have to teach twice."

"Because I teach 2 classes, I often use the lecture method so that the material is conveyed quickly to my students, ma'am."

The supporting factors that researchers found during interviews with class 1 and 2 teachers were:

"Through KKG I can share my thoughts when working on lesson planning. Apart from that, I also collaborate and share problems and solutions with fellow teachers at SDN Sidorejo 02, ma'am."

"The school has also prepared learning material modules that can help me prepare teaching materials. The material modules I use are funded by BOS funds."

Inhibiting and supporting factors can be obtained from interviews with all teachers who teach the independent curriculum. The interview above is one example of these factors found.

Inhibiting Factors
Lack of pedagogic competence of teachers
The lack of pedagogic competence of teachers is one of the crucial inhibiting factors. Almost all teachers at SDN Sidorejo 02 Saradan Madiun do not have an educator certificate, which should be a benchmark for teacher competence in pedagogic and other aspects. This condition has an impact on the ability of teachers to develop teaching modules that are in accordance with the needs of students in the school. Pedagogically competent teachers should be able to design and implement effective, creative, and innovative learning in accordance with the characteristics of students and curriculum demands. The lack of pedagogic competence of teachers can be an obstacle in creating quality and meaningful learning for students.

Limited Facilities and Infrastructure
Limited facilities and infrastructure are also a significant inhibiting factor in the implementation of the independent curriculum at SDN Sidorejo 02 Saradan Madiun. The number of electronic facilities such as LCD projectors that are only available 1 unit requires teachers to use them interchangeably. Uneven internet coverage in all classes is also an obstacle in optimizing the use of technology in learning. In terms of infrastructure, 3 classrooms suffered heavy damage. This condition certainly creates an atmosphere that is less conducive to the learning process and can reduce student comfort and motivation to learn. The limitations of these facilities and infrastructure make teachers less optimal in implementing learning in accordance with the spirit of the independent curriculum.

Shortage of Teachers
The shortage of teachers is another inhibiting factor in the implementation of the independent curriculum at SDN Sidorejo 02 Saradan Madiun. Grade 2 and grade 3 experienced a homeroom vacancy, so other teachers had to concurrently teach in the class. This condition increases the workload of the teacher concerned and can have an impact on the quality of learning provided. With limited time and energy, teachers who concurrently hold other classes often find it difficult to carry out learning according to the plan that has been prepared. This can reduce the effectiveness of learning and the achievement of the expected goals of the independent curriculum.

Supporting Factors
Habituation and Learning of Islam
 Sidorejo 02 Saradan State Elementary School has implemented an Islamic habituation and learning program as an effort to build the character of students for the past two years. This program includes habituation to listening to the Quran muratal, morning prayer together, Dhuha prayer in congregation, Dhuhur prayer in congregation, and Quran Reading and Write program (BTQ). This habituation and learning of Islam aims to deepen the knowledge of Islamic religion of students, improve their good morals, and piety.

The consistent and structured application of this program creates a positive learning environment and supports the character building of students. This is in line with the spirit of the independent curriculum, which focuses on academic aspects and holistic development of student character and competence. With the habituation and learning of Islam, teachers at SDN Sidorejo 02 Saradan Madiun have a strong foundation to implement an independent curriculum that prioritizes the development of the Pancasila Student Profile (P5).

School Budget Availability
The availability of school budgets, especially from School Operational Assistance (BOS) funds, is a very important supporting factor in the implementation of the independent curriculum at SDN Sidorejo 02 Saradan Madiun. The school uses this budget for various purposes that support learning, such as the procurement of independent curriculum textbooks, internet subscription payments, electricity, and other operations. Adequate budget support enables schools to provide learning resources and facilities needed to optimally implement the independent curriculum. This is certainly very helpful for teachers in carrying out quality learning and in accordance with curriculum demands.

Existence of Teacher Working Group (KKG)
The Teacher Working Group (KKG) is a significant supporting factor in the implementation of the independent curriculum at SDN Sidorejo 02 Saradan Madiun. This KKG has existed since before the independent curriculum was implemented and became a forum for teachers to share knowledge and experience related to learning practices. In KKG activities, teachers discuss various matters related to lesson planning, including the preparation of teaching modules and the Pancasila Student Profile (P5) program. Each grade level and subject teacher has their own KKG, with the main agenda of preparing teaching modules in accordance with the independent curriculum. KKG makes it easier for teachers to compile learning tools effectively and efficiently. Teachers can discuss with each other, exchange ideas, and find solutions to problems faced in the implementation of the independent curriculum. Collaboration between teachers in KKG is very useful to improve the quality of learning and teacher professionalism.

Collaboration Between Teachers
Collaboration between teachers is a supporting factor that is no less important in implementing the independent curriculum at SDN Sidorejo 02 Saradan Madiun. The cohesiveness and spirit of togetherness of teachers in this school has been very visible since the beginning of the planning process of the Education Unit Operational Curriculum (KOSP) which was carried out collaboratively. When there is a misunderstanding or problem related to the implementation of an independent curriculum, such as in terms of learning projects or new terms, teachers do not hesitate to share insights and discuss together to find solutions. The teacher's room is a conducive place for teachers to collaborate, both in preparing learning tools and solving problems faced. This collaboration between teachers creates a positive and mutually supportive learning climate.

Teachers can inspire, motivate, and strengthen each other in facing the challenges of implementing an independent curriculum. With this spirit of collaboration, the implementation of the independent curriculum at SDN Sidorejo 02 Saradan Madiun becomes easier to understand and implement together. The inhibiting and supporting factors revealed in this study provide an interesting picture of the dynamics of implementing an independent curriculum at the elementary school level. These findings can be a material for reflection and input for various parties, including schools, teachers, and education policy stakeholders, to continue to improve the quality of the implementation of the independent curriculum in other schools.

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into teachers' readiness to implement the "Merdeka" curriculum at SDN Sidorejo 02 Saradan Madiun. The results showed that although teachers have a good understanding of the seven steps in implementing the curriculum, there are still challenges in realizing the lessons planned according to the prepared teaching materials. This can be seen from the dominance of lecture-style teaching which tends to be monotonous and less in line with the student-centered learning approach emphasized in the "Merdeka" curriculum. These findings are consistent with previous research highlighting the importance of teachers' pedagogical competence in implementing curriculum changes (Isaev, 2020; Neuman &; Danielson, 2021). A study by (Bastian et al., 2023) found that the pedagogical competence of teachers significantly influenced the successful implementation of the "Merdeka" curriculum by 75%. (Nikmah et al., 2023) emphasizing that the ability of teachers to design and implement interesting, creative, and innovative learning activities is very important in realizing the goals of the "Merdeka" curriculum through independence in training to be a supporting factor for the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

However, it is important to note that the challenges faced by teachers at SDN Sidorejo 02 Saradan Madiun are not unique to this school. Many studies have identified similar obstacles in implementing curriculum changes, such as limited facilities and infrastructure, inadequate teacher training, and lack of support from stakeholders (Nageen et al., 2023). These challenges underscore the need for a valid approach in supporting

teachers to successfully implement the "Merdeka" curriculum. One of the main findings of the study is the importance of improving teachers' pedagogic competence in creating engaging, creative, and innovative learning experiences. This is in line with the principles of the "Merdeka" curriculum, which emphasizes the development of students' critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills and lead to a better learning experience for students (A. Hadi et al., 2023; Wijayanti et al., 2023; Yatim et al., 2023). To achieve this, teachers need to be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to design and facilitate student-centered learning activities.

An additional finding from this study is that the practice of summative assessment at SDN Sidorejo 02 Saradan Madiun is still carried out on a global scale, not developed by each school according to its specific needs. This approach is often adopted to save time in creating assessment questions. However, this practice may not fully align with the principles of the "Merdeka" curriculum, which emphasizes the importance of contextual and relevant assessments that include diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments (Shadri et al., 2023; Yunita &; Widodo, 2023)). Developing school-specific summative assessments that consider students' unique characteristics and needs can provide more accurate and meaningful evaluations of their learning progress.

The results also highlight the importance of project-based learning as a hallmark of the "Merdeka" curriculum. Project-based learning allows students to apply their knowledge and skills in creating authentic products or works, promoting deeper understanding and real-world relevance (Taufiqur Rahman et al., 2023). However, as noted in the findings, implementing project-based learning requires more time, effort, and resources compared to traditional teaching methods. This underscores the need for adequate support and training for teachers to effectively integrate project-based learning into their classrooms. Another important finding is the influence of various factors on teachers' readiness to implement the "Merdeka" curriculum. Low pedagogical competence of teachers, limited facilities and infrastructure, and insufficient number of teachers were identified as major obstacles. This challenge is not uncommon in the context of Indonesian education, as several studies have reported similar problems (Permana et al., 2023; Wijayanti et al., 2023). Overcoming this challenge requires joint efforts from various stakeholders or by organizing workshop events by cooperating with mobilizing teachers to increase learning innovation.

In addition to the factors discussed earlier, the implementation of the Islamic habituation and learning program at SDN Sidorejo 02 Saradan is in line with the emphasis of the "Merdeka" curriculum on holistic student development, covering moral, ethical, and spiritual values that are important in the formation of the Pancasila Student Profile (P5). Research underscores the positive impact of religious education on character and behavior development, affirming that structured Islamic habituation fosters a positive learning environment and noble morals (Bahrun Abubakar et al., 2023) . Integrating Islamic values into classroom learning supports not only cognitive but also affective and spiritual growth, which is essential for comprehensive education (Choirul Mahfud et al., 2023; Zulkiple Abd Ghani & Suria Hani A. Rahman, 2023) . The project-based, student-centered approach to the "Merdeka" curriculum requires teachers to design activities that connect religious values to real-world contexts, encouraging students to apply their understanding in everyday life (Abdul Mu'ti, 2023; Panagiotis Pentaris, 2023)

This integration can be facilitated by utilizing Islamic teachings on tolerance, respect for diversity, and social cohesion, which are essential for cultivating a well-rounded character (Harikumar Pallathadka et al., 2023; Sulieman Ibraheem Shelash Al-Hawary et al., 2023) . Moreover, the role of family and community support in reinforcing these values cannot be overstated, as it provides a basic environment for moral and spiritual education (Semiyu Adejare Aderibigbe et al., 2023; Yonathan Salmon Efrayim Ngesthi et al., 2023) . The use of digital media and platforms to spread Islamic values can further enhance this educational approach, ensuring that students receive a consistent and engaging religious education. By incorporating these elements, Islamic religious habituation and learning programs can effectively contribute to holistic student development, aligned with the goals of the "Merdeka" curriculum. This discussion emphasized the value of project-based learning, school funding, teacher working groups, and collaboration among teachers in facilitating successful curriculum implementation. By addressing the identified challenges and utilizing supporting factors, schools can create an enabling environment for teachers to effectively implement the "Independent" curriculum and promote student-centered learning. Ultimately, the success of the "Merdeka" curriculum depends on teacher readiness influencing school administrators, education authorities, and policymakers in providing the support and resources necessary to realize its goals.

Conclusions

Overall, this research is about the readiness of curriculum teachers at SDN Sidorejo 02 Saradan Madiun. The findings show that although teachers understand the seven steps of the curriculum well, there are still challenges in realizing planned learning due to the dominance of lecture teaching styles. However, several inhibiting factors

were identified, including lack of pedagogic competence, limited facilities and infrastructure, and lack of teachers. On the other hand, supporting factors such as school funding, teacher working groups, and collaboration among teachers contribute to successful implementation. Limitations of this study include a single case study design and a potential lack of generalizability. Future research could explore the application of the Merdeka curriculum in wider schools and conduct longitudinal studies to understand its long-term impact. The implications of this study emphasize the need for targeted professional development programs, adequate funding and infrastructure support, and the value of collaboration among teachers. Future research recommendations include conducting broader studies in different regions, exploring the impact of specific interventions, and conducting qualitative studies to gain deeper insight into teacher experiences and challenges.

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