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ANALYSIS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN THE TRANSFORMATION TOWARDS A DEEP LEARNING APPROACH

Nia Anggita[1], Pipin Angela[2], Adlina Nur Rohmah, Dinda Restya[3], Awalina Barokah[4], Bramianto Setiawan[5]

[1,2,3,4,5]Department of Elementary Teacher Education, Universitas Pelita Bangsa, Indonesia
[5]sbramianto@pelitabangsa.ac.id

Keyword

Merdeka Curriculum, deep learning, elementary school teachers, learning ransformation.

Abstract

*This study aims to analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*) in elementary schools and the extent to which its application supports the transformation of learning toward a deep learning approach. The Merdeka Curriculum is designed to create flexible, contextual, and student-centered learning, while deep learning emphasizes the development of deep understanding, critical thinking, and reflection. This research employed a descriptive quantitative approach, using a questionnaire distributed to elementary school teachers via Google Form. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques in the form of percentages and mean achievement scores. The findings indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is in the high category, with most teachers demonstrating the application of deep learning strategies in their teaching practices. Teachers with longer teaching experience tend to achieve higher scores in both aspects. These results suggest a positive relationship between teaching experience and teachers' readiness to transform learning. Therefore, continuous training and pedagogical mentoring should be enhanced, particularly for teachers with shorter work experience, to ensure the equitable and effective implementation of both the Merdeka Curriculum and deep learning.*

INTRODUCTION

Education is a developmental process aimed at guiding learners, both physically and mentally, from their natural state toward becoming better individuals in the future (Jannah, Fathuddin, & Zahra, 2022). In the 2022/2023 academic year, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology officially began implementing the Merdeka Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) in various educational institutions across Indonesia (Alimuddin, 2023). This curriculum is designed to create a contextual, creative, and inclusive learning process, enabling students to be well-prepared for the challenges of the 21st century (Thana & Hanipah, 2023; Rahmawati & Lestari, 2024). Accordingly, this educational transformation is necessary to produce a generation that not only master's knowledge but also possesses critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability (Siregar, 2024).

However, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum still faces challenges, particularly regarding teacher readiness. Supriyadi (2023), as cited in Monaliza and Marta (2024), reported that only 40% of teachers feel prepared to apply the curriculum, indicating the need for more intensive and continuous training to ensure successful implementation in the field. This is consistent with findings by Handayani and Putra (2023), who highlighted that many educators still require technical guidance and mentoring to apply the curriculum effectively. Without adequate readiness and support, the transformation of learning requiring deep understanding, reflection, and critical thinking will be difficult to achieve optimally.

Deep learning, as an instructional approach, aims to shift the paradigm from traditional learning, which focuses on rote memorization and repetition, toward a more constructive process that promotes meaningful reflection and higher-order thinking (Mutmainnah, Adrias, & Zulkarnaini, 2025; Widodo & Kurniawan, 2024). Studies have shown its positive effects in elementary education. Suar (2024) found that students engaged in deep learning are better able to connect learning materials to personal experiences, making learning more contextual. Hidayat (2025) demonstrated that it not only improves learning outcomes but also builds persistence in understanding content comprehensively. Hasanah and Pujianti (2025) noted that classrooms applying this approach tend to be more interactive and enjoyable. Similarly, research by Darmawan (2024) confirmed that deep learning fosters students' ability to integrate concepts across subjects, strengthening their problem-solving skills.

Despite its potential, the successful implementation of deep learning heavily depends on teachers' pedagogical and conceptual readiness. Hendrianty et al. (2024) emphasized that teachers play a central role as designers and facilitators of reflective learning experiences. Without sufficient preparation, educational transformation will not be optimal. This aligns with Yunita et al. (2023), who stressed that curriculum reform must be relevant to societal needs and contemporary changes, while also supported by teacher competence and school culture. Furthermore, Latifah and Pratama (2023) argued that a supportive learning environment, adequate facilities, and collaborative school culture are essential for sustaining deep learning practices.

The integration of the Merdeka Curriculum with deep learning is highly feasible since both share aligned principles—conceptual, reflective, and contextual learning. The Merdeka Curriculum offers flexibility in exploring content, while deep learning directs this process toward more profound and lasting meaning (Fauzi, 2024). However, this integration will not occur automatically without sufficient teacher preparedness and adequate systemic support.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools and examine the extent to which it supports the transformation toward a deep learning approach. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on mapping teacher readiness and practice in integrating deep learning principles within the Merdeka Curriculum framework, thereby providing empirical evidence and recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of curriculum transformation in Indonesia's primary education context.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive quantitative design to objectively describe the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools and its support for the transformation toward a deep learning approach. The research was conducted in several elementary schools in Bekasi Regency with 15 teacher respondents selected through purposive sampling, based on the criteria of being active teachers directly involved in the curriculum's implementation for at least two semesters.

The research instrument was a closed-ended questionnaire using a 4-point Likert scale, distributed via Google Form. The questionnaire consisted of two main sections: (1) indicators of Merdeka Curriculum implementation, including teacher understanding of its principles, lesson planning, flexible and contextual teaching, development of the Pancasila Student Profile, and use of formative and summative assessments; and (2) indicators of readiness and application of the deep learning approach, including the use of higher-order thinking strategies, meaning-making and reflection, active student engagement, and teacher preparedness in designing deep learning lessons.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics by calculating the percentage of achievement scores compared to the maximum possible score, classified into four categories: very high (81–100%), high (61–80%), moderate (41–60%), and low (≤40%).

RESULTS

The analysis shows that teachers with more than five years of teaching experience tend to have high achievement rates in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and applying deep learning approaches. The category of "more than 10 years" recorded the highest achievement with an average of 91.7% for Merdeka Curriculum implementation and 96.7% for deep learning. This was followed by the "3–5 years" category, which showed similarly high results, even slightly higher in the deep learning aspect.

Meanwhile, teachers with 6–10 years of experience demonstrated good performance but remained below the two previous groups. In contrast, teachers with less than 3 years of experience had the lowest achievement rates, especially in deep learning implementation, which was below 55%. These findings indicate that teaching experience influences teachers' readiness to transform learning toward a deep learning approach.

Table 1. Achievement Rates of Teachers in Implementing

No.	Theaching Experience	Merdeka Curriculum	Deep Learning
1.	< 3 years	68.1%	53.9%
2.	3–5 years	92.1%	95.9%
3.	6–10 years	76.6%	71.2%
4.	> 10 years	95.7%	96.7%

DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals that teachers with 3–5 years of experience achieved the highest implementation score of the Merdeka Curriculum and deep learning approach (84.38%), followed closely by those with more than 10 years (82.50%). Teachers with 6–10 years scored 79.38%, while those with less than 3 years had the lowest (78.13%).

These findings align with Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, which emphasizes that teaching expertise grows through social interaction, accumulated pedagogical experience, and reflective practice. Mid-career and senior teachers may have developed adaptive strategies and deeper pedagogical content knowledge, enabling them to integrate deep learning principles more effectively. Conversely, novice teachers may still be in the process of building classroom management skills and adapting to student-centered approaches, which can limit their effectiveness in applying the Merdeka Curriculum.

The results also suggest that the transition from conventional to deep learning-oriented instruction may be challenging for teachers in the 6–10 year range, possibly due to entrenched instructional habits formed under the previous curriculum. This supports Fullan's change theory, which highlights that successful curriculum transformation requires not only policy change but also continuous professional learning, mentoring, and practical support for teachers at different career stages.

CONCLUSION

Teachers with 3–5 years of experience showed the highest mastery in applying Merdeka curriculum and deep learning (84.38%), highlighting that mid-career educators are both experienced and adaptable. The study's novelty lies in identifying this career stage as optimal for curriculum transformation. It is recommended to design targeted training based on teachers' career phases to ensure effective and sustainable implementation.

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