

Urban and Rural Teachers' Perceptions of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum: A Case Study of Teachers in West Kalimantan

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the perceptions of rural and urban teachers in West Kalimantan regarding the implementation of the Independent Curriculum (The Merdeka Curriculum) through a case study at SMPN 5 Jelimpo and SMPN 29 Pontianak. The scope of the research covers two schools implementing the Independent Curriculum but located in different contexts, namely a rural and an urban area. The research employs a qualitative approach using observation and interview methods. The data sources are Indonesian language teachers from SMPN 5 Jelimpo and SMPN 29 Pontianak. The data consist of interview results from these teachers. The findings of the study include: (1) Positive Views on the Independent Curriculum, teachers from SMPN 29 Pontianak and SMPN 5 Jelimpo welcomed the policy for its flexibility in supporting student-centered learning; (2) Different Levels of Readiness and Adaptation, SMPN 29 Pontianak showed a more advanced readiness with a "Mandiri Berubah" approach, while SMPN 5 Jelimpo remains in an intensive preparation phase; (3) Teaching Strategies and Teacher Competency Development, both schools rely on various learning resources to enhance teacher competency, with different approaches such as structured training at school and the use of social media; (4) Contextual Curriculum Implementation, SMPN 29 Pontianak emphasizes internal coordination, while SMPN 5 Jelimpo focuses on project-based learning and local wisdom; and (5) Contextual Challenges, urban teachers face internal obstacles like time management, whereas rural teachers face external challenges such as limited infrastructure and resistance from colleagues.

Keywords: Rural and Urban Teachers; Implementation; The Independent Curriculum

INTRODUCTION

The demands of the times have compelled the education sector to continuously upgrade its knowledge base, particularly as reflected in curriculum development and implementation. In recent years, curriculum reform has become inevitable due to ongoing societal changes, with its application varying across different schools. This study explores the perceptions of teachers in both urban and rural areas

regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. It adopts a case study approach, focusing on Indonesian language teachers at SMPN 29 Pontianak Utara and SMPN 05 Jelimpo in Landak Regency.

The selection of these two schools was based on the following considerations: (1) SMPN 29 Pontianak Utara is an urban school located on the outskirts of the city, where the curriculum implementation differs from that of schools situated in central urban areas; and (2) SMPN 05 Jelimpo in Landak Regency is categorized as a 3T (underdeveloped, frontier, and outermost) school, with limited access to electricity and internet connectivity. Both schools have implemented the Merdeka Curriculum; however, the level of success, the approaches adopted, and the manner of implementation differ significantly.

Previous studies have examined the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum from various perspectives, including school readiness, student responses, and administrative as well as technical challenges faced by teachers. However, the majority of these studies have focused on well-established urban schools with adequate infrastructure and relatively smooth access to information. Research on teachers' perceptions in peri-urban and underdeveloped, frontier, and outermost (3T) areas remains limited. In fact, differing geographical and socio-cultural contexts are likely to shape teachers' experiences and attitudes in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

This study specifically aims to explore and compare the perceptions of teachers working in peri-urban schools and those in 3T-area schools regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The urban school in this study does not represent the rapidly developing city center; rather, it is located in a transitional area between urban and rural settings, characterized by limited resources and a diverse student population. In contrast, the rural school under study is situated in a 3T region, facing geographical barriers, limited educational facilities, and minimal access to digital-based training and learning resources.

The uniqueness of this study, in comparison to previous research, lies in three key aspects. First, in terms of research setting, this study offers a novel perspective by juxtaposing two contrasting contexts: a peri-urban school and a 3T-area school—contexts that are rarely the primary focus in curriculum implementation studies. Second, in terms of methodological approach, this research adopts a descriptive qualitative design using in-depth interviews with teachers from both settings to capture richer and more context-sensitive insights into their perceptions. Third, the primary focus of this study is on the teachers themselves, rather than on institutions or policy frameworks, thereby offering a more personal and practical understanding of how the Merdeka Curriculum is perceived and implemented by frontline practitioners.

Accordingly, this study is expected to make an empirical contribution to the growing body of literature on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, while

also serving as a policy reference for developing more equitable and contextually responsive strategies for teacher support, particularly for schools located in marginalized peri-urban and 3T regions that have often been overlooked in national education reform agendas. Furthermore, by presenting two distinct regional cases, this study provides a simplified mapping of curriculum implementation across different educational landscapes, highlighting the variations and contextual challenges encountered in both urban and rural settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The curriculum functions as a strategic instrument within the education system, undergoing dynamic adjustments to respond to social changes and contemporary demands. Its primary orientation lies in the development of learners, community engagement, and the relevance of the learning content delivered. (Athifah Muzharifah et al., 2023). The curriculum reflects the fundamental values and worldview of a nation within the realm of education (Lince, 2022).

The purpose of curriculum implementation at the educational unit level is to serve as a guiding framework for carrying out educational programs within the respective institutions. (Restiana et al., 2022). However, the implementation of the curriculum has not proceeded smoothly across all contexts, as disparities remain in achieving equitable learning outcomes among students, further complicated by ongoing curriculum changes. These curriculum shifts have significant implications for teachers' pedagogical competencies, as many educators have yet to fully adopt and implement the new curriculum in a comprehensive manner (Mawati et al., 2023).

Indonesia has now entered a new curriculum era with the introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum, which is a refinement of the 2013 Curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum is conceptualized as a learning design that provides students with opportunities to engage in joyful learning experiences, enabling them to explore and express their natural talents. The philosophy of *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) emphasizes autonomy and creative thinking in the learning process. (Rahayu et al., 2022). The Ministry of Education and Culture defines *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) as an initiative that grants autonomy and flexibility to educational institutions, liberates higher education lecturers from excessive bureaucracy, and empowers students to choose learning pathways aligned with their interests. (Nurcahyo, 2020). *Merdeka Belajar* refers to a condition in which both teachers and students are granted the freedom to innovate, as well as the autonomy to engage in independent and creative learning throughout the teaching and learning process (Purba et al., 2024). Therefore, the concept of *Merdeka Belajar* emphasizes granting flexibility to both teachers and students to innovate, while also promoting independence and creativity in the implementation of the learning process (Hendri, 2020).

The Merdeka Curriculum is characterized by differentiated and flexible learning. It emphasizes essential content to ensure that students have sufficient time to deepen

their understanding of key concepts and strengthen their competencies. (Nurani et al., 2022). The Merdeka Curriculum offers several key advantages: (1) Simpler and More In-Depth. It focuses on essential subject matter and the development of students' competencies according to their learning phases. Learning becomes more meaningful, in-depth, unhurried, and enjoyable. (2) Greater Autonomy. Teachers have the flexibility to teach according to students' levels of achievement and developmental stages. Schools are granted the authority to develop and manage their curriculum and learning processes in alignment with the unique characteristics of their institutions and learners. (3) More Relevant and Interactive. Project-based learning provides students with broader opportunities to actively explore real-world issues—such as environmental concerns, health, and others—which support the development of character and the competencies outlined in the *Pancasila Student Profile* (Nurani et al., 2022). The *Pancasila Student Profile* places greater emphasis on students' moral character and attitudes, with the expectation that learners will not only excel academically but also demonstrate strong personal values and appropriate behavior throughout the learning process. It underscores the importance of cultivating respectful conduct (*adab*) in alignment with the core values outlined in the *Pancasila Student Profile*. (Firmansyah, 2023). The implementation of the *Pancasila Student Profile* is closely related to character development, serving as a strong impetus for preparing students to navigate the demands of the digital era (Rusnaini et al., 2021).

According to the Badan Standar Kurikulum (2022), several important considerations must be taken into account in implementing the stages of the Merdeka Curriculum: (1) These stages are not fixed or standardized protocols. Educational institutions and/or local governments may develop implementation stages that are more appropriate to their specific contexts and unique characteristics. (2) Educators and educational institutions vary in capacity and readiness, and thus may begin implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at different stages and progress at varying speeds. (3) These stages are intended for self-reflection regarding the readiness of educators and/or educational institutions. They should not be used as tools or instruments to assess performance or determine career advancement or welfare outcomes. (4) Implementing the curriculum according to an agreed-upon stage should not lead to any negative consequences for educators or institutions. Therefore, these stages must not be used as a basis for comparing the quality of different schools or teachers. (5) Leadership and government bodies are expected to support the reflective process undertaken by educators and educational institutions, without directing them to implement the curriculum at a specific stage. (6) These stages are designed as a basis for professional dialogue among educators within a school or learning community, to collectively discuss the steps necessary for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum according to their respective stages.

According to the (Kementrian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, 2022), the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum are as follows: (a) Focus on Essential Content. Learning is centered on core subject matter that is most critical for developing students' competencies and character, providing educators with sufficient time to deliver

deep and meaningful instruction. This approach is designed to address various contemporary challenges and global issues, including climate change, financial literacy, digital literacy, health literacy, and the role of literature in strengthening students' overall literacy skills. (b) Character Development. The curriculum emphasizes the development of students' spiritual, moral, social, and emotional competencies. This is achieved through both dedicated instructional time and integration within the learning process, such as through the implementation of *Pancasila Student Profile Reinforcement Projects (P5)*. (c) Flexibility. Instructional practices can be adapted to the developmental needs of students, the characteristics of the educational institution, and the local socio-cultural context.

This study focuses on teachers' perceptions. Perception is an internal psychological process that enables individuals to generate thoughts that shape their mental representations. As a result, these perceptions may give rise to two types of thinking: positive and negative (Azahari et al., 2022). Perceptions regarding curriculum implementation are shaped by experiences encountered in the field, and thus reflect individual responses and evaluations related to how the curriculum is enacted in practice.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method. According to Satori, Djam'an, and Komariah (2017), qualitative research is an approach aimed at exploring specific social situations by accurately describing realities through words, using relevant data collection and analysis techniques derived from natural settings. The data collection techniques in this study include the following stages: (1) Observation. This technique was conducted to provide the researcher with a general overview of the school environment prior to data collection. Before initiating the formal research process, the researcher carried out preliminary observations by consulting with teachers to obtain initial information that would facilitate the research process. (2) Interview. Interviews serve as a key instrument in conducting research, particularly in qualitative studies (Rosaliza, 2015). In this study, interviews were used to gather information regarding the perceptions of teachers in both urban and rural areas. This technique ensured that the data obtained were valid and aligned with the actual views of the informants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research is a case study focusing on Indonesian language teachers at SMPN 29 Pontianak Utara and SMPN 05 Jelimpo, Landak Regency. The selection of these two schools as the case study sites is considered appropriate for the following reasons: (1) SMPN 29 Pontianak Utara is an urban school located on the outskirts of the city, thus representing a transitional educational context between urban and rural settings; (2) SMPN 05 Jelimpo, located in Landak Regency, is categorized as a 3T (underdeveloped, frontier, and outermost) area with limited internet access and infrastructure. Both schools have implemented the Merdeka Curriculum, albeit

within distinct geographical, socio-cultural, and infrastructural contexts. The following section presents the findings of the data analysis conducted in this study.

Urban Teachers' Perceptions of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

This perception reflects the views of an Indonesian language teacher at SMPN 29 Pontianak. As an urban schoolteacher, she perceives the Merdeka Curriculum as an educational innovation centered on students' needs. The curriculum provides opportunities for teachers to recognize and develop their own competencies, ultimately enhancing the quality of students' learning experiences. Through the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers can adopt a more adaptive approach tailored to students' individual potentials, thereby strengthening personalized and relevant learning experiences.

The perception of urban teachers toward the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum demonstrates a relatively positive response to the policy, recognizing it as an educational innovation that emphasizes students' individual needs. Based on interviews with the Indonesian language teacher at SMPN 29 Pontianak, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum offers ample space for teachers to develop their pedagogical and professional competencies. This aligns with the vision of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (MoECRT), which asserts that the new curriculum aims to foster a more adaptive, relevant, and student-centered learning process (Kementrian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, 2022).

This school began implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in 2022 under the *Mandiri Berubah* (Independent Changing) category. In the first year, several challenges emerged, such as misunderstandings regarding the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5) and difficulties in designing instructional tools. However, by the second year, the school had become more prepared, supported by self-directed training through the *Merdeka Mengajar Platform* (PMM) and the utilization of internal *Learning Communities* (Kombel). This indicates an ongoing process of improved understanding in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. SMPN 29 Pontianak, representing an urban-edge school setting, began implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in 2022 under the *Mandiri Berubah* level. During the initial implementation phase, the school encountered several challenges, particularly misconceptions about the execution of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) and difficulties in developing instructional materials. Nevertheless, these obstacles were gradually overcome through teachers' reflective and adaptive approaches, as well as active participation in training provided via the *Merdeka Mengajar Platform* (PMM) and internal learning communities. This reflects a transformative process in teachers' knowledge and attitudes toward curriculum policy change. As emphasized by Sulianti et al. (2024), sustainable curriculum reform requires systemic support, relevant professional development, and intrinsic motivation from educational practitioners.

Teachers are expected to be adequately prepared for the implementation of the new curriculum, and at SMPN 29 Pontianak, teachers, particularly those teaching Indonesian language in Phase D, reported a reasonable level of preparedness in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. To support this readiness, teachers actively participated in training through the *Merdeka Mengajar Platform* (PMM), engaged in knowledge-sharing within learning communities. They attended official training sessions organized by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemdikbud) as well as the Provincial Office of Education and Culture (Disdikbud). These efforts have enabled teachers to understand better the learning trajectory aligned with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. A teacher at SMPN 29 Pontianak elaborated on her perceptions regarding the Merdeka Curriculum. She emphasized that the success of its implementation largely depends on the preparedness of each educational institution. According to her, schools are not forced to implement the Merdeka Curriculum; instead, they are given the flexibility to choose their level of engagement: *Mandiri Belajar* (Independent Learning), *Mandiri Berubah* (Independent Changing), or *Mandiri Berbagi* (Independent Sharing).

In practice, although the implementation has been aligned with the conceptual framework of the Merdeka Curriculum, the school and its teaching staff continue to carry out evaluations and improvements to address areas where implementation remains suboptimal. The curriculum was introduced through internal coordination following directives from the local education office. Prior to school-wide socialization, the institution conducted an in-depth study of various sources related to the Merdeka Curriculum. This series of steps demonstrates a systematic approach to implementation, involving careful planning, information gathering from multiple sources, and active participation from all school stakeholders.

The curriculum implementation process at this school is not solely shaped by top-down policy mandates but also emerges from internal coordination involving participatory planning. The school conducted literature reviews from various sources, organized internal socialization sessions, and engaged school community members in understanding the direction of curriculum reform. This strategy underscores the importance of institutional collaboration in supporting curriculum reform, a notion also emphasized by Hargreaves (2009) in the context of teacher professionalism-based educational reform.

From a micro-level perspective, teachers' perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum are shaped not only by normative understandings of its content but also by their direct teaching experiences and active participation in training networks. Teacher involvement in the *Merdeka Mengajar Platform* (PMM) and formal training sessions facilitated by the local education office has enhanced their competence in applying instructional approaches suited to the characteristics of Phase D, particularly in the context of Indonesian language instruction. This reinforces the view that continuous professional development plays a crucial role in preparing teachers to navigate curriculum change effectively (Desimone & Garet, 2015).

Thus, the findings indicate that although the initial implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in urban schools encountered structural and pedagogical challenges, there has been significant progress through reflective and collaborative processes that contribute to improved learning quality. Urban teachers' positive perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum can serve as a vital indicator of policy success, particularly when supported by strong institutional capacity and a sustained professional development system.

Rural Teachers' Perceptions of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

This perception reflects the views of the teachers at SMPN 05 Jelimpo. According to the teacher, the Merdeka Curriculum is considered a positive step forward, as it aligns with the increasingly diverse educational needs of the Society 5.0 era. Compared to the previous curriculum, such as the 2013 Curriculum (K13), which emphasized text-based learning, the Merdeka Curriculum is seen as more adaptive to various learning formats. It allows teachers to adjust materials based on students' individual needs. The teacher emphasized the importance of regular evaluations to ensure that the curriculum does not become an overwhelming challenge for schools and highlighted the need for an open attitude toward these changes. In terms of preparation, the school began implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in the 2023/2024 academic year. Several preparatory steps were undertaken, including training through monthly MGMP (Subject Teacher Forum) meetings and essential workshops aimed at addressing the differences between the Merdeka Curriculum and K13, particularly with regard to the Pancasila Student Profile (P5) component. The preparation was carried out both individually and collaboratively, including through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), enabling teachers to understand better the key shifts introduced in the new curriculum. These efforts align with previous studies asserting the need for equitable socialization and technical guidance for all teachers in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Sunarni & Karyono, 2023). In the context of Indonesian language instruction, this rural teacher undertook self-directed learning via the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM), participated in webinars, and sought information from diverse sources, including social media. Particular attention was paid to the transition from syllabi to *Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran* (Learning Objectives Flow) and the introduction of cognitive development phases that are not based on grade levels. Developing differentiated learning models tailored to students' socio-emotional competencies (KSE) was also a key aspect of the teacher's adaptation to the curriculum.

The teacher expressed a generally positive perception of the curriculum reform, stating, "I prefer the Merdeka Curriculum, even though the process is not yet perfect. Under K13, the basic competencies (KDs) were numerous and still required yearly revisions. In contrast, I find the Merdeka Curriculum more favorable—even though the time allocation is shorter, it does not diminish the essence of learning." Overall, the interview findings suggest that despite challenges during the transition period, readiness supported by self-directed and collaborative learning, along with

institutional support, facilitates the implementation of a flexible and character-oriented curriculum. This highlights the importance of professional autonomy, continuous learning, and institutional engagement in realizing the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Urban Teachers' Perception Analysis of the Challenges in Implementing the *Merdeka Curriculum*

A primary challenge in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum (Kurmer) at SMPN 29 Pontianak lies in the suboptimal understanding of its conceptual framework. This issue stems from time constraints and divided attention, as teachers must balance self-directed training on *Merdeka Curriculum* with teaching duties, administrative preparation, and other additional responsibilities. Consequently, some concepts are inaccurately applied in classroom practice. This analysis reveals a pressing need for intensive mentoring or more structured training to deepen teachers' understanding of *the Merdeka Curriculum*. The limited time available is a critical factor that hinders the optimal application of the curriculum's core principles. These findings underscore the necessity of systematic intervention through structured, intensive, and continuous professional development programs. The success of *Merdeka Curriculum* implementation largely depends on teacher readiness, supporting infrastructure, and a thorough understanding of the curriculum's innovative concepts. As the main agents of implementation, teachers play a pivotal role in ensuring the curriculum is effectively applied in the classroom (Sahnan & Wibowo, 2023). A shallow conceptual grasp of *Merdeka Curriculum* poses the risk of misapplication, thereby undermining the curriculum's primary goals of fostering differentiated and student-centered learning.

In the context of a peri-urban school bridging urban and rural characteristics, challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum are often associated with limited digital access. However, a teacher at the school noted:

"Digital access is not a major issue because the Merdeka Curriculum can be studied using mobile devices, so even senior teachers have no difficulty in understanding it. In classroom instruction, the curriculum is adapted to students' needs and abilities, making implementation feasible without reliance on digital tools."

Based on this account, although concerns about digital limitations in implementing *the Merdeka Curriculum* persist, digital access is not a significant barrier for teachers at SMPN 29. The use of mobile devices enables teachers, including senior ones, to study the curriculum independently. Furthermore, the teaching process is adapted to suit the students' needs and abilities, minimizing reliance on digital technology. This finding challenges the common assumption that limited digital access is a primary obstacle to educational reform. In this context, teachers' ability to adapt by using simple digital tools (e.g., smartphones) serves as a driving factor in developing an independent understanding of *the Merdeka Curriculum*.

Moreover, learning processes in this school are not entirely dependent on digital technology; rather, they are tailored to learners' capacities. This reflects the implementation of differentiated instruction—one of the Merdeka Curriculum's core principles—which recognizes students' diverse characteristics and the importance of initial assessments to design contextually appropriate learning activities. Such pedagogical adaptation reinforces the argument that the success of *Merdeka Curriculum* implementation is not determined solely by technological advancement but by pedagogical flexibility and teachers' willingness to comprehend and apply curriculum principles in contextually meaningful ways.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has also influenced student behavior and learning styles, although these changes remain subtle. This limited impact is attributed to the curriculum being applied only to Grade 7 and 8 students, while Grade 9 students continue to follow the 2013 Curriculum. The adjustment process is still underway, and variations in student behavior and learning style depend on the readiness of all stakeholders within the educational unit. This dual-curriculum situation may affect the consistency of students' learning experiences within the same school environment. The variation underscores that curriculum transition requires time and consistent implementation across grade levels to yield observable and comprehensive outcomes. This aligns with (Azahra, 2024), who argues that curriculum reform demands comprehensive support from the educational ecosystem and adequate time to achieve systemic and sustainable outcomes, as poorly prepared changes may result in both positive and negative impacts.

Rural Teachers' Perception Analysis of the Challenges in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

Interview findings with a teacher from SMPN 05 Jelimpo reveal the complex dynamics of Merdeka Curriculum implementation in rural areas, particularly the tendency of some teachers to remain within the "comfort zone" of the previous curriculum. This suggests that curriculum implementation is not solely a technical matter but is heavily influenced by psychosocial and institutional cultural aspects within the school environment. Teachers' perceptions in response to curricular change often reflect the belief that successful learning outcomes depend more on teacher quality than on the curriculum itself. While this premise is not entirely incorrect, neglecting the curriculum's function as a systematic instructional framework may lead to incoherence in the attainment of student competencies. Moreover, the paradigm shift introduced by the Merdeka Curriculum—such as differentiated instruction, character education through the Pancasila Student Profile (P5), and diagnostic assessment—demands significant pedagogical transformation. For some teachers, these changes are perceived more as an additional burden than as opportunities to enhance learning quality. This finding echoes the argument of All et al. (2024), who assert that one of the key inhibitors of curriculum innovation is the presence of *mental block barriers*. These psychological obstacles stem from closed attitudes toward change, such as misconceptions, negative thinking, anxiety,

or outright resistance to innovation. Educators and stakeholders may feel discomfort toward proposed changes due to fear of the unknown or concern over added workload. In light of these challenges, several solutions can be proposed to facilitate the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. These include collaborative approaches such as peer mentoring and internal workshops, capacity-building in the management of digital learning materials, and the simplification of administrative procedures. These strategies aim to reduce cognitive and technical overload among teachers while fostering a culture of adaptive and sustainable curricular transformation.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of teachers' perceptions regarding the implementation and challenges of the *Merdeka Curriculum* at SMPN 29 Pontianak and SMPN 05 Jelimpo, the following conclusions can be drawn: (1) Teachers from both SMPN 29 Pontianak and SMPN 05 Jelimpo shared the following perceptions: (a) A similarly positive outlook on the *Merdeka Curriculum* as a progressive educational reform. (b) Differing levels of institutional readiness and adaptation in response to the curriculum. (c) Varied strategies in instructional design and professional development to meet the demands of the new curriculum. (d) Distinct approaches in the curriculum implementation process, shaped by their respective institutional and regional contexts. (2) Teachers from urban and rural schools encountered different challenges during the implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, reflecting their local environments: (a) Urban teachers, such as those from SMPN 29 Pontianak, primarily faced internal challenges, particularly in terms of time management, balancing instructional duties with curriculum familiarization and administrative responsibilities. (b) Rural teachers, as observed at SMPN 05 Jelimpo, dealt more significantly with external factors, such as resistance from colleagues to adopt new teaching paradigms and limitations in digital infrastructure. The proposed solutions were also context-dependent: urban teachers leaned on systemic support mechanisms, including structured training and institutional coordination, whereas rural teachers emphasized community-based collaboration and grassroots professional development initiatives. These findings underscore the importance of designing inclusive and context-sensitive support systems for curriculum reform. Continuous and comprehensive outreach—through socialization, technical guidance, and sustained professional development—is essential to address the diverse challenges faced by schools across different regions. Such efforts will be instrumental in ensuring the effective and equitable implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum* nationwide.

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