

A study on teacher's obstacles in implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* at elementary school

Hasriani ^{a,1,*}, Yanto ^{a,2}, Velmi Mayaputri ^{a,3}, Okta Mahendra ^{b,4}

^a Department of English Language and Literature Education, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah

Maumere, Nusa Tenggara Timur, Indonesia

^b Sangkhom Islam Wittaya School, Songkhla, Thailand

¹ anihasriani552@gmail.com; ² yanto140987@gmail.com; ³ velmimayaputri@gmail.com; ⁴ oktamahendra3@gmail.com

* corresponding author

ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: July 20, 2024

Revised: October 29, 2024

Accepted: December 5, 2024

Keywords

Teacher obstacles

Kurikulum Merdeka

Elementary school

ABSTRACT

Indonesia adopts a curriculum called the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. The implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* at State Elementary School Sukun faces significant challenges, particularly in limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and the need for innovative teaching methods. This study employs a qualitative approach through interviews and documentation to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' obstacles. Through descriptive and interpretive data analysis, researchers explore multiple perspectives, obtaining rich contextual insights. The findings indicate several barriers, including a lack of facilities, infrastructure, and guidebooks on the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Teachers struggle due to the absence of these essential resources, hindering their ability to fully grasp and implement the curriculum effectively. Additionally, the school's remote location in Samparong Village exacerbates the issue, as the absence of a stable cellular network limits access to online learning resources. Despite these challenges, teachers strive to ensure students understand the lessons, although some still struggle with the new curriculum approach. To successfully implement the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, teachers must adopt creative teaching strategies to align with the Ministry of Education's objectives. This study implied to the urgent need for comprehensive support, including guidebooks and infrastructure improvements, to enhance teachers' capacity in delivering effective learning experiences under the *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

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1. Introduction

The education curriculum is a public vehicle that carries passengers to their destination. It must be designed with advanced tools, complete materials, and other necessary components while following the heat standard; otherwise, the purpose of bringing passengers to their place will fail. A curriculum is a set of subjects and educational programs an educational institution provides, containing a structured lesson plan for students within a specific academic period (Akib et al., 2020). Additionally, a curriculum consists of plans and arrangements regarding content, learning materials, and methods used as guidelines for organizing teaching and learning activities (Hamalik, 2008). The curriculum is a concept that positions learners as the main subject in the learning process, granting them control and freedom in determining their learning trajectory (Manyukhina & Wyse, 2019; Pinar, 2019).

The curriculum means achieving educational goals, providing instructions, and implementing learning (Veldkamp et al., 2020). The curriculum reflects the philosophy of the nation's life and how the form of life is determined (Dewantara et al., 2021). The government has created a new curriculum issued in Indonesia as an initiative to develop a more independent and contextualized curriculum for learners. A new curriculum is developed that is more relevant to the needs of learners and provides freedom for teachers to build more enjoyable and meaningful learning materials (Hughes & Lewis, 2020).

Today, Indonesia has the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. According to Nadiem Makarim, Minister of Education and Culture, it is a new curriculum for learning freedom. Freedom or independent learning is a policy or breakthrough that aims to restore freedom of thought and administrative power to the school principal and the government (Sutanto et al., 2024). The independent learning curriculum is based on the talent and interest approach, aiming for the national education system and national education standards, namely developing the Pancasila learner profile in students. The learner profile is a source that comes from national character, education, and culture realized in the community, especially specifically to students who are the young generation of the Indonesian nation (Nur'Inayah, 2021).

The *Kurikulum Merdeka* simplifies the old curriculum and focuses on core content and learner character development (Yuhastina et al., 2020). This curriculum aims to support character learning recovery through several approaches. First, it implements project-based learning activities to develop soft skills and characteristics that align with the Pancasila learner profile. Second, it emphasizes essential materials to provide students with sufficient time for learning, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Third, it offers flexible learning opportunities, allowing students to engage in different learning activities based on their abilities while adapting to the local context and content (Sari et al., 2023). *Kurikulum Merdeka* changes the learning methods initially carried out in the classroom and then changed to learning outside the classroom (Manalu et al., 2022). Learning in the school will produce innovative learning for teachers and learners. Learning outside the classroom can shape learners' character and create more active communication between learners and teachers and among other learners (Dewi & Alam, 2020).

Problematics of implementing the independent curriculum in Elementary Schools state that teachers face several obstacles in implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. These obstacles include teachers' understanding and skills in applying the curriculum, using creative and innovative learning methods, school environmental conditions, the availability of facilities and infrastructure, and the adequacy of human resources. Similarly, research on the challenges of implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in Islamic religious education at Junior High School Al Falah Deltras Sidoarjo (Agustin et al., 2024) identifies three main problems. First, there is difficulty in changing the mindset and old habits related to learning implementation. Second, the application of differentiated learning remains suboptimal. Third, various learning tools within a single institution create inconsistencies in implementation.

Furthermore, an analysis of the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* at elementary schools in Bima Taruna highlights numerous challenges (Miladiah et al., 2023). One significant issue is the limited understanding of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* among educators, students, education personnel, and even parents. This condition hampers the learning process and prevents fully realizing the curriculum's goals. In addition, the lack of adequate learning resources and supporting facilities further complicates the curriculum's effective implementation. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive training programs and strong collaboration between schools, communities, and policymakers.

One of the schools implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is State Elementary School Sukun in Sikka Regency from 2022-2024 year. The *Kurikulum Merdeka* at State Elementary School Sukun School is implemented in stages for grades seven and eight. Meanwhile, the ninth grade still applies to curriculum 2013 (old curriculum). Based on pre-observation, one of the problems teachers face in implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is that teachers still lack understanding of how to implement the curriculum. Based on the further description, this research is essential to describe the problems faced by teachers at State Elementary School Sukun in implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. In addition, it is crucial to know what factors shape the issues in implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Based on the results of this research, it is hoped that teachers in State Elementary School Sukun can

create an innovative and creative atmosphere in the teaching-learning process by implementing the goals of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

2. Method

2.1. Research design

This study uses a qualitative approach that aims to describe the obstacles faced by teachers in implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* at Sukun State Elementary School (Moleong, 2007). This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore teachers' experiences and perceptions in depth.

2.2. Participants

This research was conducted at Sukun State Elementary School, located in Samparong Village, Alok District, Sikka Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province. This research took place from April to May 2024. The research location was chosen based on its relevance and relevance to the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

2.3. Data collection

The data sources in this study consist of primary data and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly from teachers involved in the implementation of the curriculum, while secondary data came from the principal as triangulation data to increase the validity of the study. The data collection techniques used in this study were interviews and documentation. The interview aims to identify obstacles experienced by teachers in implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* at Sukun State Elementary School. Documentation is used to complement data from interviews and strengthen research findings. The researcher will conduct interviews with four respondents, namely the principal, Indonesian language teacher, mathematics teacher, and citizenship education teacher. The selection of these respondents is based on their role in the learning process and implementation of the curriculum in schools.

2.4. Data analysis

Data analysis in this study follows the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data reduction is done by sorting and filtering relevant information, data presentation is done in narrative or tabular form, and conclusions are drawn systematically based on the findings obtained.

3. Results and Discussion

The results of this study were obtained from the principal, mathematics teacher, citizenship teacher, and Indonesian language teacher. The results of the study are summarized in the following information. First, the Principal said that implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* at Sukun State Elementary School faced various challenges, especially in the limited school facilities such as unstable electricity and internet networks. In addition, the principal highlighted the lack of guidebooks as a reference for teachers when compiling teaching modules. To overcome this obstacle, the school has attempted to provide internal training for teachers, but limited resources are still the main obstacle. The interview results with the school principal are in Table 1.

Table 1. Interview findings with the principal

Aspect	Principal's Description
Infrastructure availability	The electricity and internet networks are often disrupted.
Reference sources	The lack of guidebooks makes it difficult for teachers to prepare teaching modules.
Teacher training	The school has held internal training but has not been optimal due to limited resources.

The second information from a mathematics teacher stated that one of the main challenges in implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is adjusting learning to the varying levels of student understanding. In addition, the teacher had difficulty finding a learning model that suits the needs of

student differentiation. The lack of technology-based learning tools also challenges improving student understanding. Detailed information can be read in Table 2.

Table 2. Interview findings with mathematics teachers

Aspect	Mathematics Teacher Description
Student Differentiation	Students have very diverse comprehension abilities.
Learning Models	It isn't easy to find effective methods for all students.
Learning Technology	The limitations of digital devices hinder interactive learning.

Third, Indonesian language teachers revealed that the main challenge was the difficulty in compiling teaching modules based on the *Kurikulum Merdeka* characteristics. The teachers weren't yet accustomed to the new format of teaching modules, so it took longer to compile teaching materials. In addition, teachers also experienced obstacles in designing trigger questions that could stimulate students' critical thinking. Details of the information are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Interview findings with Indonesian language teachers

Aspect	Description of Indonesian Language Teacher
Preparation of teaching Modules	Teachers are still struggling to compile modules according to the <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i> format.
Question triggers	Difficulty in designing trigger questions for students' critical thinking.
Curriculum adjustment	Adaptation from the previous curriculum to the <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i> is still ongoing.

Finally, information from Civic Teachers highlighted that the main challenge in implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is the lack of references to learning models relevant to civics material. In addition, teachers also experience obstacles in managing heterogeneous classes, where there are significant differences in the level of student activity and motivation. Further details are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Interview findings with civic teachers

Aspect	Civic Teacher Description
Learning Model Reference	It isn't easy to find a learning model that fits the characteristics of the <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i> .
Class Management	Heterogeneous classes make classroom management more challenging.
Student Motivation	Differences in student motivation levels affect learning effectiveness.

Based on interviews with the principal and teachers, it was found that the main obstacles in implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* at State Elementary School of Sukun include limited infrastructure, lack of guidebooks, difficulties in compiling teaching modules, and challenges in learning differentiation. Solutions that have been attempted include internal training and adjustments to teaching methods, although further support from related parties is still needed. A summary of the findings can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Research Findings

Number	Findings	Description
1	Infrastructure limitations	Unstable electricity and internet networks
2	Lack of reference sources	Guidelines for teachers in compiling learning modules
3	Difficulties in compiling teaching modules	There must be adjustments to the <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i> format
4	Challenges in learning differentiation	Adjustment of methods to the diverse needs of students
5	Limitations of technology-based learning devices	Inhibitions on interactive learning
6	Lack of learning model references for certain subjects	Such as civic
7	Difficulties in classroom management	Student heterogeneity in learning activities and motivation

The results of this study indicate that many obstacles become obstacles for teachers in schools with this independent learning curriculum; teachers are more required to be creative in making or designing the learning process so that learning goes according to what is determined by the minister of education. Several obstacles hinder the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, namely lack of solar power and cellular network, Lack of guidebooks on the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, and Limited facilities and infrastructure at school. So, teachers at State Elementary School Sukun School have obstacles in teaching and learning to implement the *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

The obstacles experienced by teachers include the low level of teacher innovation when implementing a *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Luthfi et al., 2023). In contrast, innovation in a *Kurikulum Merdeka* is essential as a form of ideal conditions for implementing a *Kurikulum Merdeka*. This happens because the initial diagnostic or assessment hasn't been running optimally even though the teacher has done it (Mizela et al., 2023). Still, the evaluation form is unclear, and the form of implementation impacts the implementation process. Implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in learning starts with planning, implementation, and evaluation (Kasman & Lubis, 2022). Lesson planning can be a teacher's reference for carrying out classroom learning.

Seeing these obstacles, the fact that in the process, teachers still experience problems in making this teaching module because it is something new from before. Thus, during the preparation process, it takes a little longer. The format of this teaching module differs from the lesson plans developed in the 2013 curriculum (Lestari, 2023). In addition, teachers still can't be maximized because many teachers still have difficulty understanding the preparation of teaching modules. Teachers still can't develop teaching modules optimally because many teachers don't fully understand the techniques for compiling and developing teaching modules, especially in this curriculum (Limiansi et al., 2023; Safitri et al., 2023; Suripah et al., 2023). Difficulty developing teaching modules and adjusting the materials, media, and facilities available at school indeed have to do with implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* at schools (Wijyaningputri et al., 2024). One of the drivers is that teachers must take the time to prepare creative, innovative and challenging lessons every day. "Teacher's involvement in the curriculum development process is essential to align curriculum content with student needs in the classroom" (Alsubaie, 2016).

Implementing learning in the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is differentiated learning (Aziz et al., 2024). Teachers must be able to create a learning environment that stimulates students to achieve high learning goals, respond to students' learning needs, including plans, learning resources, learning strategies, teaching media, assignments, and assessments, and manage a productive classroom by incorporating procedures and routines that allow for flexibility within a clear structure, even when implementing different activities in an authoritative manner (Witraguna et al., 2024). Still, they can run well. The concept of the *Merdeka* learning policy is that teachers as educators can create a comfortable learning atmosphere and generate enthusiasm for learning so that students don't feel burdened by the material delivered by the teacher.

Difficulties in implementing differentiated learning, apart from being caused by teachers' understanding of can skills, are also caused by student heterogeneity. Various learning methods are needed to meet the needs of different student abilities. There are at least three ways: content, process, and product. Content differentiation has the scope of analyzing learning readiness, which refers to the material to be taught. As a facilitator, the teacher can maintain student interest and provide opportunities for students during the learning process so that students can be actively involved. Then, the teacher's role is to map student learning needs based on learning profile indicators to provide opportunities for students naturally and efficiently according to the methods needed. Second is process differentiation, where teachers can analyze students' learning independently and in groups. In this case, the teacher must consider who needs help and guiding questions in doing the learning before students do the learning independently. Process differentiation includes tiered activities, providing guiding questions, creating individualized agendas, facilitating the duration of time for students to complete their tasks, developing visual, auditory and kinesthetic learning styles, and creating groups according to the abilities and interests of each student. Third is product differentiation, where the product referred to here is the output of the learning carried out, such as essays, speechless, presentations, etc. This product differentiation aims to broaden students' understanding and challenge the creative expression of the learning that students do. In this product differentiation, the role of the teacher must meet the expectations of students, including the teacher determining the indicators of the

work to be achieved, the product must contain content, planning the process of working on it and designing the expected output of the product (Mulyawati et al., 2022).

After designing and implementing learning, the next step is evaluation or assessment (Boudett et al., 2020). The assessment of the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* includes several key aspects. At the beginning of learning, a diagnostic test is conducted, consisting of a cognitive test for academic learning and a non-cognitive test to understand students' backgrounds and emotional well-being. The minimum completion criteria are eliminated, allowing for a more flexible learning process. Teaching modules can be designed on a weekly basis, with both formative and summative assessments included. Long-term project learning outcomes focus more on character and attitude development rather than skill acquisition. Additionally, the learning assessment consists of two types of reports: an academic assessment report and a project assessment report (Rizki & Fahkrunisa, 2022; Surul, 2022). Learning results in the form of report cards will be reported and endorsed by the principal and also reported to parents/guardians. The first obstacle is conducting a preliminary assessment only at the beginning of the learning year. Teachers should conduct evaluations at the beginning of each new material to be learned.

4. Conclusion

The research concludes that the challenges faced by teachers in education are influenced by the evolving times, which serve as the foundation for curriculum changes that adapt to these transformations. These curriculum changes aim to address various educational challenges, enhance the quality of education, and provide new opportunities for improvement. Problems in education are defined as gaps between expectations and reality that require resolution, making them significant challenges for teachers, particularly in the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. As facilitators, teachers play a crucial role in improving the quality of learning through this curriculum, yet they encounter obstacles in planning, implementing, and evaluating learning. Therefore, continuous professional development and support systems are essential to help teachers adapt to these changes and effectively implement the *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

In learning planning, challenges include a lack of understanding of how to translate learning outcomes into objectives, the heterogeneity of students in the classroom, limited references for differentiated learning models, insufficient facilities and infrastructure, and restricted prior knowledge of subject matter. In the implementation process, teachers face difficulties in integrating subject matter with other relevant knowledge, formulating effective opening questions, and simplifying complex concepts into understandable lessons. Similarly, in the evaluation stage, challenges include an outdated paradigm of preliminary assessment, difficulties in identifying the learning process, and limited understanding of assessment actions. Given these challenges, further research is needed to develop a design that can serve as an alternative solution to the obstacles encountered by teachers in implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* at State Elementary School Sukun Schools.

Acknowledgment

The researcher would like to thank all parties who have contributed to this study, especially the respondents. The researcher would also like to express sincere gratitude to Universitas Muhammadiyah Maumere for its invaluable support and contribution to the successful implementation of this research.

Declarations

- Author contribution** : Researchers contribute to all stages of research up to the evaluation stage of the constraints of the independent curriculum, which requires a change policy.
- Funding statement** : There is no information available regarding funding for this report.
- Conflict of interest** : There are no conflicts of interest in this research.
- Additional information** : No additional information is available for this paper.

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