



# Teachers' Voices Toward Kurikulum Merdeka in Indonesian Elementary Schools

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## Abstract

*Curriculum reform is a continuous process aimed at improving educational quality and responding to evolving societal needs. In Indonesia, the transition from Curriculum 2013 (K13) to Kurikulum Merdeka represents a major shift toward flexible, competency-based learning. However, the success of such reforms largely depends on teachers who serve as the primary implementers of curriculum policies. This study aims to explore elementary school teachers' perceptions, challenges, and recommendations regarding the transition from K13 to Kurikulum Merdeka in Kendari, Indonesia. The research employed a descriptive survey design involving 31 public elementary school teachers who had experience teaching under both curricula. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of 25 items and analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings indicate that most teachers perceive Kurikulum Merdeka positively, particularly appreciating its flexibility in lesson planning and its emphasis on essential learning content. Nevertheless, teachers reported several challenges during implementation, including limited time, insufficient training, and inadequate school resources. Despite these challenges, the majority of respondents expressed strong support for the new curriculum and believed it has the potential to improve the quality of learning. Teachers also recommended increased professional development opportunities, collaborative teacher forums, and clearer implementation guidelines from education authorities. These findings highlight the importance of incorporating teachers' voices into curriculum reform processes to ensure sustainable and effective implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka.*

## **1. Introduction**

Curriculum reform has become a central feature of educational systems worldwide as governments seek to improve learning outcomes and prepare students for the demands of the twenty-first century. Rapid technological advancement, globalization, and changing labor market needs have encouraged education systems to redesign their curricula to emphasize critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability. Indonesia has experienced several curriculum transformations over the past decades, including the transition from Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan (KTSP) to Curriculum 2013 (K13), and most recently to Kurikulum Merdeka.

Kurikulum Merdeka was introduced by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology as part of national efforts to improve educational quality and support learning recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic. Unlike Curriculum 2013, which is often criticized for its complex administrative requirements and dense learning content, Kurikulum Merdeka emphasizes flexibility, essential competencies, and project-based learning through the implementation of *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5)*. P5 is one of the distinctive features of Kurikulum Merdeka that aims to strengthen students' character development through interdisciplinary and project-based learning activities. P5 focuses on developing six core competencies of the Pancasila Student Profile, namely faith and noble character, global diversity, cooperation, independence, critical thinking, and creativity.

Through project-based learning, students are encouraged to apply knowledge in real-life contexts while developing social and collaborative skills (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, 2023). The implementation of P5 requires teachers to adopt more flexible and innovative instructional approaches compared to previous curriculum practices. Teachers also experience challenges implementing P5 activities because project-based learning requires extensive preparation, collaboration, and instructional adaptation (Ben Gurion, 2024).

The curriculum also encourages teachers to adapt instructional strategies according to students' needs and local contexts. In curriculum reform processes, teachers are expected to continuously adjust instructional practices and learning approaches in response to changing educational expectations and classroom realities (Haq et al., 2025).

Although Kurikulum Merdeka aims to empower teachers and schools, successful curriculum reform depends heavily on teachers' perceptions and experiences during implementation. Teachers' perceptions toward curriculum reform play an important role in determining how educational changes are interpreted and implemented within classroom practices (Hura, 2024). Teachers serve as key mediators between national policies and classroom practices. Their beliefs, professional knowledge, and contextual understanding significantly

influence how curriculum policies are interpreted and enacted in schools. Educational change is closely connected to teachers' ability to adapt pedagogically and professionally to new curriculum demands and evolving classroom contexts (Haq et al., 2025). When teachers perceive a reform positively and receive adequate support, the likelihood of successful implementation increases.

Several studies have explored the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in different regions of Indonesia. For instance, Afida, et al. (2024) reported that school leadership plays an important role in facilitating curriculum adoption. Similarly, Kulsum & Suloso (2024) highlighted regional disparities in curriculum implementation across Indonesian provinces, particularly between urban and rural areas. However, most existing studies focus primarily on schools in Java, leaving many eastern Indonesian contexts underrepresented.

Eastern Indonesian regions, including Southeast Sulawesi, face unique challenges related to educational infrastructure, training accessibility, and resource availability. These contextual factors may significantly influence how teachers experience curriculum reform. Therefore, it is important to document teachers' voices from these regions to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Kurikulum Merdeka implementation across Indonesia.

Despite the growing body of research on curriculum reform in Indonesia, several studies have explored teachers' perceptions of the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in different contexts. For example, Afida, et al. (2024) investigated teachers' interpretations of Kurikulum Merdeka and found that teachers generally viewed the curriculum positively because it offers greater flexibility in lesson planning and encourages student-centered learning practices. Similarly, Candra (2024) examined teachers' responses to the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka using a policy diffusion perspective and reported that many teachers perceive the curriculum as beneficial due to its emphasis on essential competencies and instructional flexibility.

Other studies have also highlighted the challenges faced by teachers during curriculum reform. Mutmainnah, et al., (2023) explored curriculum implementation and found that teachers often encounter obstacles related to limited resources, insufficient teaching materials, and inadequate training opportunities. Likewise, Kulsum & Suloso (2024) investigated regional disparities in the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka and concluded that teachers in eastern Indonesian regions frequently experience fewer professional development opportunities compared to those in more developed areas.

In addition, Aprianti, et al. (2025) reported that many teachers still struggle with adapting their instructional strategies when transitioning from Curriculum 2013 to Kurikulum Merdeka, particularly in terms of assessment practices and project-based learning implementation.

Although these studies provide valuable insights into teachers' experiences with the new curriculum, several limitations remain. First, many previous studies examine Kurikulum Merdeka implementation in general rather than specifically

focusing on teachers' experiences during the transition from Curriculum 2013 (K13) to Kurikulum Merdeka. Second, some studies focus on regions or educational levels, which limits the broader understanding of how the reform is experienced in different contexts. Third, most existing research has been conducted in larger urban areas or selected pilot schools, while teachers' perspectives from many regions outside Java remain underrepresented in national curriculum discussions.

Therefore, further research is needed to capture teachers' voices in diverse regional contexts, particularly in areas that have received less attention in national curriculum studies. Kendari, as one of the educational centers in Southeast Sulawesi, represents an important context for examining how teachers interpret and implement Kurikulum Merdeka in everyday classroom practices. Understanding teachers' experiences in this region can provide valuable insights into both the strengths and limitations of the curriculum reform and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of curriculum implementation across Indonesia. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do elementary teachers in Kendari perceive the transition from Curriculum 2013 to Kurikulum Merdeka?
2. What challenges do teachers face when implementing Kurikulum Merdeka?
3. What recommendations do teachers propose for improving the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka?

By amplifying teachers' voices, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of curriculum reform in Indonesian elementary education and offers practical insights for policymakers, school leaders, and teacher professional development programs.

## **2. Method**

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to examine teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding the transition from Curriculum 2013 to Kurikulum Merdeka. The descriptive approach was selected because it allows researchers to systematically collect and analyze participants' opinions, experiences, and perspectives related to a specific educational phenomenon.

The participants of this study were 31 public elementary school teachers in Kendari, Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia. All participants had prior experience teaching under both Curriculum 2013 and Kurikulum Merdeka, which enabled them to provide informed comparisons between the two curricula. The teachers were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that respondents had relevant teaching experience related to the curriculum transition.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of 25 items divided into three main sections corresponding to the research questions: teachers' perceptions of the curriculum transition, challenges encountered during implementation, and recommendations for improving curriculum implementation. The questionnaire

included multiple-choice questions, Likert-scale items, and open-ended questions to capture both quantitative and qualitative data.

The open-ended questions asked teachers to explain: (1) their personal opinions regarding the transition from Curriculum 2013 to Kurikulum Merdeka, (2) the major difficulties they experienced during curriculum implementation, and (3) their recommendations for improving the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in elementary schools. These open-ended responses enabled the researcher to capture teachers' contextual experiences, concerns, and suggestions beyond numerical data.

Before distributing the questionnaire, the instrument was reviewed by two lecturers in the field of curriculum and English education to ensure content validity and clarity of the items. The questionnaire items were developed based on the concepts of curriculum reform, teacher perception, and educational change proposed by Fullan (2007). Several revisions were made after receiving feedback regarding wording clarity and item relevance.

In addition, a pilot test was conducted with five elementary school teachers outside the research participants to examine the readability and comprehensibility of the questionnaire. The teachers reported that the items were clear and easy to understand. The reliability of the Likert-scale items was measured using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.81, indicating that the questionnaire had good internal consistency and reliability for data collection purposes.

The collected quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequencies and percentages, to summarize teachers' responses to close-ended questionnaire items. Meanwhile, qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questions were analyzed using thematic analysis adapted from Braun and Clarke (2021). The researcher first read all responses repeatedly to become familiar with the data.

Next, important statements and recurring ideas were coded systematically. Similar codes were then grouped into broader themes related to teachers' perceptions, implementation challenges, and recommendations for curriculum improvement. Finally, the themes were interpreted narratively to explain how teachers experienced the transition from Curriculum 2013 to Kurikulum Merdeka in their classroom practices.

### **3. Result**

#### *Teachers' Perceptions of Curriculum Transition*

The first research question explored teachers' perceptions of the transition from Curriculum 2013 to Kurikulum Merdeka. Teachers were asked to describe their perception of the curriculum transition using several questionnaire items. Table 1 presents teachers' responses regarding their overall description of the curriculum transition.

*Table 1. Teachers' Perceptions of Curriculum Transition*

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Flexible	26	83.9%
Promising	4	12.9%
Hindering	1	3.2%
Total	31	100%

The results indicate that the majority of teachers (83.9%) described the curriculum transition as flexible, suggesting that they perceive Kurikulum Merdeka as offering greater freedom in instructional planning compared to Curriculum 2013. This perception reflects one of the core principles of Kurikulum Merdeka, which encourages teachers to adapt learning materials and instructional strategies according to students' needs and local contexts.

The finding suggests that the shift from Curriculum 2013 to Kurikulum Merdeka is generally viewed positively by teachers. The emphasis on flexibility appears to reduce the rigidity often associated with previous curriculum frameworks, particularly in terms of lesson planning and instructional design. Teachers may perceive this flexibility as an opportunity to exercise greater professional judgment in selecting learning activities and teaching approaches.

Further analysis revealed that most teachers also reported positive attitudes toward the new curriculum. Approximately 67.7% of respondents stated that they support Kurikulum Merdeka, while 29.0% strongly support it. Only one respondent expressed uncertainty about the curriculum implementation.

Another important finding relates to the aspects of Kurikulum Merdeka that teachers appreciate the most. The majority of respondents indicated that the flexibility of lesson planning is the most beneficial feature of the new curriculum. In addition to describing the transition, teachers were also asked about their initial perception of Kurikulum Merdeka when they first heard about the reform.

*Table 2. Teachers' Initial Perceptions of Curriculum Merdeka*

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	15	48.4%
Very Positive	8	25.8%
Neutral	8	25.8%
Total	31	100%

The results show that approximately 74.2% of teachers initially viewed Kurikulum Merdeka positively, while about 25.8% reported neutral attitudes. These findings indicate that although most teachers welcomed the curriculum reform, a considerable proportion of teachers initially experienced uncertainty regarding its implementation.

Such uncertainty is common during the early stages of curriculum reform because teachers often require time to understand the new framework and its practical implications. Teachers may initially lack sufficient information about the curriculum's objectives, instructional strategies, or assessment methods, which can lead to cautious or neutral attitudes. Teachers were also asked to indicate their current perception of Kurikulum Merdeka after experiencing its implementation in schools.

*Table 3. Teachers' Current Perceptions of Curriculum Merdeka*

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Support	21	67.7%
Strongly Support	9	29.0%
Doubtful	1	3.2%
Total	31	100%

The findings reveal that 96.7% of teachers expressed supportive attitudes toward Kurikulum Merdeka, with nearly one-third of respondents indicating strong support for the curriculum. This suggests that teachers' perceptions became more positive after experiencing the curriculum in practice.

The shift from initial uncertainty to stronger support indicates that teachers may have developed a better understanding of the curriculum once they began implementing it in their classrooms. Practical experience with the curriculum may have helped teachers recognize its benefits, particularly in terms of instructional flexibility and simplified learning content.

#### *Challenges in Implementing Kurikulum Merdeka*

The second research question investigated the challenges faced by teachers during the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka. Teachers were asked to identify the main obstacles they face in implementing the new curriculum.

*Table 4. Implementation Challenge*

Challenge	Frequency
Limited time	11
Limited resources	9
Lack of training	9
Unclear Policy guidelines	2
Total	31

The findings reveal that limited time is the most frequently reported challenge among teachers. Eleven respondents indicated that time constraints hinder their ability to effectively implement the new curriculum. Teachers may struggle to allocate sufficient time for planning learning activities, conducting project-based learning, and evaluating students' progress.

Another significant challenge identified in this study is the lack of training opportunities for teachers. Nine respondents reported that they require more professional development to fully understand the instructional approaches and assessment methods associated with Kurikulum Merdeka. Without sufficient training, teachers may experience uncertainty when attempting to implement new teaching strategies or assessment techniques.

Limited school resources also emerged as a major challenge in the implementation of the curriculum. Teachers noted that some schools lack adequate learning materials, digital infrastructure, or supporting resources necessary to conduct innovative learning activities such as project-based learning. These limitations may affect the extent to which teachers can implement the curriculum as intended.

Besides, teachers were also asked to compare their workload under Kurikulum Merdeka with their workload under Curriculum 2013.

*Table 5. Teachers Workload Comparison*

Response	Frequency
Lighter than K13	13
Similar workload	8
Depends on school context	6
Much heavier	4
Total	31

The results indicate that the largest proportion of teachers that is 13 respondents perceive Kurikulum Merdeka as having a lighter workload compared to Curriculum 2013. This perception may be associated with the simplified administrative requirements and the reduced emphasis on extensive documentation of lesson plans.

However, some teachers indicated that the workload under Kurikulum Merdeka depends on the specific conditions of each school. For example, teachers working in schools with limited resources or insufficient institutional support may experience greater challenges when implementing project-based learning activities.

#### *Teachers' Recommendation*

The final research question focused on teachers' recommendations for improving curriculum implementation. The results indicate that teachers strongly emphasize the importance of professional development.

*Table 6. Teacher' Recommended Training*

Training Type	Frequency
Flexible lesson planning	15
Platform Merdeka training	7
PPPP project examples	6
Formative assessment	3
Total	31

The findings show that teachers strongly emphasize the need for training on flexible lesson planning, which was selected by 15 respondents. This indicates that although teachers appreciate the flexibility offered by Kurikulum Merdeka, they still require practical guidance on how to design effective lesson plans within the new curriculum framework.

Training on the Merdeka Mengajar platform was also identified as an important need among teachers. This platform is designed to support teachers by providing instructional resources, learning materials, and professional development modules. However, some teachers may still require assistance in effectively using the platform

Teachers also suggested that education authorities provide more examples of PPPP projects to help teachers implement project-based learning activities. Clear examples and practical models can help teachers better understand how to integrate character education and interdisciplinary learning within classroom instruction

Overall, the findings highlight that while teachers generally support the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka, they require continued institutional support, professional development opportunities, and adequate resources to effectively implement the curriculum in their classrooms.

#### **4. Discussion**

##### *Teachers' Positive Perception of Kurikulum Merdeka*

The findings of this study revealed that the majority of elementary school teachers perceive Kurikulum Merdeka positively. Most respondents described the curriculum as flexible and supportive of teaching practices, particularly in terms of lesson planning and instructional adaptation. This result aligns with the fundamental philosophy of Kurikulum Merdeka, which emphasizes teacher autonomy, essential learning content, and student-centered learning approaches (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, 2023).

The positive perception reported by teachers in this study suggests that the transition from Curriculum 2013 to Kurikulum Merdeka has been received relatively well by practitioners. One of the main reasons for this positive perception is the increased flexibility offered by the new curriculum. Unlike Curriculum 2013, which required teachers to produce detailed and often lengthy lesson plans,

Kurikulum Merdeka allows teachers to design instructional activities based on students' learning needs and contextual realities. This flexibility appears to reduce administrative burdens while enabling teachers to focus more on the learning process.

The findings also support the argument that curriculum reforms are more likely to succeed when teachers perceive them as beneficial and manageable. According to Fullan (2007), teachers play a central role in the implementation of educational change because they act as mediators between policy and classroom practice. When teachers perceive a reform as meaningful and practical, they are more likely to integrate new pedagogical practices into their daily teaching activities.

Similarly, previous research on Kurikulum Merdeka implementation has highlighted the importance of teacher perception in determining the success of the reform. Afida, et al. (2024), for example, found that teachers who viewed the curriculum as flexible and supportive were more willing to adopt project-based learning and competency-based assessment approaches. In the same vein, Candra (2024) reported that teachers generally perceived Kurikulum Merdeka as offering a clear advantage over previous curricula, particularly in terms of instructional freedom and content simplification. Furthermore, Masyithah et al., (2024) also point out that teachers generally perceive Kurikulum Merdeka as encouraging more interactive and student-centered learning practices.

Another important finding in this study is that teachers' attitudes toward Kurikulum Merdeka became more positive after experiencing the curriculum in practice. While some teachers initially expressed uncertainty about the reform, the majority reported supportive attitudes after implementing it in their classrooms. This pattern reflects what Fullan (2007) describes as the transition from the initiation phase to the implementation phase of educational change. During the initiation phase, teachers often experience mixed feelings or uncertainty because they have limited understanding of the new policy. However, once teachers begin to implement the reform and observe its benefits, their attitudes often become more supportive.

The findings also highlight that teachers particularly appreciate the flexibility in lesson planning provided by Kurikulum Merdeka. This feature appears to be one of the most valued aspects of the curriculum reform. By allowing teachers to design learning activities that are relevant to their students and local contexts, the curriculum promotes more meaningful learning experiences. Such flexibility is considered essential for fostering creativity, critical thinking, and collaborative learning, which are key competencies required in the twenty-first century (Swaffield, 2025).

Overall, the positive perceptions reported by teachers suggest that Kurikulum Merdeka has the potential to improve instructional practices in Indonesian elementary schools. However, the findings also indicate that successful

implementation requires more than positive attitudes alone. Teachers still face several challenges that may hinder the full realization of the curriculum's objectives.

### *Challenges in Implementing Kurikulum Merdeka*

Despite the generally positive perception of Kurikulum Merdeka, the findings reveal that teachers encounter several practical challenges during its implementation. The most commonly reported challenges include limited time, insufficient training, and lack of school resources. These challenges reflect structural and institutional constraints that often accompany large-scale curriculum reforms. Previous studies also found that teachers often encounter challenges related to technological readiness, limited facilities, and adaptation to new teaching methods during curriculum transition processes (Hura, 2024).

The issue of limited time was identified as the most significant challenge in this study. Teachers reported that they often struggle to balance instructional responsibilities with administrative tasks, professional development activities, and project-based learning requirements. Although Kurikulum Merdeka reduces certain administrative burdens compared to Curriculum 2013, teachers still need adequate time to design learning activities, implement projects, and assess student learning outcomes.

This finding is consistent with previous studies on curriculum reform in Indonesia. Aprianti, et al. (2025), for instance, reported that many teachers experienced difficulties managing their workload during the transition from Curriculum 2013 to Kurikulum Merdeka. However, Saputra & Hadi (2022) found that teachers positively perceived the implementation of the merdeka curriculum, and it affects the teaching practices in the classroom.

Another major challenge identified in this study is insufficient teacher training. Many respondents indicated that they require more professional development opportunities to fully understand the principles and practices of Kurikulum Merdeka. Continuous professional development is essential for helping teachers adapt to curriculum reform because sustained training opportunities improve teachers' pedagogical competence, instructional confidence, and classroom practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Although the government has introduced several training programs, including online modules through the Merdeka Mengajar platform, many teachers still feel that these initiatives are not sufficient. The findings of this study support previous research indicating that many teachers are still not fully prepared to implement Kurikulum Merdeka because they continue to face difficulties understanding new curriculum paradigms and differentiated learning approaches (Ben Gurion, 2024).

Teacher training plays a critical role in the success of curriculum reform because it directly influences teachers' professional competence and confidence. According to Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, teachers who feel confident in their instructional abilities are more likely to adopt innovative teaching practices. Conversely, teachers who lack adequate training may experience uncertainty and resistance toward new pedagogical approaches.

The findings of this study also support the argument that professional development is one of the most important factors influencing curriculum implementation. Research by Kulsum & Suloso (2024) indicates that teachers in regions outside Java often have fewer opportunities to participate in training programs compared to their counterparts in more developed areas. This disparity may contribute to regional differences in the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka across Indonesia.

In addition to training challenges, teachers also reported limited school resources as an obstacle to effective curriculum implementation. Some respondents noted that their schools lack adequate teaching materials, digital resources, and infrastructure to support innovative learning activities. These resource limitations can hinder teachers' ability to implement project-based learning and other student-centered approaches promoted by Kurikulum Merdeka. Teachers also frequently experience challenges implementing authentic assessment practices under Kurikulum Merdeka despite understanding its importance conceptually (Arjuna et al., 2024).

This issue is particularly relevant in regions such as Southeast Sulawesi, where schools may have fewer educational resources compared to urban areas in Java. Previous research has highlighted similar concerns regarding resource disparities across Indonesian regions. Mutmainnah, et al., (2023), for example, found that schools in non-Java regions often face delays in receiving learning materials and limited access to digital learning platforms.

From a theoretical perspective, these challenges illustrate the complexity of educational change processes. Fullan (2007) emphasizes that successful curriculum reform requires not only policy innovation but also adequate support systems, including teacher training, leadership support, and resource allocation. Without these supporting factors, even well-designed reforms may fail to achieve their intended outcomes. Therefore, the challenges experienced by teachers suggest that curriculum reform requires not only policy changes but also continuous professional adaptation and institutional support for teachers during the implementation process (Haq et al., 2025) as effective curriculum implementation depends not only on policy design but also on teacher support systems, professional development, and institutional readiness (Chang et al., 2014).

### *The Importance of Teacher Support and Collaboration*

Another important finding of this study is the strong emphasis teachers place on professional collaboration and institutional support. Many respondents recommended the establishment of teacher discussion forums, mentoring programs, and regular professional development workshops to support the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka.

Professional collaboration is widely recognized as an effective strategy for improving teaching practices and facilitating curriculum reform. Through collaborative learning communities, teachers can share experiences, exchange teaching strategies, and collectively solve instructional challenges. Collaborative professional learning communities are important because teacher development is strengthened through shared expertise, collegial support, and continuous professional interaction (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Such collaboration can also help teachers build confidence in implementing new pedagogical approaches.

Research in educational change has consistently shown that collaborative professional learning environments contribute significantly to successful reform implementation. Robinson (2012) argues that when teachers work together to reflect on their teaching practices and discuss instructional challenges, they are more likely to adopt innovative teaching methods and sustain educational change.

In the Indonesian context, teacher collaboration is often facilitated through professional communities such as MGMP (Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran) and KKG (Kelompok Kerja Guru). These forums provide opportunities for teachers to share best practices, discuss curriculum implementation issues, and develop instructional resources collectively. Strengthening such professional communities may therefore play a crucial role in supporting the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka.

The findings also highlight the importance of leadership support in curriculum reform. Teachers indicated that school principals and education authorities should provide clearer guidelines, regular training programs, and adequate resources to facilitate curriculum implementation. Leadership support is essential because school leaders play a key role in creating a supportive environment for educational innovation.

According to Fullan (2007), effective school leadership is one of the most important factors influencing the success of educational change. Principals who actively support teachers, encourage professional collaboration, and allocate resources strategically can significantly enhance teachers' capacity to implement curriculum reforms.

### *Implication for Curriculum Reform in Indonesia*

The findings of this study have several implications for curriculum reform in Indonesia. First, the generally positive perception of Kurikulum Merdeka among teachers suggests that the curriculum has strong potential to improve teaching and

learning practices in elementary schools. Teachers appreciate the flexibility and simplified content structure of the new curriculum, which allows them to focus more on meaningful learning experiences. This finding indicates that teachers actively interpret curriculum policies based on their classroom realities and students' learning needs, which is considered an important aspect of successful educational reform (Haq et al., 2025).

Second, the challenges identified in this study highlight the need for stronger institutional support during curriculum implementation. Providing continuous professional development opportunities for teachers should be a priority for education authorities. Training programs should focus not only on theoretical explanations of the curriculum but also on practical teaching strategies that teachers can apply in their classrooms.

Third, strengthening professional learning communities among teachers can play an important role in facilitating curriculum reform. Collaborative forums such as teacher discussion groups and mentoring programs can help teachers share experiences, develop instructional resources, and overcome implementation challenges collectively.

Finally, policymakers should consider regional disparities when implementing national curriculum reforms. Schools in different regions may face varying levels of resource availability, infrastructure, and training access. Therefore, curriculum implementation strategies should be adapted to local contexts to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study explored elementary school teachers' perceptions of the transition from Curriculum 2013 to Kurikulum Merdeka in Kendari, Indonesia. The findings reveal that most teachers hold positive attitudes toward the new curriculum, particularly appreciating its flexibility and focus on essential learning content.

However, several challenges were identified during the implementation process, including limited time, insufficient training, and lack of resources. These challenges highlight the need for stronger institutional support and professional development opportunities for teachers.

Based on these findings, the study recommends that education authorities provide continuous training programs, practical teaching guidelines, and collaborative professional forums to support teachers in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka effectively.

One limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size limited to teachers in Kendari. Future research may involve larger samples from multiple regions to provide a broader understanding of curriculum reform implementation in Indonesia.

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