



Challenges of Economics Teachers in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

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The Independent Curriculum aims to provide greater learning flexibility by accommodating students' individual needs and potential. However, its implementation often poses challenges for teachers, particularly in adapting pedagogical practices to the demands of the curriculum. This study analyzes the difficulties economics teachers face in implementing the Independent Curriculum within the Jember Regency Economics MGMP forum. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach. Four informants were selected, consisting of the MGMP Chair, the Deputy Chair of the Development Division, and two economics teachers. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, then analyzed through data collection, validation, presentation, and conclusion drawing. Triangulation was used to ensure data validity. Findings show that teachers experience several obstacles, including limited understanding of differentiated instruction, difficulties adapting learning materials, challenges developing appropriate assessment methods and curriculum-aligned learning tools, constraints on integrating the Pancasila Student Profile into project-based themes, and suboptimal use of the Merdeka Teaching Platform. These challenges reflect gaps in curriculum readiness, teacher competency development, and institutional support. Strengthening continuous professional development, intensive mentoring, and school-level facilitation is essential to improve curriculum implementation.

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INTRODUCTION

The Independent Curriculum represents a major educational reform intended to give teachers and students greater autonomy in the learning process. Rather than prescribing rigid procedures, the curriculum emphasizes flexible learning pathways that allow students to explore their interests, develop their talents, and strengthen essential 21st-century competencies. Recent studies

highlight its potential to promote differentiated learning and cultivate future-oriented skills; however, they also note that its success depends heavily on teachers' capacity to interpret and apply curriculum principles in authentic classroom contexts. Despite these expectations, little is known about how economics teachers who must navigate abstract economic concepts and rapidly evolving socio-economic issues experience and manage this transition. This gap is significant because subject-specific challenges may differ across disciplines, yet existing research rarely focuses on the difficulties faced by economics teachers as a professional community. Therefore, this study seeks to analyze the specific obstacles encountered by economics teachers within the Jember Regency Economics MGMP in implementing the Independent Curriculum. (Ardianti & Amalia, 2022; Sahrandi & Bahri, 2023; Jannati et al., 2023)

The Independent Curriculum emphasizes students' active participation and creativity in the learning process. However, despite its pedagogical advantages, challenges remain in its practical implementation, particularly for teachers who must redesign instructional strategies, adapt to differentiated learning, and integrate new assessment approaches. These issues highlight the need to critically examine how teachers interpret and apply the curriculum in real classroom settings, which is the central focus of this study (Sahrandi & Bahri, 2023; Arini et al., 2023). A key aspect of the independent curriculum is the development of students' character and social competence. Through this approach, it is hoped that students will acquire not only knowledge but also interpersonal skills and critical thinking skills necessary for everyday life (Tuerah & Tuerah, 2023; Jannati et al., 2023). Research shows that the Independent Curriculum provides teachers with space to innovate in teaching methods, thereby creating more engaging and relevant learning experiences for students (Puspitasari et al., 2025; Ningrum & Suryani, 2022). However, challenges in implementing this curriculum persist, especially regarding teacher readiness and the availability of adequate resources (Aswar & Humaidi, 2022; Enawati et al., 2024). Therefore, continued support from the government and educational institutions is crucial to ensure the success of the Independent Curriculum in improving the quality of education in Indonesia.

The role of teachers in education, particularly in the context of implementing the Independent Curriculum, extends beyond serving as information providers to students; it also includes facilitating access to resources, guidance, and support throughout the student learning process. In the Independent Curriculum, teachers face additional demands, enabling them to be more innovative and creative when designing learning tailored to students' needs, as in differentiated learning (Sahrandi & Bahri, 2023; Ledia & Bustam, 2024). Research shows that the success of implementing the independent

curriculum depends heavily on teachers' ability to adapt teaching methods and create a conducive learning environment (Sodikin et al., 2024; Astuti et al., 2023; Suhandi & Robi'ah, 2024). In this regard, it is considered essential to continue collaborating among teachers as field implementers, schools as educational institutions, and the government as the initiators of ideas, so that various obstacles can be minimized, including the development of appropriate teaching materials and ongoing training to improve teacher readiness (Indarta et al., 2022).

Subject Teachers' Consultative Meetings (MGMP) are an essential forum for teachers to share experiences, knowledge, and teaching strategies. In the context of Indonesian education, MGMP serves as a collaborative forum that supports the development of teacher professionalism, particularly in facing the challenges of implementing the latest curriculum, such as the Independent Curriculum. MGMP is expected to bridge the gap between national education policy and teaching practices in the field, enabling teachers to be more effective in improving learning quality. According to Maure et al. (2021), the existence of MGMP plays a significant role in improving teachers' pedagogical and professional competence, which, in turn, positively impacts student learning outcomes.

However, despite the MGMP's noble goals, many teachers still face difficulties in implementing this new curriculum. This is due to various factors, including a lack of understanding of the Independent Curriculum's principles and weak school support. Research by Munir et al. (2024) Shows that economics teachers often face these challenges, as curriculum changes require more innovative and flexible approaches. Therefore, an in-depth analysis of the difficulties teachers face in MGMP is crucial for formulating strategies and solutions to help them implement the curriculum effectively.

Based on the description above, teachers face various challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum, especially economics teachers who are members of the MGMP. Some of these challenges include limited competence in understanding the concepts of the Independent Curriculum, inadequate training, limited supporting facilities, and difficulties in designing learning to meet student needs. This indicates that efforts to implement the Independent Curriculum require strategic support, including improving teachers' competency through ongoing training, fostering collaboration among teachers in the MGMP, and support from the government and relevant stakeholders. This study aims to analyze the challenges faced by economics teachers who are members of the Subject Teachers' Conference (MGMP) in Jember Regency.

This research is particularly urgent because national evaluations of the Independent Curriculum reveal substantial implementation challenges across regions. According to the Ministry of Education's 2023 national monitoring report, more than 60% of teachers report struggling to implement differentiated

instruction, and 54% report difficulties designing assessments aligned with the new curriculum structure. Similar patterns appear at the regional level; the East Java Education Office notes that many teachers still lack confidence in integrating the Pancasila Student Profile and utilizing digital platforms such as Merdeka Mengajar. These issues tend to be more pronounced in subject-specific communities, including economics teachers within MGMP forums, who must adapt abstract conceptual material and rapidly changing economic topics to a more flexible curriculum model. Despite this, limited empirical research has examined how economics teachers experience these challenges as a professional group. Therefore, investigating their specific obstacles is crucial for understanding teachers' practical readiness and for designing targeted support strategies. In this context, a thorough understanding of the challenges teachers face is vital for formulating appropriate training and support strategies. Given that MGMP serves as a collaborative platform for teacher professional development, this research is expected to provide insight into the factors that hinder teaching effectiveness. Thus, the results of this study can serve as a reference for more relevant and contextual education and training policies.

Furthermore, this research also supports efforts to achieve the national education goal of improving the quality of learning in Indonesia. By analyzing the challenges teachers face in implementing the Independent Curriculum, this research can offer concrete recommendations to relevant parties, including the government and educational institutions, to improve resources and training. This aims not only to improve teacher competency but also to create a more innovative and adaptive learning environment for students, ultimately impacting learning outcomes and student character development in the global era.

The novelty of this study lies in addressing gaps left by prior research on the Independent Curriculum. Existing studies predominantly examine general teacher readiness, broad pedagogical challenges, and implementation issues across subjects, yet they seldom examine how subject-specific teacher communities, particularly economics teachers, navigate these challenges. Moreover, previous research has not analyzed the strategic role of MGMP as a professional forum in supporting curriculum implementation. This study makes a new contribution by providing an in-depth examination of the unique difficulties economics teachers face, including adapting abstract economic concepts, designing assessments aligned with competency-based learning, and integrating project-based elements into economics instruction. Additionally, this research introduces insights not previously proposed in earlier studies, including the identification of MGMP-based intervention strategies, specialized economics-focused training modules, and the development of discipline-specific learning tools to strengthen the effectiveness of the Independent Curriculum in economics

education.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive, qualitative case study approach, chosen to enable an in-depth exploration of the real experiences and challenges economics teachers encounter when implementing the Independent Curriculum within their professional community. The case study approach is appropriate because the MGMP Economics of Jember Regency functions as a collaborative forum where teachers routinely discuss curriculum implementation, exchange pedagogical strategies, and address instructional difficulties, making it the most relevant locus for understanding the phenomenon holistically. Four informants were selected using purposive sampling: the MGMP Chair, the Deputy Chair of the Development Division, and two economics teachers, because they represent individuals with direct experience, institutional roles, and practical insights needed to illuminate the complexities of curriculum implementation from multiple perspectives. Data were gathered through interviews, observations, and documentation, then analyzed through stages of data collection, validation, presentation, and conclusion drawing, supported by triangulation to ensure credibility. (Sugiyono, 2020). This research took place within the Jember Regency Economics MGMP forum. Four informants participated in the study: the Head of the MGMP, the Deputy Head of the Development Division, and two Economics teachers. Data collection techniques included semi-structured interviews, passive participant observation, and documentation (Cahyono, 2023; Neviyani et al., 2024). The data were obtained and analyzed across several stages using the interactive techniques of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, namely data collection, data validity, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification (Miles et al., 2018). The validity of the data in this study was ensured through triangulation, specifically source triangulation and method triangulation. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing information from different informants within the MGMP, including the MGMP Chair, the Deputy Chair of the Development Division, and two economics teachers, to identify consistency or variation in their experiences with the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

Meanwhile, method triangulation was applied by cross-checking data gathered through interviews, observations during MGMP meetings or teacher discussions, and documentation such as lesson plans or MGMP activity reports. For example, teachers' statements about difficulties in implementing differentiated instruction were verified through observations of MGMP discussions and documentation of their learning tools, to ensure the accuracy and

credibility of the findings. This combined triangulation approach strengthens the trustworthiness of the research conclusions. (Mariatul Ulfa et al., 2023).

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Understanding the Structure of the Independent Curriculum

The findings reveal recurring difficulties that economics teachers experience in interpreting and implementing the core structure of the Independent Curriculum. Based on the coding process, at least **three major themes** emerged: (1) limited conceptual understanding of the curriculum, (2) challenges in applying differentiated instruction, and (3) uncertainty in conducting authentic assessments.

Several teachers reported difficulty comprehending the curriculum framework, particularly the relationship between intracurricular activities and the components of the Pancasila Student Profile project. This is reflected in the informant's statement: *"Adapting and understanding student characteristics to the subject matter still becomes an obstacle."* Such difficulties indicate that teachers have not fully mastered the curriculum's role as a *guiding framework* that provides flexibility in designing learning experiences. In curriculum theory, this situation illustrates the process of *curriculum sense-making*, in which teachers interpret and internalize curriculum documents a process that typically requires time, support, and professional development.

Teachers reported obstacles in identifying students' varying characteristics and determining appropriate and relevant learning strategies. The informant noted: *"There may be obstacles in identifying and developing learning strategies because it requires precision and appropriate strategies and takes a long time."* This reflects the complexity of differentiated instruction, which demands continuous observation, adaptive planning, and responsiveness to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Theoretically, differentiated pedagogy increases a teacher's cognitive workload, requiring advanced pedagogical decision-making, an area where many teachers still feel unprepared.

Although the curriculum offers flexibility in assessment, teachers expressed hesitation regarding the appropriateness and accuracy of the methods they choose. This uncertainty stems from a lack of confidence in evaluating project-based processes and outcomes, which are central to the Independent Curriculum. In the context of the MGMP Economics forum, authentic assessment is particularly challenging because economics, as a subject, involves abstract and conceptual content that must be carefully translated into meaningful, project-based tasks.

Overall, the thematic findings suggest that the curriculum's intended flexibility inadvertently creates new pressures, requiring teachers to make more sophisticated pedagogical decisions. The gap between curriculum demands and

teacher readiness directly affects implementation effectiveness. Therefore, structured MGMP-based support, intensive training, and sustained mentoring are urgently needed to strengthen teachers' competence and confidence in applying the Independent Curriculum.

The independent curriculum focuses on students' implementation of the learning process, emphasizing their active role, the development of character and competence, and a focus beyond the academic realm (Sahrandi & Bahri, 2023; Arini et al., 2023). The independent curriculum has a definite structure that must be implemented to achieve the previously determined goals, ensuring integrity in the learning process and alignment with student needs (Tuerah & Tuerah, 2023; Jannati et al., 2023).

The Independent Curriculum provides teachers with space to innovate in teaching methods, thereby creating more engaging and relevant learning experiences for students (Puspitasari et al., 2025; Ningrum & Suryani, 2022). However, challenges in implementing this curriculum persist, especially regarding teacher readiness and the availability of adequate resources (Aswar & Humaidi, 2022; Enawati et al., 2024). Therefore, continued support from the government and educational institutions is crucial to ensure the success of the Independent Curriculum in improving the quality of education in Indonesia.

Understanding the Independent Curriculum Learning Tools

Understanding is the process of interpreting and internalizing the facts, information, and skills acquired through learning so they can be applied appropriately in instructional practice. Within the Independent Curriculum, learning tools such as Learning Outcomes (Capaian Pembelajaran/CP), Learning Objectives Flow (Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran/ATP), and assessment guidelines function as essential documents that support teachers in planning, delivering, and evaluating learning activities in alignment with the Pancasila Student Profile.

The Deputy Head of Development noted: *"In general, the main challenge for teachers is adjusting to new terminology, although the intentions and goals are actually similar to the previous curriculum."*

This statement highlights a critical pattern: teachers struggle not only with the content of the Merdeka Curriculum but also with its conceptual structure. Their challenges stem from the way the curriculum reframes competencies, sequencing, and planning, demanding a deeper level of interpretation and long-term pedagogical thinking than previous curricula required.

A significant source of difficulty lies in understanding key curriculum documents, particularly the CP and ATP. The CP is written in broad competency descriptions that require careful interpretation before being translated into measurable objectives. Meanwhile, the ATP requires teachers to sequence objectives logically by student developmental phases rather than by annual

grade levels. Because many teachers were previously accustomed to a more linear, grade-based curriculum structure, this shift introduces cognitive demands and creates considerable uncertainty in curriculum planning.

The limited nature of the training provided further intensifies these challenges. Teachers reported that although socialization sessions had been conducted, they tended to focus solely on introducing new terminology rather than on guided practice in constructing learning tools. This lack of hands-on support leaves teachers uncertain about how to apply the concepts in practice. As one economics teacher stated, *“I still feel unfamiliar with determining learning steps, especially because I find it difficult to differentiate terms such as CP, ATP, and assessment.”*

Compounding these issues is the flexibility embedded in the Independent Curriculum. While designed to empower teachers with greater autonomy, its openness often leaves them unsure whether their chosen learning designs or assessments are appropriate. Teachers admitted feeling doubtful when shifting from annual-based planning to a broader, phase-based structure, which requires a more holistic, long-term pedagogical vision than they are accustomed to. These themes are illustrated through concrete examples from MGMP Economics discussions. For instance, during observation of an MGMP meeting, several teachers struggled to design a teaching module because they were unsure how to break down CP into more specific learning objectives. One teacher attempted to create an ATP but revised it multiple times after realizing the goals did not align with the expected competency progression. Meanwhile, other teachers debated whether an economics project such as “simulated market activities” could be considered an authentic assessment aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile.

Overall, these findings suggest that the shift in terminology and structure is not merely a matter of unfamiliar words but reflects deeper conceptual gaps. The need for institutional support becomes evident, primarily through structured workshops, hands-on practice sessions, and continuous mentoring to help teachers internalize curriculum concepts and translate them into practical learning tools.

The Independent Curriculum requires teachers to be more creative and innovative in designing learning that suits students' needs and characteristics (Sahrandi & Bahri, 2023; Ledia & Bustam, 2024). The success rate of implementing the independent curriculum depends heavily on teachers' ability to adapt teaching methods and create a conducive learning environment (Sodikin et al., 2024; Astuti et al., 2023; Suhandi & Robi'ah, 2024). This is why it is essential to continue collaborating among the government, educational institutions, and teachers as field implementers so that it can run as expected (Indarta et al., 2022).

Implementation of the Pancasila Student Strengthening Profile Project

The implementation of the Pancasila Student Strengthening Profile Project (P5) is a co-curricular activity designed to reinforce students' competencies and character in alignment with the Pancasila Student Profile. Its implementation is intentionally flexible and accommodates various learning themes relevant to contemporary issues within the school environment. However, field findings indicate a significant gap in teachers' understanding of the appropriate assessment approach. As stated by the Head of the Economics MGMP:

"The gap occurs in the location of the assessment, there are several teachers who think that the assessment of the success of P5 is based on the product results, whereas the essence lies in the process."

This statement reflects a common misconception in which teachers emphasize the final product rather than the learning process. In contrast, the core principle of P5 aligns with the global framework of authentic assessment, which positions evaluation as an integral, process-based activity embedded in real-world tasks (Mueller, 2018; Gulikers et al., 2022). Authentic assessment evaluates how learners apply values, competencies, and attitudes during the learning process not merely the tangible outcomes produced. This perspective is supported by one Economics teacher who noted:

"Just realized that P5 is no longer talking about the final result but tends towards the implementation of Pancasila values."

Recent literature emphasizes that authentic assessment encourages deeper learning by assessing students' engagement, collaboration, decision-making, and value-driven behavior as they work through complex tasks (Darling-Hammond & Adamson, 2019; Vega, 2021). Therefore, the P5 should not be assessed solely through products or artifacts, but through the observable processes that demonstrate students' embodiment of Pancasila values, such as responsibility, collaboration, empathy, and problem-solving.

The findings of this study show that the misalignment between teachers' understanding and the intended assessment approach stems from limited knowledge of process-oriented evaluation. International research similarly highlights that teachers often struggle to shift from product-based evaluation to process-based authentic assessment due to habit, workload, and unfamiliarity with qualitative assessment tools (Koh et al., 2018; Werquin, 2020). In the context of P5, this misunderstanding risks reducing the project to a product-oriented task, rather than a holistic character-building experience.

Thus, the implementation of the Pancasila Student Strengthening Profile Project must be reinforced with teacher capacity building in authentic, process-focused assessment to ensure that the project effectively cultivates students'

competencies and character in accordance with Pancasila values.

The implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project in the Independent Curriculum aims to foster students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development, enabling the internalization and practice of Pancasila values in daily life (Mery et al., 2022). As a national foundation, Pancasila serves as the basis for shaping student character and preparing a resilient future generation capable of contributing positively to the nation (Setiaji et al., 2022). The project is carried out using holistic, contextual, focused, and exploratory principles to ensure meaningful and relevant learning experiences (Hamzah et al., 2022).

Independent Teaching Platform

The Merdeka Mengajar Platform is a digital learning service developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology to support teachers in the instructional process within the Merdeka Curriculum. The platform offers various features such as teaching tools, assessments, training modules, reflections, communication forums, learning communities, exemplary works, and instructional videos designed to enhance the quality of the learning process. Ideally, this platform serves as a reference point, a source of inspiration, and an additional learning resource for teachers, helping them connect differentiated learning to the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum.

However, field findings indicate that teachers have not fully utilized the full potential of the Merdeka Mengajar Platform. The Head of the Economics MGMP explained that many teachers struggle to make use of the platform due to limited time to understand and integrate its features into their daily teaching activities. This view is reinforced by an Economics teacher who admitted that exploring the platform's numerous features is difficult due to the heavy workload and multiple tasks that must be completed. This situation creates a tendency for teachers to rely on familiar methods rather than experimenting with new digital tools.

Although teachers often attribute the problem solely to time constraints, the findings suggest that the issue is broader and more complex. The challenges likely stem from a combination of technical barriers and varying levels of digital literacy among teachers. Navigating a platform with multiple interconnected features can be overwhelming for teachers who are not yet accustomed to digital learning environments. Furthermore, the transition from conventional planning to digital-based instructional design demands not only time but also a certain degree of technological readiness and confidence.

Workload factors also play an important role. Teachers must manage lesson planning, administrative responsibilities, classroom management, and student assessments simultaneously. Without structural support from schools,

such as scheduled training, dedicated time for platform exploration, or reduced administrative burdens, teachers tend to de-prioritize the use of the Merdeka Mengajar Platform. As a result, the platform's purpose as a catalyst for teacher creativity and autonomy in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum has not been fully realized.

The findings indicate that the challenges faced in using the Merdeka Mengajar Platform are not merely technical but are intertwined with digital literacy and institutional support. Therefore, maximizing the platform's potential requires a more comprehensive effort, including continuous training, peer mentoring through MGMP forums, and clear strategies from schools to help teachers adapt. Only with sufficient support can teachers fully utilize the platform as a tool to strengthen instructional quality and align learning practices with the core principles of the Merdeka Curriculum.

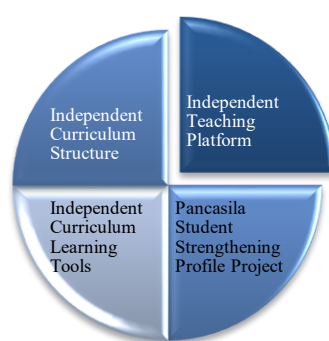


Figure 1. Research result

The Merdeka Teaching platform offers numerous opportunities for teachers, enabling them to use it as a learning resource and a reference for innovation. Research shows that teachers still struggle to integrate the Merdeka Teaching platform into their teaching and learning. This creates a constant threat, putting teachers' time at risk, and they are under pressure to maximize the potential available to them.

Learning can be considered successful when there is synergy among teachers, education, media, and learning outcomes that are appropriate to students' needs and enable them to meet daily needs, including knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Setiariny, 2023). Although there are many potentials and opportunities in the independent learning platform, this is directly proportional to the existence of obstacles that slow down teachers from being able to master it thoroughly, for example, difficulties in adapting to technological updates, challenges in integrating materials, the level of urgent needs and so on, which are technical issues that hinder its maximum utilization (Hakim & Abidin, 2024).

Efforts to utilize it require a form of in-depth collaboration as found in the MGMP forum so that teachers who experience difficulties can collaborate and discuss with colleagues so they can get answers or solutions to the problems they

are experiencing, especially those related to digitalization which requires special provisions that sometimes cannot be tolerated by other things (Lena et al., 2024). Support from the school and the motivation within each teacher are absolute things that must be addressed so that the use of the independent teaching platform can become a bridge for teachers so that they can free themselves in teaching and are no longer constrained by limitations in knowledge or specific skills to create a golden generation in the future (Triscova et al., 2022). A concrete example can be seen in teachers' daily practice with PMM modules. One teacher explained that, before using PMM, lesson planning felt difficult because it required manually searching for various references. After accessing PMM, the teacher began using the *Bahan Ajar* and *the RPP* (teaching materials and lesson plan examples) available on the platform. In one instance, the teacher used a PMM video tutorial on differentiated instruction to prepare a learning activity that grouped students by readiness level. The teacher noted that students became more engaged, and the class ran more smoothly because the learning design was more transparent and easier to implement. This example illustrates how the combination of school support, such as providing training, internet access, and collaborative teacher discussions, and teacher motivation to explore PMM independently can transform teaching practices. Through PMM, teachers can continuously improve their competencies without feeling limited by previous gaps in pedagogical knowledge or digital skills.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that the primary challenge in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is not merely teachers' unfamiliarity with differentiated instruction, assessment design, or curriculum terminology, but a deeper misalignment between the curriculum's conceptual demands and teachers' current pedagogical capacity. This highlights that the implementation gap is systemic and requires cognitive reframing, stronger institutional support, and sustained mentoring. The study contributes to academic discourse by offering a renewed perspective that positions the Merdeka Curriculum not as a technical reform but as a cultural and pedagogical shift that demands long-term adaptation. It also advances understanding of digital learning ecosystems by showing that the limited use of the Merdeka Mengajar platform reflects broader issues of digital literacy and the absence of structured professional learning communities.

However, this research has several limitations. The number of informants is relatively small and focused solely on MGMP Economics, restricting generalizability to other contexts and subject areas. The reliance on self-reported data may also introduce bias. These limitations suggest the need for further

studies with more diverse samples, inclusion of gender and age variation, and the use of mixed methods, particularly survey-based approaches, to generate a more comprehensive picture that can better inform policy. Despite these constraints, the study provides meaningful insights. It offers valuable recommendations to strengthen teacher competency, enhance collaborative curriculum implementation, and optimize digital platforms to support the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

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