

Teacher Reflection on the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools demands a paradigm shift in learning that is more contextual, differentiated, and oriented toward strengthening the Profile of Pancasila Students. However, in reality, many teachers still face challenges in understanding and effectively applying this curriculum. This study aims to reflect on teachers' experiences in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary school level. This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design conducted in four elementary schools in Wanasaba District over a period of three months, from January to March 2025. Data collection techniques included semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation involving 25 informants consisting of principals, teachers, and students. The results of the study indicate that most teachers have understood the basic concepts of the Merdeka Curriculum but face difficulties in its practical implementation, such as designing differentiated instruction, conducting formative assessments, and building a culture of reflection. Structural support from schools and other stakeholders is also still limited. The lack of ongoing training and supporting facilities is a significant obstacle in the adaptation process to this new curriculum. In conclusion, teachers' reflections reveal a gap between theoretical understanding and the practical application of the Merdeka Curriculum. Therefore, systematic efforts are needed to enhance teacher competence through training, mentoring, and strengthening collaborative learning communities to support the successful implementation of the curriculum in elementary schools.

INTRODUCTION

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) in elementary schools presents significant challenges for teachers, particularly in understanding and applying new components such as Learning Outcomes (Capaian Pembelajaran or CP), Learning Objectives (Tujuan Pembelajaran or TP), and Learning Objective Sequences (Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran or ATP). This lack of comprehension leads to difficulties in designing lessons that align with students' needs. A study by Irmawan et al. (2023) revealed that teachers struggle to elaborate TPs from CPs and to construct effective ATPs. This situation is exacerbated by the limited availability of references and training related to the Independent Curriculum for elementary school teachers.

In addition, teachers face challenges in implementing differentiated instruction, which is one of the core characteristics of the Independent Curriculum. Difficulties in analyzing students'

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individual characteristics—such as family background, learning styles, and prerequisite knowledge—make it harder for teachers to design appropriate learning activities. The limited time allocation in each class schedule also affects teachers' ability to conduct diagnostic assessments and implement effective learning activities (Setyo Adji Wahyudi et al., 2023).

Constraints in resources and supporting facilities further hinder the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Teachers experience difficulties due to inadequate facilities and limited understanding of the goals and concepts of the new curriculum, even after attending various training sessions (Zahroh et al., 2024). This condition indicates that existing training programs have not been fully effective in preparing teachers to adapt to curriculum changes.

Moreover, teachers encounter challenges in developing teaching materials such as Modul Ajar (Teaching Modules) and Learning Achievement Criteria. According to Mirawati (2023), most teachers still experience confusion when constructing teaching materials that align with the standards of the Independent Curriculum, despite their understanding of its basic concepts (Mirawati et al., 2023). This finding underscores the need for further support through ongoing training and mentoring programs for teachers.

Educational experts emphasize that a deep understanding of the Independent Curriculum is crucial for teachers to implement it effectively. According to Aulia et al. (2023), teachers must comprehend the essence of each curriculum component—including CP, TP, and ATP—to design learning experiences that meet students' diverse needs. Without such understanding, teachers will face challenges in applying the curriculum optimally (Aulia et al., 2023).

Furthermore, differentiated instruction—one of the central focuses of the Independent Curriculum—requires teachers to deeply analyze their students' characteristics. Research by Deric and Susanti (2023) asserts that teachers must understand students' backgrounds, learning styles, and individual needs to design effective instruction. This requires teachers to possess strong diagnostic assessment skills (Deric & Susanti, 2023).

The limitation of resources and facilities has also been highlighted by scholars. Rusmiati et al. (2023) found that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools has not been fully realized due to various issues, including the lack of facilities and infrastructure. This finding suggests the need for broader institutional and governmental support to provide sufficient resources for teachers (Rusmiati et al., 2023).

Effective training and mentoring are also key to supporting teachers in adapting to curriculum reforms. Research by Wulan Dewi and Astuti (2022) indicates that improving teachers' readiness to implement the Independent Curriculum requires more intensive training and continuous support from relevant stakeholders. Such initiatives are essential to ensure that teachers possess the competencies necessary for applying the new curriculum effectively (Wulan Dewi & Astuti, 2022).

Additionally, teacher reflection on teaching practice plays an important role in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Ramadhan (2023) argues that teachers must engage in continuous reflection to improve the quality of instruction and adapt to students' learning needs. This reflective process enables teachers to identify their strengths and weaknesses in instructional practice (Ramadhan, 2023).

Finally, support from various stakeholders—including the government, educational institutions, and the community—is vital to assist teachers in addressing challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum. Sofiah and Azizah (2024) suggest that solutions to these challenges include enhancing teacher training, leveraging technology, strengthening learning facilities, and improving public awareness of the curriculum (Sofiah & Azizah, 2024). These

findings highlight the importance of collaboration among multiple stakeholders to ensure successful curriculum implementation.

Most previous studies have focused primarily on teachers' readiness for the Independent Curriculum, with limited attention to teachers' reflections on its implementation. For instance, the study by Purani and Susanto Putra (2022) emphasized an analysis of teachers' readiness at SDN 2 Cempaga but did not deeply examine teachers' reflections on their instructional practices (Purani & Susanto Putra, 2022). Similarly, Yuliani (2021) concentrated on teachers' abilities to develop instructional materials without addressing how they reflect on and improve their teaching practices based on such reflection, even though reflection is a critical aspect of professional teacher development (Yuliani, 2021).

Windayanti et al. (2023), in a literature review study, identified barriers and potential solutions in curriculum implementation but did not specifically address teacher reflection in the context of the Independent Curriculum. Likewise, research by Indahwati et al. (2023) analyzed teachers' perceptions of the curriculum without exploring how teachers reflect on their experiences in implementing it, even though perception and reflection are interrelated aspects of the learning process (Indahwati et al., 2023).

Therefore, a gap exists in the current literature regarding teachers' reflections on the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring how teachers reflect on their experiences in implementing the Independent Curriculum and how these reflections can be used to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in elementary education.

METHODS

The research employed a qualitative approach intended to explore in depth the experiences and reflections of teachers regarding the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Curriculum) in elementary school settings. This approach afforded the researcher the opportunity to capture the subjective meanings constructed by participants within their educational social and cultural contexts (Santoso & Saputra, 2022). Qualitative inquiry also permitted direct interaction between the researcher and informants, which is essential for thoroughly understanding educational practices in the field (Feroza & Misnawati, 2021). Accordingly, this approach was deemed most appropriate for eliciting teacher reflections, particularly within the dynamic context of introducing a new curriculum such as the Kurikulum Merdeka.

The study adopted a collective case study design. This design was selected because it can portray in depth how the Kurikulum Merdeka is implemented across different contexts in the four elementary schools that served as research sites. A collective case study enables the researcher to understand diverse forms of curriculum enactment and related challenges through the exploration of complementary cases that enrich the data (Wahyudin Darmalaksana, 2020). Each elementary school in the study was treated as an individual case within a shared thematic framework—namely, teacher reflections on the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka. This design allowed identification of common patterns as well as significant differences in the curriculum implementation process. The collective case study also facilitated the use of multiple data-collection techniques to strengthen the validity of findings, such as interviews, observations, and document analysis (Sofiani & Hardyanti, 2024).

The population for this study comprised principals, teachers, and students who were directly involved in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka in elementary schools located in Wanasaba District. From this population, the researcher purposively selected four public elementary schools

that had implemented the Kurikulum Merdeka for at least one year as the study sites: SDN 01 Mamben Lauk, SDN 02 Mamben Daya, SDN 01 Wanasaba, and SDN 05 Wanasaba. School selection was purposive, taking into account representation of urban and rural contexts and the schools' readiness to adopt the curriculum change (Fadhil, 2023). The sample comprised 25 informants: five principals, fifteen teachers, and five upper-grade students (grades IV–VI). These informants were selected because they were considered to possess the experience and capacity to provide in-depth information about the dynamics of Kurikulum Merdeka implementation at their respective schools. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure the relevance and depth of the information obtained and to include multiple perspectives from stakeholders directly engaged in curriculum implementation (Dermawan et al., 2023).

The primary instrument in this study was the researcher as a human instrument. The researcher was responsible for designing, collecting, and analyzing data directly in the field. This role is crucial in qualitative research, given the need to apprehend nuance and the subjective meaning of informants' statements (Fauzi & Setiawan, 2020). Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and document review. Interviews were used to elicit reflections, perceptions, and experiences of principals and teachers in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka, while classroom observations were conducted to directly observe instructional strategies in practice (Andreani & Gunansyah, 2023). Collected documents included lesson plans (RPP), evaluation reports, and student learning portfolios. Data collection occurred over a three-month period, from January to March 2025, through routine visits to the four elementary schools (Sujana et al., 2002). To preserve data validity, the researcher implemented methodological and source triangulation and conducted member checking with informants (Zaman & Jabar, 2020).

Data analysis followed a thematic analytic approach, beginning with the detailed transcription of interview data and observation notes. Analysis involved repeated readings of the data, coding units of meaning, and categorizing those codes into themes representing salient issues in teachers' reflections on the Kurikulum Merdeka (Rozali, 2022). Emerging themes included teachers' understanding of the curriculum's essence, readiness for implementation, structural barriers, and school-environmental supports. The analytic process was iterative and was confirmed through peer discussion among researchers and triangulation across data sources to ensure the credibility and reliability of findings. The results of the analysis are presented as descriptive narratives supplemented by direct quotations from informants to strengthen the authenticity of the data (Soleh & Pratiwi, 2021).

RESULTS

Table 1. Teachers' Reflections on Conceptual Understanding of the Independent Curriculum

Reflection Theme	Key Informants	Statements from	Observation Results	Supporting Documents
Understanding the principles of "Merdeka Belajar"	the	"We know that the Independent Curriculum emphasizes differentiation, but we are still confused about how to implement it in practice." (G2)	Teachers still predominantly use one-way teaching methods.	Teaching modules have not yet been adjusted to students' needs.
Perception of the <i>Pancasila Student</i>		"The profile is ideal, but we need concrete training on how to	The values of the profile are not clearly	No reflective notes or character

Reflection Theme	Key Statements from Informants	Observation Results	Supporting Documents
<i>Profile</i>	implement it.” (G5)	reflected in the learning process.	assessment records were found.
Teachers’ readiness to understand the new curriculum	“This curriculum is good, but the time provided to study it thoroughly was too short.” (G3)	Teachers tend to rely on the previous KTSP textbook as a reference.	Syllabi and lesson plans still reflect the old format.

Based on the interviews, most teachers expressed that their understanding of the Independent Curriculum remains largely theoretical. They recognized differentiated learning and the strengthening of the *Pancasila Student Profile* as positive ideas but reported difficulties in actual implementation. Classroom observations confirmed that instructional strategies remain conventional and teacher-centered. Documents such as lesson plans and teaching modules further revealed the lack of integration between the theoretical framework of the Independent Curriculum and its practical application in classrooms.

Table 2. Teachers’ Reflections on Teaching Practices in the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum

Reflection Theme	Key Statements from Informants	Classroom Observation Results	Supporting Documents
Innovation in teaching	“We have tried project-based methods, but not consistently.” (G1)	Only one out of four classes applied project-based learning.	One simple project was created by sixth-grade students.
Use of formative assessment	“We conduct formative assessments only when necessary.” (G4)	Assessment focuses mainly on final results.	No evidence of regular formative assessment was found.
Student participation in learning	“Students are active, but not yet guided according to their interests and talents.” (KS1)	Some students appeared passive and were not involved in learning planning.	No individual student portfolios were found.

In teaching practice, several teachers reported attempting to apply project-based learning approaches, though implementation was inconsistent and uneven across classrooms. Observations revealed that only a small number of classes truly involved students in authentic projects. Assessment practices remained dominated by cognitive aspects and did not yet reflect the principles of continuous formative evaluation. Collected documents also showed that learning portfolios were not being utilized effectively to assess students’ holistic development.

Table 3. Challenges and Support in Implementing the Independent Curriculum

Reflection Theme	Key Statements from Informants	School Observation Results	Supporting Documents
Infrastructure challenges	“We lack media and flexible learning spaces.” (KS2)	Classrooms are small and not conducive to collaborative learning.	Proposals for facility procurement are still in process.
Support from the principal	“The principal gives encouragement, but we need ongoing mentoring.” (G2)	The principal conducts periodic monitoring.	Supervision reports are only completed once per semester.
Role of teacher learning communities	“The learning community exists, but discussions about the curriculum are inactive.” (G3)	Limited interaction among teachers was observed.	Attendance records from the KKG forum exist, but no meeting minutes.

The greatest challenges teachers face in implementing the Independent Curriculum stem from limited facilities and a lack of technical support. Teachers expressed enthusiasm but insufficient facilitation, particularly in terms of practical training and mentoring. While principals were reported to provide motivation, they had not yet established strong systems of supervision or professional guidance. Meanwhile, teacher learning communities (*Kelompok Kerja Guru*, KKG) were functioning but not yet active as platforms for meaningful discussion of curriculum practice.

Based on research conducted in four elementary schools in Wanasaba District, it can be concluded that teachers' reflections on the implementation of the Independent Curriculum reveal a gap between conceptual understanding and classroom practice. In general, teachers possess a theoretical grasp of the core principles of the curriculum—such as differentiated learning and the strengthening of the *Pancasila Student Profile*—but encounter significant challenges in consistent and comprehensive implementation.

From the aspect of instructional practice, some teachers have made efforts to apply project-based learning and formative assessment, yet these efforts remain inconsistent and not fully aligned with the essence of the Independent Curriculum. Observations showed that teaching activities are still dominated by conventional, teacher-centered methods and lack active student engagement in planning and reflection. Moreover, documentation systems such as portfolios and authentic assessments have not yet become integral parts of the teaching and learning process.

The challenges identified in implementing the Independent Curriculum are not solely due to teachers' readiness but also relate to infrastructural limitations, weak supervision and mentoring systems from school leaders, and the underdeveloped role of teacher learning communities (KKG) in discussing curriculum practices. Administrative and managerial support has not been adequately accompanied by technical and collaborative empowerment among educators.

In conclusion, this reflection demonstrates that the success of the Independent Curriculum implementation at the elementary level heavily depends on synergy among teachers' understanding, structural support from schools, and the strengthening of teacher learning communities as forums for professional growth. Continuous mentoring, capacity building, and the improvement of the learning ecosystem are essential to ensure that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum truly embodies student-centered educational values.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that teachers' understanding of the Independent Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*) at the elementary school level remains largely conceptual and has not been fully actualized in classroom practice. Although some teachers have grasped the fundamental principles, such as differentiated learning and the reinforcement of the *Pancasila Student Profile*, the implementation process continues to face various technical and methodological challenges in the field (Saragih & Marpaung, 2024). Classroom learning remains dominated by conventional methods, and active student participation has not yet been optimally integrated, reflecting a persistent gap between theory and practice (Nufus, 2025). Furthermore, teachers have not effectively implemented continuous formative assessments. Evaluation systems still tend to emphasize final outcomes rather than holistic learning processes (Eni Astuti et al., 2024). Reflective teaching practices have also not yet become a part of teachers' daily professional culture, even though reflection is a key component of the Independent Curriculum (Yayuk et al., 2023). The lack of in-depth and continuous professional training on the curriculum's implementation emerges as one of the main factors behind weak execution. Many teachers feel insufficiently equipped with practical strategies to design contextualized learning that aligns with

students' characteristics (Sucipto et al., 2024). These findings underscore the importance of strengthening teacher capacity in facing complex and dynamic curriculum reforms, as well as the need for comprehensive institutional and governmental support systems.

When compared to previous studies, these findings are consistent with earlier reports emphasizing that teachers continue to struggle in translating the vision of the Independent Curriculum into everyday pedagogical practices. Manullang and Marpaung (2024) found that elementary school teachers are still adapting to a paradigm shift that requires them to act as facilitators rather than sources of information. This aligns with Salma and Yuli (2023), who reported that most teachers possess only a moderate level of understanding regarding the substance of the Independent Curriculum. Similarly, Lembong et al. (2023) identified limited access to quality learning resources and training as major barriers for teachers in implementing the new curriculum. Nurhairunnisah et al. (2025) also highlighted that teachers' comprehension of formative assessment remains very limited, preventing the full realization of the evaluative approach envisioned by the Independent Curriculum. Hence, this study reinforces previous findings and emphasizes the urgency of comprehensive teacher training reform to support curriculum implementation.

The implications of this research cover several important aspects of educational policy and instructional practice. First, there is an urgent need for continuous training and mentoring programs to enhance teachers' competence in understanding and implementing the Independent Curriculum (Mujiyanto et al., 2025). Such training should focus not only on theoretical understanding but also on practical classroom application. Second, schools must strengthen structural support, including the provision of appropriate learning facilities, relevant teaching materials, and the establishment of active professional learning communities such as teacher working groups (KKG) or subject teacher forums (MGMP) (Sumianto et al., 2024). Third, school principals must take an active role as instructional leaders who foster reflective and innovative cultures in teaching management (Khotimah & Noor, 2024). Fourth, the curriculum requires greater involvement of parents and communities to create a collaborative learning ecosystem centered on students' needs (Jannati et al., 2023). Fifth, teachers should be encouraged to regularly reflect on their teaching practices to identify strengths and weaknesses in curriculum implementation (Sari et al., 2025). Finally, periodic evaluations of the effectiveness of the Independent Curriculum at the school level are crucial to ensure continuous improvement (Prima, 2024).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussions, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools—particularly in Wanasaba District—still faces significant challenges in both understanding and practice. Teachers generally recognize the basic concepts of the curriculum, such as differentiated instruction and the reinforcement of the Pancasila Student Profile, yet many still struggle to fully translate these principles into classroom learning processes. The limited ability to design contextualized instruction, the lack of sustained formative assessment, and the absence of a reflective teaching culture constitute major obstacles to achieving the curriculum's intended goals.

The study also reveals that structural and institutional support from schools and local governments remains suboptimal. Limited training opportunities, inadequate learning facilities, and the absence of teacher collaboration forums hinder professional capacity building. Moreover, the leadership role of principals as change agents in promoting instructional transformation has not

been fully effective. In this context, the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum requires a more holistic and collaborative system involving all educational stakeholders—teachers, principals, policymakers, and parents alike.

Therefore, teachers' reflection on the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is essential to understanding their readiness, comprehension, and practices in applying this new educational policy. Reflection serves not only as a tool for self-evaluation but also as a foundation for developing sustainable strategies for teacher competence enhancement. The implications of this study point to the necessity of systematic and structured efforts to strengthen teacher capacity through training, mentoring, and professional learning communities, which are vital to addressing real challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum at the elementary school level.

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