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The Influence of Early Childhood Education Teachers' Adaptability on the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum

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Received : October 29, 2024 Revised : November 29, 2024 Accepted : December 4, 2024	This study aims to analyze the influence of early childhood teachers' adaptability on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in North Konawe Regency, with a focus on the obstacles and opportunities faced by teachers in implementing curriculum changes. The curriculum is designed to improve the quality of education in Indonesia, especially in early childhood education. Teacher adaptability is the key to success in implementing this curriculum. This study uses a mix methods method with a sequential explanatory approach, combining quantitative and qualitative. The sample was taken using cluster random sampling with the Slovin formula, involving 143 early childhood teachers through a Google Form questionnaire. Qualitative data were obtained from indepth interviews with six teachers from three sub-districts. Quantitative analysis used interactive techniques. The results showed that early childhood teachers' adaptability had a significant effect on the success of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation with a significance value of $0.000 < 0.05$. Several schools have started implementing the curriculum with strategies such as attending training, although not yet fully optimal. The main obstacles faced are limited training and resources, while opportunities arise from government support and the use of technology to improve teacher skills. This study contributes to more effective teacher adaptation strategies for the sustainability of curriculum implementation.			
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INTRODUCTION

The curriculum is one of the important elements in the Indonesian education system which functions as the main reference in the learning process. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2013 Curriculum had been widely used (Maulinda, 2022). However, the pandemic since 2020 has changed the education scenario, causing face-to-face learning to shift to distance learning and making the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum less effective (Asrifan et al., 2023; Matasik et al., 2021). Responding to this challenge, the government launched the 2021 Merdeka Curriculum to improve the quality of education through learning innovation (Fitriyah & Wardani, 2022). This curriculum change shows the importance of adjusting the education system to developments in the era, society, and technology



(Hehakaya & Pollatu, 2022; Yamin & Syahrir, 2020) . In the context of Early Childhood Education, teachers have a central role in forming the foundation of children's growth and development, so the ability of teachers to adapt to changes in the curriculum is very important. Research by (Purani & Susanto Putra, 2022) confirms that teacher readiness is the main key to the successful implementation of the new curriculum.

Although the Independent Curriculum brings innovation, challenges in its implementation still exist, especially in the preparation of teaching modules and assessments (Ardianti & Amalia, 2022; Jannah et al., 2023). Previous research confirms that adaptation to the Independent Curriculum requires thorough preparation and development. (Shihab et al., 2023). Although the government has taken steps to overcome these obstacles, teachers still face various challenges in implementing it. (Rusmawan, 2013; Suhandi & Robi'ah, 2022).

Therefore, this study is very relevant in the context of curriculum change, especially at the early childhood education level. Teacher adaptation to the Independent Curriculum is very important to ensure the continuity and quality of education and support them in facing rapid and complex changes. A preliminary survey in North Konawe Regency showed that teachers facing various obstacles in understanding the essence of "Independent Learning", including technical difficulties in creating teaching and assessment modules.

Adaptation to the new curriculum also prepares teachers to face the development of the times. Change is an inevitable part of life, and educators are required to continue to adapt and improve their quality. According to Hartanto (Celik, 2024; Setiadi, 2016; Taş, 2022), adaptation is a dynamic process that includes aspects of an individual's thoughts, feelings, behavior, and biophysiology that continue to change according to their environment. Adaptation is not only related to physical adjustments, but also the development of an environment that supports learning. (McGrath, 2012; Pinder et al., 2017) . Pulakos (Ulya & Hidayat, 2022) added that adaptation includes the ability to deal with organizational changes, culture, new technologies, and working with different people. In the context of the curriculum, adaptation involves adjustments by developers and educators at the school and classroom levels.

Several factors that support the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum include teacher competency improvement workshops, such as practice-based training on project-based learning methods and learning differentiation. This training is generally organized by the local Education Office. In addition, the role of facilitators, consisting of experienced instructors or expert assistants, helps teachers understand the essence of the curriculum through direct assistance. This training is expected to be able to overcome challenges, such as a lack of understanding of student-based learning, as well as difficulties in designing authentic assessments at the early childhood education level . (Bustari et al., 2023) The principal and curriculum team also have an important role in motivating teachers during the implementation of the curriculum. However, challenges such as the understanding of education practitioners regarding the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, as well as the creativity and competence of teachers in its implementation are still obstacles. (Rusmawan, 2013) Early childhood education teachers in particular face challenges in compiling teaching modules and

assessments that are in accordance with the principle of "Independent Learning". This adaptation process requires alertness and creativity to utilize existing potential.

Early childhood teachers as the spearhead of curriculum implementation face a significant adaptation task and become the main pillar of educational success (Ariga, 2023; Assingkily, 2020; Datnow, 2020). Teachers also play an important role in the success of a curriculum (Handler, 2010; Nevenglosky et al., 2018) and have the responsibility to plan, implement, evaluate, and follow up on the evaluation. (Sutrisno, 2022; Windayanti et al., 2023) . Therefore, teachers' adaptability is one of the determining factors for the success of implementing curriculum changes. In implementing the Independent Curriculum, teachers must be creative, innovative, and adaptive in designing learning activities that are in accordance with the characteristics, interests, and potential of children. This means that teachers need to compile varied teaching modules, design authentic assessments, and build positive interactions with students.

The success of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is highly dependent on the ability of teachers to integrate the values of independent learning, exploration, and project-based learning into daily practice, so that students can develop optimally according to their talents and interests. The essence of the Independent Curriculum is education based on nature and era, where each student has unique talents and interests. (Cholimah et al., 2023) . Independent Learning aims to reduce learning delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the 2013 Curriculum is still in use, schools need to prepare themselves to implement the Independent Curriculum. The development of a holistic, competency-based, contextual, and personal curriculum is important (Susilana et al., 2023). Thus, this study aims to explore more deeply the adaptability of early childhood education teachers in North Konawe Regency to the Independent Curriculum, as well as to identify obstacles and opportunities in its implementation. This research is expected to provide practical benefits, especially for teachers, by providing guidance in developing their adaptability to curriculum changes, such as through training or development of learning modules. In addition, the results of this study can help education stakeholders in designing more effective policies and mentoring programs to support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Early Childhood Education.

METHOD

This study used a mixed methods approach with a sequential explanatory mixed-method design. According to Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, and Hanson (Di Napoli et al., 2023) this design involves collecting and analyzing quantitative data first, followed by collecting and analyzing qualitative data. This approach combines quantitative and qualitative methods sequentially. (Azhari et al., 2023; Monica & Yaswinda, 2021) . Quantitative data were obtained through questionnaires distributed to 143 early childhood teachers from 42 institutions in North Konawe Regency. Furthermore, in-depth interviews were conducted with 6 early childhood teachers spread across 3 different sub-districts to deepen the results of the quantitative analysis. Documentation including taking pictures during

interviews was also carried out in the research process. This approach aims to support qualitative data collection by providing visual evidence that can enrich the narrative generated from the interviews.

The population of this study was all early childhood education teachers involved in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in North Konawe Regency. Sampling was carried out using the cluster random sampling technique with the Slovin formula which is suitable for large and grouped populations. (Suriani et al., 2023) . The selection of 42 institutions in North Konawe Regency using this technique aims to obtain a representative sample from the population spread across various regions. The institutions selected include variations in terms of geographical location, as well as the resources they have. The clusters in this study were formed based on sub-districts and types of institutions, such as Kindergartens (Kindergarten). Each sub-district in North Konawe Regency becomes one cluster, and within each sub-district, additional clusters are formed based on the type of educational institution, for example Kindergarten (TK).

Quantitative data analysis was carried out using simple linear regression, which is an equation model that describes the relationship between one independent variable (predictor) and one dependent variable (response). (Afriansyah et al., 2021) . This method is used to determine the direction of the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable, both positive and negative, and to predict the value of the dependent variable based on changes in the independent variable.

To analyze the influence of teacher adaptability on curriculum implementation, quantitative analysis was used. Qualitative analysis was then carried out through interpretation of the results of in-depth interviews, using an interactive analysis model conceptualized by Miles & Huberman. This approach includes the stages of data reduction, data presentation, drawing conclusions, and verification of analysis results (Pujasmara et al., 2023). This analysis process is then depicted in the chart in Figure 1.

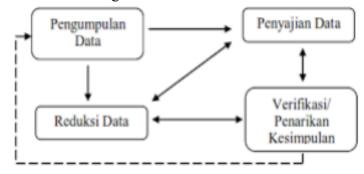


Figure 1. Miles & Huberman Analysis Model chart

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study focuses on the level of adaptation of early childhood teachers in North Konawe Regency in implementing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. The main focus of this study is to identify the obstacles and opportunities faced in the process of implementing the new curriculum. Where the results of data collection and processing become a source of information in answering the problems in this study.

Adaptability of Early Childhood Education Teachers Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics are used to see the mean value, maximum value and standard deviation of each variable in the study. **Table 1**, Descriptive Analysis Results

Variables	Ν	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Adaptability	143	32.00	60,000	44.0210	3.59865
Curriculum	143	49.00	90,000	65.7273	4.30064
Implementation					

Source. Researcher Data SPSS 25 Output.

The descriptive statistics results for both variables show the following: Adaptability: Respondents' adaptability scores ranged from 32.00 to 60.00, with an average of 44.0210 and a standard deviation of 3.59865. The relatively small standard deviation value indicates that the majority of respondents have a fairly uniform level of adaptability. Curriculum Implementation: Curriculum implementation scores ranged from 49.00 to 90.00, with an average of 65.7273 and a standard deviation of 4.30064. Although there was slightly greater variation, these data indicate that most respondents had a good level of curriculum implementation.

The difference in standard deviation between these two variables is influenced by several factors. The variable "adaptability" has a narrower range of values, so the standard deviation is smaller, indicating a more uniform data distribution. In contrast, in the variable "curriculum implementation," the wider range of values and the possibility of outliers, such as the diversity of teachers' ways of implementing the Independent Curriculum, cause a larger standard deviation. For example, some teachers may have a very innovative way of implementing the curriculum or are very different from the majority, which widens the range of values on curriculum implementation. Nevertheless, the majority of respondents still show a good level of implementation. Overall, the data distribution shows that the majority of respondents have good adaptability and curriculum implementation, with not too much variation. These results provide a clear picture for further analysis in the context of simple linear regression.

Simple Linear Regression Test Results

The results of the simple linear regression test calculation on the variable of teacher adaptability to the implementation of the independent curriculum are as follows:

Coefficient ^a					
	Unstandardized Coefficients			Standardiz Coefficien	
Model	В	Std. Error	Betta	t	Sig
(Constant)	31,548	3.379		9,336	.000

Table 2. Results of Regression Equation Model Testing

Adaptability	.776	.077	.650	10.148	.000
SPSS 25.0 Researcher Data Output					

It is known that the constant (a) = 31.548 and adaptability (b) = 0.776. Then the regression equation can be written as follows,

Y = 31.548 + 0.776X.

The regression coefficient indicates that every one unit increase in teacher adaptability will increase the implementation of the Independent Curriculum by 0.776. This positive coefficient indicates that the adaptability of Early Childhood Education teachers has a positive effect on the effectiveness of the implementation of the curriculum.

Although the results of this simple regression test provide an overview of the relationship between teacher adaptability and the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, it should be noted that the curriculum implementation process is complex. Various studies have shown that the success of curriculum implementation is not only influenced by teacher adaptability, but also involves other factors. School management support, for example, plays an important role in providing facilities, supervision, and policies that encourage teachers to adapt to curriculum changes (Putri & Sugiyo, 2022). In addition, ongoing training and professional development also play a significant role in improving teacher competence in facing the demands of the new curriculum (Huyen & Yen, 2022).

Another factor that influences curriculum implementation is a learning environment that is responsive to the needs of students. A supportive environment, including parental involvement in the learning process, can increase the effectiveness of curriculum implementation. In addition, mental readiness, flexibility, and internal motivation of teachers to continue to develop are important factors in dealing with change (Azhari et al., 2023). Research by Callaway- Cole & Kimble (2021), which involved 100 early childhood teachers in the United States, found that teachers with high levels of adaptability were more successful in implementing the new curriculum. Similar results were also obtained in research by Putri & Sugiyo (2022) which involved 113 kindergarten teachers in Indonesia. They found that teachers with high adaptability were able to create a learning atmosphere that was flexible, fun, and responsive to the needs of children.

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that although teacher adaptability is an important factor in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, the success of its implementation is also influenced by the support of school management, ongoing training, a supportive learning environment, and the mental readiness and motivation of teachers. Therefore, to support the effective implementation of the Independent Curriculum, it is recommended that schools provide ongoing training programs, improve communication between school management and teachers, and encourage collaboration between teachers in learning communities. By considering these factors, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in early childhood education institutions can run more optimally and effectively in improving the quality of learning.

Implementation of Independent Curriculum

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Early Childhood aims to provide freedom and flexibility to educators to design learning experiences according to the needs, interests, and potential of children. The main focus is on character development, basic literacy, numeracy, and strengthening local culture through fun and contextual learning. With this approach, children are encouraged to become creative, independent, and critical individuals, while maintaining a balance of cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical aspects in an inclusive environment that values diversity. Based on the results of the interview with Informant I regarding how to prepare for the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, the following are the results of the interview:

"Before being implemented, the school carried out a strategy or preparation by participating in the Merdeka Curriculum introduction training. The Merdeka Curriculum has been implemented in schools since last year, but its implementation is still in the trial and adaptation stage, not yet optimal overall" (Informant I TKN Pembina, 2024).

This statement emphasizes that although the Independent Curriculum began to be implemented a year ago, the full implementation process has not been able to be carried out because it is still in the adaptation and further preparation stage, both in terms of resources and the readiness of educators. This is also supported by the results of an interview with Informant II:

"The preparation carried out by teachers is partly by attending training, and its implementation is still in process. It is not yet fully optimal because there are several things that still need to be prepared, especially in terms of facilities and infrastructure that are not yet optimal to support the implementation of the curriculum" (Informant II TKN Oheo, 2024).

The results of interviews with Informants III and IV showed similar things:

"In my opinion, our curriculum implementation is not yet optimal, it is still in the curriculum adaptation stage. For preparation, there is still a lot that needs to be prepared so far, fellow teachers still often attend training and workshops on the Independent Curriculum" (Informant III, TKN Tanjung Bunga, 2024).

"So far, the preparation from the principal and we, the teachers, have taken part in training, and the implementation is still in the trial stage of the Independent Curriculum" (Informant IV, Ana Mokole Kindergarten, 2024).

Informant V from Lumbung Padi Kindergarten also provided a similar explanation:

"Because we are still using K13 and will be conducting a trial implementation of the Independent Curriculum this year, the initial strategy that can be carried out is to attend a workshop or training on introducing the Independent Curriculum, so that its implementation can be optimal" (Informant V, Lumbung Padi Kindergarten, 2024).

Based on the respondents' opinions, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the Kindergarten level has indeed started since last year, but is still in the trial and adaptation stage, with the aim of optimizing its implementation. However, several educational institutions are still using the K13 Curriculum as a temporary foundation while preparing themselves for the changes brought by the Merdeka Curriculum.

The results of the study showed that although the implementation of the Independent Curriculum was still in the adaptation stage, teachers designed learning strategies that supported children's development. One of the main strategies was to participate in training and workshops organized by the local Education Office. This is in line with research (Awwalina, 2024) which highlights the importance of training to help teachers adapt to curriculum changes. The implementation of the Independent Curriculum faces challenges such as limited resources and varying teacher readiness, in line with the findings (Huyen & Yen, 2022) which show that teacher adaptation is very important in the success of curriculum implementation.

Although there are still many challenges, schools are trying to adapt learning activities to local cultures, in order to create more relevant and contextual learning. Evaluation of curriculum implementation is carried out through summative assessments, such as assessments of children's work results and direct observations, which is in line with research (Callaway-Cole & Kimble, 2021) which emphasizes the importance of teacher flexibility in managing major changes in teaching methods. And although the Merdeka Curriculum is still in the adjustment and trial stage, the six educational institutions studied showed a strong commitment to implementing this curriculum. This implementation still adheres to the principle of constructivism which emphasizes the independence and creativity of early childhood.

Obstacles and Opportunities in Implementing the Independent Curriculum

The following are the results of respondents and findings of in-depth					
interviews that have been conducted.					
Table 3. Presentation of Research Results					

Na	Table 5. Presentation of Research Results			
No.	Respondents and	Questionnaire Results	Interview Findings	
	Informants	(Constraints and	(Constraints and	
		Opportunities)	Opportunities)	
1.	Respondent I and Informant I	There are obstacles, especially the problem of different implementations in each educational institution and different understandings among each educator.	There were no obstacles faced during the implementation personally. However, the opportunities that can be obtained after implementing it are improving the quality of learning in early childhood education, being motivated for further professional development (Informant, TKN Pembina teacher)	
2.	Respondent 2 and Informant II	The obstacle faced is that the process of implementing the Independent Curriculum requires time to study it in more depth, the opportunity to implement and master it is very large because materials and explanations related to the independent curriculum are widely available on social media and training has often	The obstacles experienced were partly in facilities and infrastructure, understanding of module preparation. While the opportunities obtained, the use of technology such as laptop media in learning activities. (Informant, Oheo Kindergarten Teacher)	

been held by the education office.

3.	Respondent 3 and Informant III	The obstacle experienced was adjusting the implementation of the new curriculum with the old curriculum.	Obstacles in implementing the Independent Curriculum such as inadequate facilities and infrastructure. Adjustment of new teaching methods. The opportunities obtained are the development of creativity and more innovation and utilization of technology. It is hoped that mentoring and training can be further improved. <i>(Informant,</i> <i>Ana Mokole Kindergarten</i> <i>Teacher)</i>
4.	Respondent 4 and Informant IV	The obstacle in implementing the Independent Curriculum is the ability to accept changes to the curriculum that must be adjusted to the conditions of the educational unit where the leadership must be able to accept and make changes to adjust to the implementation of the curriculum provisions with all thorough preparations.	The existing constraints on infrastructure, training that is still lacking while for opportunities that can be obtained such as improving teacher skills to be more skilled. The use of technology such as laptops and other facilities when teaching makes it easier for teachers to choose themes that are not monotonous. (<i>TKN Bunga</i> <i>Tanjung teacher informant</i>)
5.	Respondent 5 and Informant V	The supporting facilities for learning media are still lacking. With this new curriculum, the opportunity that I can get is that I am motivated to actively participate in every curriculum development activity.	Constrained by inadequate infrastructure and opportunities obtained in the form of a desire to develop themselves further to a more professional level. And improve the quality of children's learning in the classroom. (Informant of Nursuala Kindergarten teacher)
6.	Respondent 6 and Informant VI	The problem is, we whose kindergarten is on the island, have difficulty implementing this curkem with limited facilities. So, the opportunity that I can get personally with this curkem is an opportunity for further professional development.	Limited resources that are still lacking, limitations in understanding the new curriculum. Opportunities when the curriculum is implemented such as the use of technology and improving the quality of teachers. (Informant of Lumbung Padi Kindergarten teacher)

Source: Researcher Data 2024

Based on the table, overall the obstacles faced by early childhood are: teachers in implementing the independent curriculum in early childhood education institutions include limited resources, such as lack of training and understanding of the new curriculum concept, as well as minimal supporting facilities and infrastructure. In addition, adaptation to changes in learning methods that are more interactive and child-centered is also a challenge in itself. However, on the other hand, this new curriculum provides an opportunity for teachers to be more creative in developing learning activities that are in accordance with children's developmental needs, as well as encouraging more intensive collaboration between teachers, parents, and the community to support more holistic and enjoyable early childhood education.

The findings show that the main inhibiting factors in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum are the readiness of teachers and facilities and infrastructure in each institution. These problems can be minimized through synergistic contributions from the principal, teachers, and parents or guardians of students, who together create a learning environment that supports and supports optimal child growth and development. In addition, the second challenge faced by Teacher early childhood is the adjustment of teaching methods and the creation of teaching modules that are in accordance with the Independent Curriculum. Teachers often find it difficult to adapt teaching methods to the varying needs of their students. This difficulty is compounded by the need to develop teaching modules that are in line with the new curriculum, and are engaging and easy for children to understand. Limited resources and inadequate training exacerbate this situation, making teachers feel less confident in implementing new methods or modules. Support from the principal and collaboration with parents are essential to help teachers overcome these challenges and ensure optimal learning in the classroom.

This finding is in line with the results of previous studies as reported by (Lestari, 2024) which showed that although most teachers have a basic understanding of the Independent Curriculum, challenges in its implementation include limited resources, inadequate management support, and the expansion of new learning approaches. The Independent Curriculum, despite facing various obstacles, also has a positive impact on children's learning motivation and parental involvement in education. (Rahmaningtyas & Wijayanti, 2024) also emphasized that the main challenges faced by early childhood teachers include understanding the preparation of the Independent Curriculum, with many aspects that are still confusing such as school identity, preparation of core activities, learning objective flows, and curriculum components.

Despite various obstacles, there are great opportunities for teachers to develop their profession. Challenges in adjusting methods and creating teaching modules provide opportunities for teachers to continue to develop, especially in terms of digital skills. The use of technology in the learning process provides opportunities for teachers to improve their skills, adopt more innovative and effective teaching methods. Collaboration between teachers, principals, and parents can also create a more supportive and conducive learning environment, where each party can provide input and support to each other. Thus, existing obstacles can be turned into opportunities for professional growth and improving the quality of early childhood education. As educators, we are required to be able to adapt to various changes and challenges that exist. However, every obstacle we face in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum also brings opportunities for professional development. By mastering technology, collaborating with colleagues, and turning obstacles into opportunities for learning, we can continue to develop and improve the quality of education we provide.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, the adaptability of early childhood teachers has proven to be one of the key factors for the successful implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in North Konawe Regency. The results of the study showed that teachers' adaptability had a significant effect on the implementation of the new curriculum, where teachers who had flexibility were more effective in implementing changes. Schools in North Konawe Regency have started the implementation process with strategies such as training and adjusting learning tools, although it is currently still in the trial stage. The main obstacles faced include teacher readiness and infrastructure that still need to be improved. However, there are opportunities for professional development through the use of technology and collaboration, which can contribute to improving the quality of early childhood education. Therefore, teachers' adaptability and collaborative support are the keys to the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This study suggests the need for improvements to training programs and the development of teaching modules to support teachers in dealing with curriculum changes.

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