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Consensus on the advantages of Merdeka curriculum in SMP teachers' perception in Padang City

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Article Info

Abstract

The implementation of Merdeka curriculum as an effort to overcome the learning lag caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as to make it easier for education units to develop and implement learning in accordance with the conditions and potential possessed by education units, regions, and the interests of students. The purpose of this study is to analyze and compare teachers' perceptions, in themes categorized. Then, to determine a consensus about the importance of each theme. The researcher used a study with a Delphi Method at SMP Padang city, West Sumatra, Indonesia. The Research informants are 14 expert teachers representing schools, who were willing and had experienced the advantages of implementing a Merdeka curriculum from 43 junior high schools in Padang city. The findings of this study are: teachers' responses to the importance of themes showed an average agree between 3.71 to 2.01 with Kendall Coefficient of Concordance (W) of 0.180 greater than 0.05 and a significance value lower than .05, namely, .039, meaning that the consistency of teachers' responses has been met. The importance of each theme starting from: (1) Oriented to the needs and abilities of students, teachers and schools; (2) Strengthening critical, creative and communicative thinking skills; (3) Increasing student learning motivation; (4) Supporting meaningfulness in learning; and (5) Supporting individual independence.

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Introduction

The government of Indonesia through the Decree of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia Number 56 of 2022 concerning Guidelines for Curriculum Implementation in the Context of Learning Recovery, stipulated the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in each Education Unit starting in the 2022/2023 school year. The government launched the Merdeka Curriculum as an effort to overcome the learning lag caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as to make it easier for education units to develop and implement learning in accordance with the conditions and potential possessed by education units, regions and the interests of students.

It should be noted that as an alternative in its learning approach, the Merdeka Curriculum implements differentiated instructions as a manifestation of student-centered learning that is designed, implemented and assessed to meet the individual needs of students by taking into account readiness, learning interests, and learning profiles. Differentiated learning must be rooted in meeting students' learning needs and how teachers respond to these learning needs (Nurahman, 2022; Kunandar, 2007). In this case, there are at least three patterns of differentiated learning, namely, content, process and product differentiation (Aprima & Sari, 2022).

Basically, the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum is to strengthen the 2013 Curriculum in its implementation so that it is hoped that it will no longer find problems, including the teacher's ability to design and organize teaching materials, the teacher's understanding of scientific-based learning, and assessments that only focus on cognitive aspects (Wahyuni & Berliani, 2019). Likewise, the results of research from Maladerita et al. (2021) found that students are still lacking independence in learning, teachers complain about the many elements of assessment on students in the 2013 Curriculum, some students have not been able to connect one subject to another, completion of material for each theme is time-limited (each theme for 1 month), and recording of assessments on report cards which takes extra time. For these reasons, the government took concrete steps by launching a Merdeka Curriculum. The change in Curriculum is the government's way to adapt education to the demands of the 21st century, where science and technology are developing very quickly without being controlled. Therefore, there is no other choice but to compensate for this, namely, by perfecting the tools that will continue to be used, namely, the Curriculum (Angga et al., 2022). In addition, according to Prasetyo and Hamami (2020), it is the process of maximizing the implementation of the Curriculum in achieving the learning objectives set as in the Curriculum set by the government after being implemented within a certain time. Furthermore, Merdeka Curriculum development is part of the efforts of teachers, in order to gain a sense of independence both in designing learning, implementing learning that is interesting for students and implementing learning assessments (Bukit & Sarbaini, 2022).

In Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2020), the implementation of the Curriculum by education units can be done using a Curriculum that is in accordance with the learning needs of students, and must pay attention to the achievement of student competencies in education units in the context of learning recovery. So education units are given the option of implementing a Curriculum that suits the learning needs of students. This means that each education unit can develop a Merdeka Curriculum according to the situation and needs of each education unit and region.

This paper aims to analyze the advantages of implementing Merdeka Curriculum in the perceptions of teachers in SMP Padang City. This is an effort to explain the positive impact on the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum according to the perceptions of Padang City junior high school teachers. Specifically, there are two questions in this paper: (1) what are the advantages of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum according to the perceptions of junior high school teachers in Padang City; and (2) what is the importance ranking for each advantage in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum according to the perceptions of junior high school teachers in Padang City. The answers to these two questions are expected to provide educational Curriculum observers and education experts with knowledge about the advantages of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum so that this knowledge can be used as a basis for improving the planning and implementation of an effective Merdeka Curriculum.

This paper is based on the argument that the governments policy of implementing an Merdeka Curriculum in educational units has had an impact on learning progress with all the advantages of implementing an Merdeka Curriculum based on the perceptions of teachers in SMP Padang city.

Methodology

This study used the Delphi method, which is a procedure for obtaining consensus values from experts

or subjects who really understand the situation of research data objects through formulated instruments. The Delphi method is one of the most widely used techniques to recommend currently developing perceptions of future responses (Egfjord & Sund, 2020).

According to Tee et al. (2022), the Delphi method acceptable reliability process, identifies the following research characteristics: (1) Anonymity: participants or experts remain anonymous to each other; they only interact with the author; (2) Controlled feedback: all information is collected and then redistributed by the researcher; (3) Group response: individuals provide appropriate information to the group response; (4) Experts (Panelists) are selected according to their field knowledge; and (5) Limit costs and time for interaction and face-to-face.

Furthermore, determining the experts who can be involved in the research can be based on the following criteria: (1) have knowledge and experience about the issue being investigated; (2) have a high capacity and willingness to participate; (3) have sufficient time to participate in the Delphi technique; and (4) have the ability in communication techniques (Adam, 2022). For this reason, the need for experts in this research is teachers who are willing to provide their perceptions of the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in SMP Padang city.

The delphi method was conducted in 2 rounds using a questionnaire as an instrument. The first stage was the presentation of various perceptions of the positive impact of the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, to be analyzed, and compiling the suitability of perceptions from expert teachers as a form of response and additional knowledge based on previous information. In the second stage, expert teachers were asked to rank or scale from the most dominant to the less dominant perceptions, as a consensus of positive perspectives that show excellence.
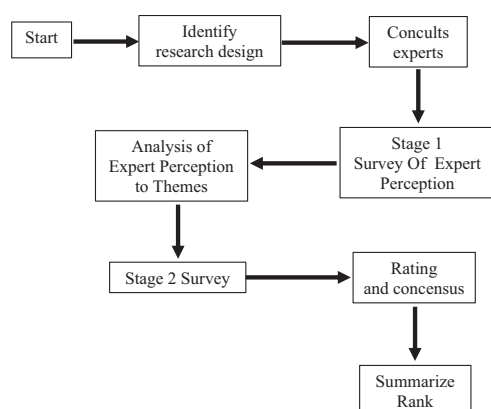

Figure 1 Stages of methodology

Furthermore, the results of the second stage will be measured with Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance (W) and Chi-square to determine the rank of perception and consensus of the submitted responses as a basis for determining a conclusion. In the calculation, the hypothesis presented is based on the results of a high Coefficient of Concordance (W) (close to score 1) with a low significance value (less than 0.05) so that it is concluded that there is consistency in the answers of the expert teachers. However, the hypothesis is rejected if the Coefficient of Concordance (W) is lower while the significance value is higher than 0.05, which implies that the rankings from the perspective of expert teachers are inconsistent, so a third stage must be carried out.

Results

The advantages of Merdeka Curriculum in SMP Teachers' Perception at Padang City

Since August 6, 2023, questionnaires were distributed to 43 junior high schools in Padang city. However, only 14 expert teachers representing schools were willing and had experienced the advantages of implementing a Merdeka curriculum. From the expert teacher's responses, 39 perceptions were grouped into 5 theme categories. The responses obtained were analyzed and arranged according to the suitability of perceptions based on information and knowledge and then summarized to avoid repetition of opinions or duplication.

After distributing the instrument in the form of a questionnaire about the perception of the advantages of implementing a Merdeka curriculum in junior high schools, several perceptions were generated, namely: (1) Oriented to the needs and abilities of students, teachers and schools; (2) Supporting meaningfulness in learning; (3) Increasing student learning motivation; (4) Supporting individual independence; and (5) Strengthening critical, creative and communicative thinking skills.

Furthermore, the results of the first stage became the instrument to be used in the second stage. The second stage presents a list of responses that have been compiled and analyzed for feasibility, to be sorted based on the importance of the educator experts' perspectives from each school. The second stage instrument was redistributed to expert teachers who were willing to give their perceptions. The rating scale was determined by giving a score of 5 for the ranking of very important themes to a score of 1 for the ranking of important themes.
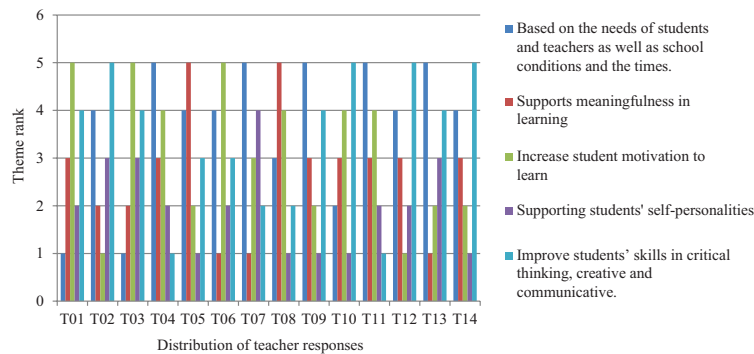
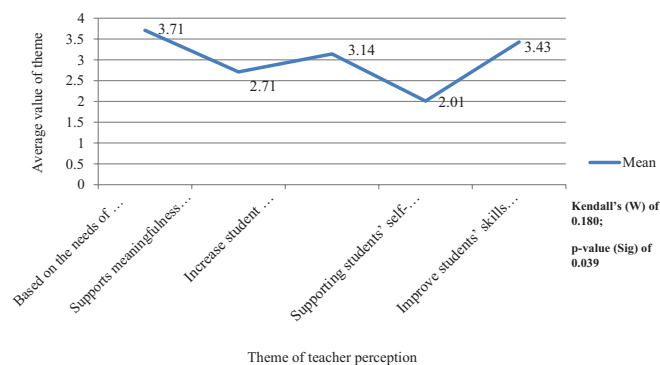**Figure 2** Chart of theme rank based on teachers' perception

Figure 3 Average value of themes

The author received responses back from 14 expert teachers, indicating consistency and no reduction in educator involvement. The results of the educator responses to the theme ratings showed an average rating between 3.71 and 2.01. The importance ranking of each theme starts from Oriented to the needs and abilities of students, teachers and schools (3.71), Strengthening critical, creative and communicative thinking skills (3.43), Increasing student learning motivation (3.14), Supporting meaningfulness in learning (2,71) and Supporting individual independence (2.01), with the level of Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance (W) of 0.180 greater than 0.05 and a significance value lower than 0.05, namely, 0.039, meaning that the consistency of teachers' responses in the second stage is not a requirement to carry out the third stage.

Discussions

The importance of the themes proposed in the second stage yielded a Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance (W) for each theme score of 0.180 and a significance value

of 0.039. Therefore, the order is: (1) Oriented to the needs and abilities of students, teachers and schools; (2) Strengthening critical, creative and communicative thinking skills; (3) Increasing students' learning motivation; (4) Supporting meaningfulness in learning; and (5) Supporting individual independence. The theme "Oriented to the needs and abilities of students, teachers and schools" is the most important advantage in the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, which has an impact on changing the direction of learning and the expected results.

1. Based on the Needs of Students and Teachers as well as the Conditions of the School and Era

In table 1, it is stated that there are 10 perceptions that become indicators and with an average level of importance of 3.71 for themes based on the needs of students and teachers as well as school conditions and times. From the results of the research, the characteristic of the Merdeka curriculum is differentiated learning, thus giving teachers the responsibility to understand and develop learning based on differences in student

learning characteristics (Anis & Anwar, 2022; Angraeni & Yusuf, 2022; Fitriyah & Wardani, 2022; Laila et al, 2022; Lestari, 2023; Nurzen, 2022; Nurmasyitah et al, 2023). In fact, the learning foundation of the Merdeka curriculum is directed towards differentiated learning that makes student differences a necessity. In addition, the assessment process also pays great attention to the aspect of teacher knowledge of the student's situation diagnostically through his learning style so that teachers can design learning freely and flexibility to meet student learning needs (Nurmasyitah et al, 2023). Even through developing student-centered learning, teachers are given the freedom to determine learning by adding or reducing learning content according to the situation and conditions of schools and times (Hartoyo & Rahmadayanti, 2022; Lestari, 2023). In Merdeka curriculum, all aspects that can support the success of learning are taken into consideration in implementing learning and not making it a burden that must be given a solution, because the different needs, abilities and conditions of each student, teacher and school become the potential that can determine the direction of learning.

Tabel 1 Consolidation of stage one on teachers' perception

Themes		Items	Perceptions
Based on the needs of students and teachers as well as school conditions and the times.	10	➢ The Curriculum is simple, focusing on essential materials and developing student competencies in the phases. ➢ Students can learn by following the development of the times. ➢ Students can feel the interest in learning. ➢ Students are more focused on the lesson ➢ Teaching materials follow student needs. ➢ Accommodates a variety of student learning styles.	➢ Giving students space to develop according to their talents. ➢ Teachers can make learning tools based on the conditions of their students. ➢ Implementation of exams that adjust to students' abilities. ➢ Teachers are given the opportunity to implement learning based on students' abilities in their respective school environments.
Supports meaningfulness in learning	6	♦ Students can have fun learning in a variety of ways. ♦ The attractiveness of co-curricular learning explored in the project of strengthening the profile. of Pancasila students (P5) ♦ Students are given the opportunity to explore learning.	♦ Teachers are given the widest possible. opportunity to create fun learning. ♦ Students can adjust learning objectives to their desired abilities. ♦ Students can explore themselves to learn.
Increase student motivation to learn	8	● Students and teachers can feel that learning is more flexible. ● Students can have more knowledge because of the Pancasila Student Project (P5). ● Growing knowledge of the importance of Pancasila. ● Students are given the opportunity to improve soft-skills.	● Students are motivated in solving every problem in learning. ● Students have the opportunity to explore information that can support teaching materials. ● Learning can focus on student character development ● Teachers can focus on learning, due to reduced administration
Supporting students' self-personalities	5	♥ Teachers have a learning time allocation that is calculated for one year, not one week. ♥ Teachers and students can express their learning.	♥ Student-centered learning. ♥ Students are more confident in their opinions and responsibilities. ♥ Teachers provide opportunities for students to learn.
Improve students' skills in critical thinking, creative and communicative	10	▪ Improve students' literacy skills. ▪ Train students to be critical and creative in their opinions. ▪ P5 becomes an economic business opportunity for students. ▪ Teachers become more creative and innovative. ▪ Teachers are more active and creative in developing teaching tools. ▪ Diagnostic assessment makes teachers closer to students.	▪ Students can apply critical thinking because of project-based learning. ▪ Bringing teachers to focus on children, so that they are always innovative, flexible, and communicative. ▪ Students can think critically, creatively and work together (caring). ▪ Students are willing to innovate in their projects.

2. Strengthen Critical, Creative, and Communicative Thinking Skills

There are 10 perceptions that become indicators and with an importance average level of 3.43 about aspects of strengthening critical, creative and communicative thinking skills that occur in teachers and students, which are oriented towards the concept of project-based learning directed at the Pancasila Student Profile Linking Project (P5), where the project (P5) refers to the achievement of indicators such as critical thinking, creativity and mutual cooperation, which are in accordance with the achievement of learning success in the era of Revolution 4.0 and 21st century learning objectives (Fitriyah & Wardani, 2022; Rizaldi & Fatimah, 2022; Sari et al, 2023; Solikhah, 2022). The application of project-based learning facilitates students to be real and critically active in finding solutions to problems encountered in learning, as the creativity of ideas and ideas that must be developed with peers communicatively, innovatively and collaboratively so as to facilitate the achievement of learning needed by students (Sari et al, 2023). The success of project-based learning will also have an impact on increasing participation and a sense of caring and increasing student achievement (Rizaldi & Fatimah, 2022). In fact, in the demands of future learning success, the application of P5 is the basis for the formation of scientific thinking habits that are useful for the world of work (Solikhah, 2022).

The same condition also occurs for teachers who feel challenged to be more creative and communicative in presenting effective and efficient learning, because teachers feel more focused on educational services and student character development. Thus, the theme "Strengthening critical, creative and communicative thinking skills" becomes the identity of excellence possessed in the Merdeka curriculum so as to provide a direction for learning changes that require students to participate in every condition both in learning and life roles in society.

3. Increase Student Learning Motivation

There are 8 perceptions that become indicators and with an importance average level of 3.14 about the impact of increasing student motivation arises due to the various perceptions of teachers regarding flexibility and freedom in managing learning by both students and teachers. Meanwhile, one of the principles in the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum is flexibility, where students and teachers are given the freedom to determine the direction of their learning to meet student needs, especially in working on the Pancasila student project, because the Pancasila student project is formulated in various themes that provide flexibility for teachers to choose according to the potential and needs of students so that students are motivated (Angraeni & Yusuf, 2022; Fitriyah & Wardani, 2022; Lestari, 2023).

For teachers, this freedom can be felt, when they can arrange the Pancasila student project module according to student characteristics (Hartoyo & Rahmadayanti, 2022). In addition, teachers' efficacy also increases due to a strong determination to improve learning, and this becomes a motivation in preparing for learning (Angraeni & Yusuf, 2022). In overcoming problems that arise in learning, student involvement has become an investment in determining solutions for their learning (Anis & Anwar, 2020). The principle of flexibility and freedom given in the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum has increased student and teacher motivation, making the learning atmosphere more conducive, especially, the development of soft-skills and student character.

4. Supporting Meaningfulness in Learning

There are 6 perceptions that become indicators and with an importance average level of 2.71 about teacher perceptions suggest an effort to explore learning so that it leads to a fun and meaningful learning atmosphere. Learning in a Merdeka curriculum requires student activeness to be directly involved in the project through the study of information obtained from various sources so as to provide convenience and meaningfulness that is beneficial to students (Fitriyah & Wardani, 2022; Lestari, 2023; Rizaldi & Fatimah, 2022; Sari et al., 2023). Basically, the Merdeka curriculum provides convenience and comfort for students to be able to explore their learning, thus finding an understanding of the material being studied and obtaining information that is relevant to the needs of the Pancasila student project that they must complete. Through these efforts, it increasingly provides a way for students to get the benefits of what they have learned.

5. Supporting Individual Independence

There are 5 perceptions that become indicators and with an importance average level of 2.01. In the aspect of independence, teachers' perceptions suggest that there is freedom of opinion and courage to take responsibility and the determination of learning time allocations that are annual rather than weekly, thus further supporting

the independence of learning and the learning process for teachers and students (Azita et al., 2023). The element of having the courage to argue and be responsible is a reflection of the success of learning (Fitriyah & Wardani, 2022). In addition, through student activeness in opinion, it will foster broad insights and be open to change (Lestari, 2023). With regard to responsible individuals, it is an effort to reflect on the experiences gained by students in everyday life (Hartoyo & Rahmadayanti, 2022), so that what is learned has value for their progress and independence.

Nowadays, independence is important because the use of technology has created social problems to be solved according to positive individual needs and good values. Therefore, the character of a Merdeka individual is a personality that respects differences, is responsible for the tasks completed and dares to express ideas in every discussion and opportunity that can build student knowledge.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The Merdeka curriculum is an effort made by the government through its policies to overcome all the weaknesses that arise in learning and implementing the 2013 curriculum. This is intended to provide more freedom and convenience for teachers and students in learning, especially in dealing with the past COVID-19 Pandemic situation. In every change, various responses have emerged about the advantages of the Merdeka curriculum after implementation, as well as for teachers in the city of Padang, West Sumatra, especially at the junior high school level.

This article can be written because of the help and cooperation of junior high school teachers in the city of Padang. We thank you for all the perceptions that have been expressed.

Recommendations are given to educational practitioners that curriculum change is the government's effort to improve education, therefore, it needs the cooperation of all stakeholders in making these changes a success according to the desired expectations. For future researchers, the findings in this study are limited to the perceptions of teachers in Padang city and only at the junior high school level. It is hoped that future researchers will study and discuss such more broadly so that the consensus given can really be generalised.

For the community, it is hoped for their concern and participation in the success of government policies to advance education as expected. The research that can be

recommended as a follow-up to the results of this study is aimed at the implementation of critical thinking for students in the success of the Pancasila student profile strengthening project (P5).

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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