

## **Teachers' Perceptions of Curriculum Changes in the Sumba, Timor, and Flores Regions**

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**Abstract:** This research investigates teachers' perceptions of transitioning from Curriculum 13 to the Merdeka Curriculum in Sumba, Timor, and Flores. Using a quantitative descriptive approach, 180 respondents participated, including 70 from Sumba, 90 from Timor, and 20 from Flores. Data was collected using a Likert scale questionnaire via Google Forms, a widely accepted method for measuring attitudes and perceptions. The questionnaire was validated by experts in the field. These research findings show that teachers perceive the transition as sufficient, with variations in aspects like absorption, understanding, evaluation, and role perception. Challenges include insufficient information about the Merdeka Curriculum, impacting implementation and outcomes. The study underscores the need for proactive measures to enhance teachers' understanding and implementation while advocating for stability in curriculum changes, contributing to educational policy discourse and teacher professional development.

**Keywords:** Curriculum Change, Merdeka Curriculum, Teachers' Perceptions

### **A. Introduction**

Education reflects the level of a country's welfare and quality (Fortuna & Khadir, 2022). Education and learning will always follow developments in science, technology and societal needs. Seeing the importance of education for a nation's intelligence, the government pays serious attention to the education sector by allocating the education budget, making policies to improve quality and solving various problems at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels (Bureekhampun, Techakarnjanakij, & Supavarasuwat, 2021). Apart from that, through a planned, intensive, directed and efficient educational process, it is hoped that the next generation will have the opportunity to develop their potential within themselves to produce human resources that can compete globally (Kristianto, Susetyo, Utama, Fitriyono, & Jannah, 2023).

Among the many elements of education, curriculum significantly contributes to the quality of education (Thurzo et al., 2023). In simple terms, the curriculum is a

guideline for implementing education. This is in line with the opinion of Pramesti, who states that the curriculum is described as a plan of action or written document containing strategies to achieve educational goals (Pramesty et al., 2020). Facing the world of education challenges, curriculum rigour and implementation are urgently needed to improve educational performance (Tri Anggini & Clara Riana Dea Suryani Retno Wulandari, 2022). However, the curriculum is often a factor causing the decline in the quality of education. There are many criticisms of the curriculum, including that it does not meet students' needs, the curriculum content is too dense, and frequent changes make teachers have to work extra to prepare lessons based on curriculum provisions. Even though the curriculum has a central position in realizing the desired educational goals and objectives. However, the curriculum is dynamic and needs to be changed to meet the needs of each generation and be adapted to developments in science and technology. Curriculum changes can have a positive impact, namely that educators and students can learn by keeping up with the times. However, they can also have a negative impact, namely a decrease in student achievement because it is difficult to adapt to the new curriculum learning system (Fenty Setiawati, 2022). If the curriculum is developed according to the needs of teaching students, the education output will align with expectations (Mubarok, 2021). However, if there are still discrepancies in the curriculum, it does not rule out the possibility that the quality of education will tend to decline.

In the history of Indonesian education, the government has revised the curriculum 11 times. In 2019, the Covid pandemic broke out worldwide, and the government took quick steps by issuing a policy to simplify the 2013 curriculum into an Emergency curriculum. The independent curriculum is an issue that needs to be addressed to improve learning recovery. The government has reintroduced the policy of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in educational institutions as part of learning recovery efforts by 2022. Based on this, it can be explained that there have been two curriculum changes in a relatively short period. This change certainly has an impact on the education system in schools. The development and arrangement of the curriculum from the 2013 Curriculum to the Independent Curriculum will impact teachers' performance. Curriculum changes require educators as curriculum implementers to have a growth mindset. Educators must be able to differentiate between the contents of the old curriculum and the new curriculum. Teachers are the ones who know best whether the curriculum is relevant to the needs of students and the surrounding community (Race et al., 2022).

The difference between the 2013 curriculum (K13) and the Merdeka curriculum is that in K13, learning is centred on students and teachers as facilitators. Students are required to be more active during the learning process. Meanwhile, in the Merdeka Curriculum, learning is differentiated according to the stage of student achievement, in addition to intracurricular learning (around 70-80% of lesson hours) and co-curricular through a project to strengthen the Pancasila student profile (around 20-30% of lesson hours). K13 learning outcomes are assessed in cognitive, affective and

psychomotor. Meanwhile, in the independent curriculum, learning outcomes are stated in paragraphs that combine knowledge, attitudes and skills, things that strengthen and improve competence, and assessment results are used to design learning appropriate to the stage of student achievement. Referring to the explanation above, there are differences between the two curricula, so teacher preparation is needed before implementing the new curriculum. Curriculum changes in a short period have given rise to many complaints from teachers (Lastya & Wahyuni, 2022), including the lack of assistance through training or socialization of the new curriculum, not knowing how to implement the new curriculum, and educators not fully adapting learning to the old but existing curriculum. curriculum changes (Tampubolon, Gulo, & Nababan, 2022). The government should make curriculum changes and strengthen teacher competency so they are ready to implement the new curriculum. How can education be carried out well if educators are unprepared to adapt to the new curriculum? The presence of the Merdeka curriculum, which is still relatively new, with a level of socialization that is not yet optimal, especially for teachers in the outermost, frontier and underdeveloped areas, including teachers in NTT, has caused a variety of responses. As far as I can hear, some say, "We just felt comfortable with curriculum 13; now it has changed". Some said, "A change of minister will change the curriculum, and soon there will be a change of president; perhaps the curriculum will be revised again." Capturing what several teachers complained about as told, encouraged researchers to research to find out teachers' perceptions of the curriculum changes.

Perception is entering messages or information into the human brain, which is integrated with individual thoughts, feelings and experiences (Arini, Mudjito, & Hariyati, 2021). Because of this, teacher perceptions have a significant impact and influence the success of curriculum implementation. A person's perception of something will influence their behaviour towards the object or event they experience (Abdullah, 2019). Social learning theory views individual behaviour as an automatic reflex or stimulus resulting from reactions arising from interactions between the environment and the individual's cognitive scheme (Yanuardianto, 2019). Therefore, each individual gives meaning to a stimulus differently, even though the object is the same. How an individual views a situation is often more important than the situation itself. Perception is an assumption based on experience or knowledge, which sometimes differs from one person to another or sometimes differs from actual conditions. Knowing the teacher's perception of curriculum changes is an effort to see the teacher's desires or expectations and the suitability of the curriculum that will be applied to the learning environment. Based on the description above, the researcher wants to determine teachers' perceptions of curriculum changes in the Sumba, Timor and Flores regions.

The research has significant similarities and differences with previous studies, including those by (Tendrita & Kaliu, 2024), (Agustina & Mustika, 2023), (Novianti & Ahman, 2024), and (Gusnandy et al., 2023). All these studies emphasize teachers'

perceptions of curriculum changes or implementation. All relate to implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, also the research focus in Sumba, Timor, and Flores. However, there are significant differences in geographical context, research subjects, theoretical frameworks, and methodologies. The research in Sumba, Timor, and Flores covers three different geographical regions, providing a broader and more diverse perspective compared to the study by Tendrita and Kaliu, which focuses solely on Kolaka Regency. Additionally, Tendrita and Kaliu focus on biology teachers, whereas the research in Sumba, Timor, and Flores likely includes teachers from various subjects. The study by Novianti and Ahman investigates economics teachers, while Gusnandy examines Islamic Religious Education teachers. Regarding the theoretical framework, Tendrita and Kaliu use Wargito's theory, which includes five indicators of perception: absorption of stimuli, understanding, assessment, the role of teachers in the curriculum, and the position of teachers regarding curriculum changes. Meanwhile, Agustina and Mustika use indicators of changes in lesson planning, the teaching and learning process, and assessment. Novianti and Ahman examine knowledge, beliefs, and commitment to the Merdeka Curriculum, while Gusnandy examines the supporting factors for curriculum implementation. The methodologies used may also differ. The research in Sumba, Timor, and Flores may employ qualitative methodologies similar to those of Tendrita and Kaliu, but differences in data collection and analysis techniques can influence the results. The studies by Agustina and Mustika, Novianti and Ahman, and Gusnandy use different methods tailored to their specific focus and research context. Thus, the study "Teachers' Perceptions of Curriculum Changes in the Sumba, Timor, and Flores Regions" provides diverse and rich contributions to understanding the implementation and perception of the Merdeka Curriculum in various regions and subjects.

This research aims to explore and understand teachers' perceptions of curriculum changes, specifically the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, in the regions of Sumba, Timor, and Flores. This study aims to identify how teachers absorb, understand, and assess curriculum changes and their roles and positions in facing these changes. Additionally, this research seeks to uncover the factors that support and hinder the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in these three regions, with the hope of making a significant contribution to developing educational policies and teaching practices in Indonesia.

## **B. Methods**

This research is quantitative and descriptive. The sample for this research was 70 high school teachers on Sumba Island, 90 people on Timor and 20 on Flores. Total respondents were 180 people (Mulyadi, 2019). Research data was collected using a questionnaire assisted by *Google Forms*. Researchers developed a questionnaire using a Likert scale (Jebb, Ng, & Tay, 2021). The type of questionnaire used in this research is an open questionnaire. Before being distributed, the questionnaire was first tested

for validity by experts. The data obtained is processed using the following steps: editing, tabulating, namely arranging the data in table form, and data processing. Data obtained from distributing teacher questionnaires were analyzed using statistical methods, namely with the equation:

$$\text{Result} = \frac{\text{score obtained}}{\text{score maximum}} \times 100$$

**Table 1. Assessment Criteria**

No.	Score Range (i)	Category
1	$\bar{X} \geq X_i + 1,8Sbi$	Very Good
2	$X_i + 0,6Sbi < \bar{X} \leq X_i + 1,8Sbi$	Good
3	$X_i - 0,6Sbi < \bar{X} \leq X_i + 0,6Sbi$	Enough
4	$X_i - 1,8Sbi < \bar{X} \leq X_i - 0,6Sbi$	Poor
5	$\bar{X} \leq X_i - 1,8Sbi$	Very Poor

### C. Results and Discussion

After the research data is collected, the first step is standard deviation analysis to determine the range of categorization scores for the research results. The calculation results are as shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2. Assessment Criteria**

No.	Score Range (i)	Category
1	$X \geq 85$	Very Good
2	$70 < X \leq 85$	Good
3	$55 < X \leq 70$	Enough
4	$42,5 < X \leq 55$	Poor
5	$X \leq 42,5$	Very Poor

Based on table 2 above, it can be seen that the assessment criteria are determined as follows: a maximum score of 85 and a minimum score of 42. Those who reach the very good category if they get a score  $\geq 85$ , good if they get a score of  $70 < X \leq 85$ , fair if they get a score of  $55 < X \leq 70$ , poor if they get a score of  $42.5 < X \leq 55$ , and very poor if you get a score of  $\leq 42.5$ .

After analyzing the respondents' data, the results of high school teachers' perceptions regarding the curriculum changes from the 2013 curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum were obtained, as shown in Table 3 below.

**Table 3. Result of Teacher Perception Analysis**

No	Aspect	Results	Category
1	Aspect of Absorption of stimuli or objects from outside the individual	65	Enough
2	Aspects of understanding or comprehension	63	Enough
3	Aspects of assessment or evaluation	60	Enough
4	Aspects of the teacher's role in the curriculum	76	Good
5	Aspects of teacher position regarding curriculum change	63	Enough
	Average	65	Enough

Based on the results of the analysis of teacher perceptions in Table 3 above, teacher perceptions can be described based on five indicators, namely 1) Aspects of Absorption of stimuli or objects from outside the individual, 2) Aspects of understanding or comprehension, 3) Aspects of assessment or evaluation, 4) Aspects of the teacher's role in curriculum, 5) Aspects of the teacher's position regarding curriculum changes.

#### **Absorption of Stimuli or Objects from Outside the Individual**

The level of teachers' absorption of information about the Merdeka Curriculum received a score of 65 and was in the sufficient category. With this score, it can be said that teachers' absorption of curriculum information is not good. It is still far from the maximum score. The lack of teacher absorption of the Independent Curriculum can be caused by a lack of stimulation or information received by teachers about the Independent Curriculum. Based on the research data collected, it is known that of the 180 respondents, 58% of respondents had taken part in training or workshops, meaning there were 62% of teachers had not taken part in the Independent Curriculum workshop. If you take part in the Merdeka Curriculum training, do you and your teachers already know the Merdeka Curriculum? The answers from teachers who could understand the characteristics or description of the Independent Curriculum only achieved a score of 66.52. This means it only reaches the sufficient category. Whether the image is clear or not depends on whether the stimulus is apparent, the normality of the sensory organs and the time, recent or long ago. The respondent's response to changes in the curriculum received a score of 62. This means that it is in the sufficient category. The low response from teachers certainly impacts teachers' response and enthusiasm for learning the new curriculum.

The results of this research align with Wargito's views regarding the process of forming perceptions. According to Wargito, perception is formed from stimuli or objects absorbed or received by the five senses, including sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste, individually or together and further emphasized that perception is the final process of observing an object, which begins with the sensing process, namely

the sensory organs' receiving stimuli (Kandi et al., 2023). The individual has attention, then it is transmitted to the brain, and then the individual becomes aware of something. Based on the opinions of Wargito and Sunaryo above, it can be emphasized that perception requires information, whether information is conveyed via audio, visual or audio-visual kinaesthetic. WS Winkel explains that information services attempt to fulfil individuals' lack of information they need about something (Bebasari et al., 2022).

If we investigate further, why has independent curriculum training not been comprehensively provided to teachers? Referring to the central government policy (Kepmendikbudristekdikti, 2022) Concerning the Independent Curriculum Implementation Mechanism, educational units that choose the Independent Curriculum can implement it through three options as follows: 1) implementing several parts and principles of the Independent Curriculum without changing the educational unit's curriculum; 2) implementing the Independent Curriculum using teaching tools provided by the Central Government; 3) implementing the Independent Curriculum by developing various teaching tools by educational units. There are three options for implementing the Independent Curriculum for educational units that choose to use the Independent Curriculum in 2023/2024, namely 1) Independent Learning, 2) Independent Change, and 3) Independent. This means that the government legally allows schools to choose how to implement the Independent Curriculum according to the school's level of readiness. Not all teachers have participated in the training, as determined by local government policy and educational unit management. In this case, the school principal. With Indonesia's vast geographic problems, regional governments and educational units should be more proactive in providing training for their teachers.

### **Understanding or Comprehension**

Several teachers in NTT's understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum received a score of 63, which is sufficient. The understanding intended in this research is an understanding of the philosophy of the Independent Curriculum regarding process standards and assessment standards. The teachers' understanding scored 75, which is in the good category. Understanding of process standards received a score of 64 in the sufficient category, and understanding of assessment standards received a score of 65 in the sufficient category. Accumulative understanding of these three aspects obtained a score of 63. From this data, it can be said that the respondents' understanding of the issue is still limited.

The cognitive work process largely determines understanding or understanding. Cognitive processes include conscious mental activities such as thinking, knowing, and understanding, and mental conception activities such as attitudes, beliefs, and expectations, which then become determining factors in behaviour (Abdullah, 2019). Because the human mind is a maker of meaning. Understanding begins with perception. Perception is the process of knowing objective objects and events with

the help of the senses (Maftutah, Jannah, & Utama, 2021). Perception concerns humans' relationship with their environment how they understand and interpret stimuli in their environment. After an individual senses an object in his environment, he then processes that sensing so that a meaning arises about that object for him, which is called perception (Desmita, 2013). Arianto says that from the first microsecond you see, hear, taste, or feel something, you begin deciding what it is, how it relates to what you already know, and whether it is important to remember or should be discarded. This entire process may occur consciously, unconsciously, or both. Wargito said that after images or impressions occur in the brain, these images are organized, classified, compared or interpreted to form understanding. Good perception helps a person organize observations, differentiate, group, and focus on all objects (Sarwono, 2014).

The respondents' understanding will determine how they implement the Independent Curriculum in their schools. Based on the data collected, the level of implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum obtained a score of 45, which is in the poor category, so it can be assumed that the respondents' ability to implement the Merdeka Curriculum is not optimal.

### **Assessment or Evaluation**

The teachers' assessment or evaluation of curriculum changes received a score of 60, in the sufficient category. This means that respondents' understanding of the assessment model in the Independent Curriculum is low. The level of understanding of teachers is still not optimal, which impacts the teachers' low ability to make assessments or comparisons between Curriculum 13 and the Merdeka Curriculum. An individual's self-assessment occurs after understanding or comprehension is formed. Individuals compare the newly acquired meaning or understanding with the criteria or norms that individuals have subjectively. Individual judgments vary even though the object is the same. Apart from the respondents' ability to assess the differences between the Merdeka Curriculum and Curriculum 13, the respondents also did not understand the assessment model in the Merdeka Curriculum (Ilyasin, 2020). The assessment model is intended to measure student learning abilities.

### **The Role of Teachers in the Curriculum**

The teacher's role in the curriculum received a score of 73, which is in the good category. This shows that teachers are aware of their role in implementing the curriculum. Based on the indicators of the teacher's role put forward by (Arifin, M., Saehu, U., Rahayu, E., Nasution, I., Jamila, Wahyuni, S., Sitepu and Sanjaya 2008 namely, 1) As an *implementer*, the teacher's role is to apply the existing curriculum. In carrying out their role, teachers accept various policies of curriculum formulators. In the phase of curriculum implementation, the teacher's role in curriculum development is limited to implementing the curriculum that has been prepared. In this research, the teacher's attitude, limited to implementing the existing curriculum, received a score of 57, in the sufficient category. 2) The role of teachers as *adapters* is



more than just aligning the curriculum with the characteristics and needs of students and regional needs. In this study, respondents who said the role of teachers as adapters received a score of 71, which is in the good category. 3) *Developers*. The role of the teacher as a curriculum developer is that the teacher has the authority to design a curriculum. Teachers can determine the objectives and content of the lessons to be delivered, what strategies should be developed, and how to measure their success. In this study, respondents agreed with the role of teachers as curriculum developers with a score of 81, which is in the good category. 4) *Researchers*: The final phase is the teacher's role as a curriculum researcher. This role is carried out as part of the teacher's professional duties who are responsible for improving their performance as a teacher. In the research, respondents agreed with the role of teachers as researchers 80. Good category.

Successful curriculum implementation needs to be supported by quality teachers who can analyze, interpret, and actualize the information in the curriculum document and incorporate it into learning. For teachers, the curriculum is a guide in implementing the learning process. Therefore, no matter how ideal the curriculum is, without being supported by the teacher's ability to actualize and implement it, the curriculum will not be meaningful at all, and learning will not be effective. As the key to successful curriculum implementation, teachers play a role in the learning order (Alawiyah, 2013).

### **Teachers' Position Regarding Curriculum Change**

Based on the results of this research, it is known that the teacher's position regarding curriculum changes received a score of 63, in the sufficient category. Compared with the maximum number, the score obtained is still low or far from the maximum standard. On how the teachers responded regarding the change in the K13 curriculum to the Independent Curriculum, they received a score of 63 in the sufficient category. In the question of whether the teacher determines the content of the curriculum depending on taste, or interest and ability, the teacher himself received a score of 49, which is in the poor category. This means that teachers disagree if they develop the curriculum according to taste. The results of this research can describe teachers' responses to curriculum changes. Using a grouping of teacher responses based on the views of Hamalik, namely: 1) The first group consists of teachers who are responsive to continuous curriculum development activities and trials or experiments. 2) The second group is teachers who follow better and adhere to the existing or currently implemented curriculum without trying to make changes and improvements. What is good in the teacher's view is good for all students. 3) The third group consists of teachers, who determine the content of the curriculum based on the teacher's tastes, interests, and abilities. What the teacher is interested in can be included in the curriculum so that, in the end, the curriculum continues to be added to, resulting in an imbalance. Based on the classification developed by Hamalik, it can be said that the respondents in this research generally fall into the second group. These namely teachers follow the

existing or current curriculum well and are being implemented without trying to make efforts independently and proactively to learn (Hamalik, 2008).

The findings of this research provide valuable insights in the context of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. These findings encompass various aspects, ranging from the level of information absorption by teachers to their understanding of the philosophy and assessment standards of the Merdeka Curriculum. The research reveals that there is still a significant need for improving the distribution of information and training for teachers regarding the Merdeka Curriculum. Additionally, new insights are also found regarding teachers' responses to curriculum changes, with the majority of teachers tending to adhere to the existing curriculum without attempting their own changes. Analysis of government involvement and local policies also highlights structural challenges in the dissemination of information and training. Overall, this research provides a strong foundation for policy improvements and educational practices in Indonesia to support more effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

This research contributes significantly to strengthening the understanding and addressing challenges related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. By measuring the level of information absorption by teachers, identifying issues in training and information distribution, and analyzing teachers' understanding and responses to the new curriculum, this research opens doors for educational policymakers to design more effective strategies. Furthermore, by shedding light on issues in government involvement and local policies, this research provides crucial insights for structural improvements in providing training and support for teachers. Overall, the findings of this research not only offer a comprehensive overview of the challenges and issues in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and lay a solid foundation for policy and educational practice improvements in Indonesia.

#### **D. Conclusions**

This research assessed teachers' perceptions in Sumba, Timor, and Flores regarding the shift from Curriculum 13 to the Merdeka Curriculum. The findings revealed that teachers' perceptions generally fall within the sufficient category, averaging a score of 65 across various aspects, including absorption of stimuli, understanding, assessment, teacher's role in the curriculum, and their position regarding curriculum changes. From these results, several conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, it is evident that teachers lack optimal information about the Merdeka Curriculum, mainly through formal channels like training or workshops. This knowledge gap could impede effective implementation. Secondly, the low understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum among teachers may hinder its successful integration into teaching practices and negatively impact student learning outcomes. Hence, there is a pressing need for proactive measures from government and educational leaders to

provide comprehensive training to teachers. Lastly, considering the nascent stage of Merdeka Curriculum implementation and teachers' ongoing adjustment, maintaining policy consistency is crucial to prevent disruptions in the teaching-learning process. Stability in curriculum policies is vital for fostering effective teaching practices and ensuring positive learning outcomes.

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