



The Effect of Self-Awareness and Self-Management of Kindergarten Teachers on the Readiness to Implement the Merdeka Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

This research highlights the urgency of enhancing Kindergarten teachers' readiness in facing educational transformation through the Merdeka Curriculum. The study focuses on analysing the effect of: (1) teachers' self-awareness, (2) teachers' self-management, and (3) the simultaneous influence of both variables on readiness to implement the curriculum. Employing a quantitative ex post facto approach, the research involved 205 Kindergarten teachers across 17 sub-districts in Sleman Regency, Yogyakarta. Sampling was determined based on the Krejcie & Morgan Table using probability and cluster random techniques. Data were collected through questionnaires and analysed with multiple linear regression. The results indicate that self-awareness and self-management, both individually and jointly, significantly influence teachers' readiness for curriculum implementation. These findings confirm that the development of personal capacities is a crucial foundation for effective educational change. The contribution of this study lies in providing empirical evidence that strengthening self-awareness and self-management is not only beneficial for individual teacher growth but also serves as a strategic key in supporting the broader success of early childhood learning transformation under the Merdeka Curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

The Merdeka Curriculum is one of the latest alternatives in the Indonesian education system, offering a more adaptive, contextual, and student-centred approach to development. This curriculum emphasises differentiated learning, character strengthening through the Pancasila Student Profile, as well as flexibility in lesson planning by teachers. The urgency of teacher readiness in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is crucial, as teachers are the ultimate actors who ensure that curriculum ideas and policies are realised in classroom practice. Teachers who are fully prepared will be able to translate curriculum documents into meaningful learning experiences that are aligned with children's needs. Without adequate readiness, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum risks not running optimally, making it difficult to achieve the curriculum's ultimate goals.

For early childhood, the success of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum has a significant impact. Children have the opportunity to learn according to their interests, needs, and developmental stages. A learning process that is aligned with children's characteristics will foster intrinsic motivation, strengthen self-confidence, and cultivate independence from an early age (Sri, 2022). In addition, strengthening the values of the Pancasila Student Profile in Early Childhood Education (ECE) is the foundation for building the character of the Indonesian generation to be faithful, creative, critical thinkers, collaborative, independent, and globally minded. The readiness of ECE teachers in implementing this curriculum not only influences the quality of learning but also impacts children's holistic development experiences.

However, various studies indicate that teachers continue to face numerous challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Wiyani (2023) found that most ECE teachers are not yet prepared to implement project-based learning, a hallmark of the Merdeka Curriculum. Rosidah and



Pramulia (2021) highlighted the lack of teacher readiness in conducting authentic assessments. Research by Budiman, Mulzza, and Rahman (2023) in pioneering kindergartens revealed that teachers encounter challenges in utilising the *Merdeka Mengajar* platform and adapting teaching tools to meet children's needs. Meanwhile, Hidayat (2022) emphasised that the limitations of teachers' personal and professional competencies affect the consistency of implementing differentiated learning. These findings suggest that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum continues to face complex challenges, both technical and non-technical in nature.

Personal teacher factors are closely related to self-awareness and self-management. Self-awareness enables teachers to recognise their weaknesses, limitations, and emotions accurately, and to engage in effective self-reflection. Self-management, a continuation of self-awareness, enables teachers to manage their emotions, cope with stress, and stay focused on their learning goals. Goleman (1996) explained that self-awareness is the primary foundation of emotional intelligence, while self-management is a form of self-control that enables success. The advantage of these two aspects is the formation of teachers with more stable, adaptive, and resilient personalities in the face of curriculum change demands. Teachers with strong self-awareness can accept feedback, develop themselves, and effectively manage classroom dynamics.

Previous studies on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum have primarily focused on technical aspects, including authentic assessments, teaching tools, learning media, and project strategies. Research by Wiyani (2023), Rosidah and Pramulia (2021), and Budiman et al. (2023) focused on technical difficulties in curriculum implementation. Meanwhile, Huynh Van Son and Tran Lulong (2018) studied the relationship of self-awareness and self-management among elementary students, but did not relate it to ECE teachers. An analysis of these studies reveals a research gap, specifically the lack of studies linking teachers' personal factors, notably self-awareness and self-management, to readiness in curriculum implementation. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on an area that has not been widely explored in Indonesia, specifically examining the effect of kindergarten teachers' self-awareness and self-management on their readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum.

In addition to demonstrating novelty, this study also has strong practical relevance. Kindergarten teachers who can develop self-awareness and self-management will be better prepared to face complex learning challenges, from adapting teaching tools and conducting authentic assessments to instilling the values of the Pancasila Student Profile in students. Emotionally resilient teachers can also create a more positive, conducive, and inclusive classroom climate. This is important because children's learning experiences in early childhood will serve as the foundation for character development and long-term competence.

This study has two main objectives. First, it aims to fill the academic gap by presenting empirical studies on the influence of kindergarten teachers' self-awareness and self-management on their readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. Second, it aims to make practical contributions to educational institutions, particularly in designing professional development programs for ECE teachers that are more relevant to the actual needs in the field. The findings are expected to enrich theoretical insights and provide a foundation for comprehensive strategies to enhance teacher capacity.

METHOD

This research employed a quantitative approach with an ex post facto (causal comparative research) design. This method was chosen because the study aimed to determine the effect of independent variables, namely self-awareness (X1) and self-management (X2), on the dependent variable, namely teacher readiness in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum (Y), without manipulating the variables (Table 1). The research was conducted with kindergarten teachers in Sleman Regency, Yogyakarta, spread across 17 sub-districts.

The research population consisted of all kindergarten teachers in Sleman Regency, totalling 1,855 individuals. The sample was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan Table, resulting in 205 kindergarten teachers as respondents. The sampling technique used was cluster random sampling to ensure regional representation. The research variables were operationalised through indicators measured using a Likert-scale questionnaire with four response options (always, often, sometimes, never).



Tabel 1. Operationalization of Research Variables

Variabel	Operational Definition	Indicator
Self-Awareness (X1)	Teachers' ability to recognize feelings, behaviors, weaknesses, and strengths, as well as to conduct self-evaluation.	Recognizing feelings & personal behavior, identifying strengths & weaknesses, independence, making appropriate decisions, controlling thoughts/feelings, self-evaluation (Goleman, 1996).
Self-Management (X2)	Teachers' ability to manage themselves in order to achieve learning objectives.	Planning, organization, persistence, self-monitoring & self-evaluation, self-control, attention to detail (Zimmerman, 2002).
Readiness to Implement the Merdeka Curriculum (Y)	Kindergarten teachers' ability to implement the Merdeka Curriculum in accordance with policy objectives.	Curriculum structure, Pancasila Student Profile, learning outcomes, project relevance to outcomes, project-based learning, authentic assessment (Regulation of the Minister of Education No. 5, 2022).

The instrument used was a closed questionnaire, where respondents were asked to select answers that best matched their personal conditions. The higher the chosen score, the higher the levels of self-awareness, self-management, and readiness in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The instruments were tested to ensure the accuracy of the data. Validity testing was conducted using product-moment correlation analysis to examine the relationship between item scores and total scores. Items were declared valid if the r -count was greater than the r -table (0.305 at $\alpha = 0.05$). The results showed that most items were valid, except for a few that were eliminated. Reliability testing used Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The results indicated that self-awareness had an α of 0.812, self-management had an α of 0.889, and readiness for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum had an α of 0.924. All values exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.7, indicating that the instruments are reliable and feasible for use. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics to describe respondent characteristics and response distribution, as well as multiple linear regression to test the effect of self-awareness and self-management on teacher readiness in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Description of Research Results

The study involved 205 kindergarten teachers in Sleman Regency, spread across 17 sub-districts. The descriptive analysis results are presented in the Table 2.

Tabel 2. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variabel	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max
Self-Awareness	205	81.2	9.32	58	100
Self-Management	205	80.6	9.79	56	100
Readiness to Implement the Merdeka Curriculum	205	82.9	10.9	46	100

The results of the descriptive analysis showed that the self-awareness variable had a mean score of 81.2 with a standard deviation of 9.32, a minimum value of 58, and a maximum value of 100. This indicates that most teachers possessed relatively high self-awareness, although variations among respondents still existed. The self-management variable obtained a mean score of 80.6 with a standard deviation of 9.79, a minimum value of 56, and a maximum value of 100. This indicates that teachers' ability to manage themselves was generally good, although some still demonstrated lower levels. Meanwhile, the variable of readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum had the highest mean score, namely 82.9, with a standard deviation of 10.9, a minimum value of 46, and a maximum value of 100, showing that the majority of teachers already had relatively good readiness to carry out the Merdeka Curriculum, despite differences in individual readiness levels.



Tabel 3. Distribution of Score Categories

Category	Self-Awareness f (%)	Self-Management f (%)	Readiness to Implement the Merdeka Curriculum f (%)
Very Low	6 (2,9%)	8 (3,9%)	5 (2,4%)
Low	68 (33,2%)	66 (32,2%)	68 (33,2%)
Moderate	65 (31,7%)	73 (35,6%)	54 (26,3%)
High	58 (28,3%)	52 (25,4%)	63 (30,7%)
Very High	8 (3,9%)	6 (2,9%)	15 (7,3%)
Total	205 (100%)	205 (100%)	205 (100%)

These results indicate that the majority of teachers were in the low–moderate categories for self-awareness (64.9%) and self-management (67.8%). Meanwhile, readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum tended to fall within the low category (33.2%) and the high category (30.7%), indicating variations in readiness levels among kindergarten teachers.

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

The results of the multiple linear regression analysis provide an overview of the extent to which the independent variables influence the dependent variable, as well as whether there is a significant relationship between these variables. The analysis revealed that the estimated model provided a good fit to the data. The R value of 0.758 indicated that the independent variables in the model had a strong correlation with the dependent variable. The R² value of 0.574 showed that approximately 57.4% of the variance in the dependent variable could be explained by the independent variables in the model. This suggests that the model had good predictive ability for the dependent variable.

The F-test results demonstrated that the model was overall significant, with an F value of 136 and a p-value < 0.001. This indicates that the model exhibited good predictive power for the dependent variable, and the relationship between the independent and dependent variables was not due to chance. Thus, these findings suggest that the estimated regression model provided a good fit to the data and can be used to predict the dependent variable. After conducting the regression analysis, the following regression equation was obtained: $Y = 9.644 + 0.239 X_1 + 0.667 X_2$

The constant or intercept value of 9.644 suggests that even without the influence of the independent variables (self-awareness [X1] and self-management [X2]), readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum (Y) still had a baseline value of 9.644. The regression coefficient for self-awareness (X1) was 0.239, indicating a positive influence on readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. This means that every one-point increase in self-awareness leads to a 0.239 increase in readiness. Meanwhile, the regression coefficient for self-management (X2) was 0.667, also showing a positive and more substantial influence, meaning that each increase in self-management score contributed more substantially to improving readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum.

T-test

The results of the regression analysis in the previous Table showed that the variables of self-awareness and self-management had a significant effect on readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. For the self-awareness variable, the t-test results indicated that the regression coefficient of 0.239 was significant at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level, with a t-value = 3.21 and p = 0.002. This means that every one-unit increase in self-awareness score results in a 0.239-unit increase in readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. This finding supports Hypothesis 1.

For the self-management variable, the t-test results showed that the regression coefficient of 0.667 was highly significant at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level, with a t-value = 9.37 and p < 0.001. This indicates that each one-unit increase in self-management score increases readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum by 0.667 units. This finding supports Hypothesis 2.

Thus, the results of this analysis indicate that self-awareness and self-management are significant factors in predicting readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers with high levels of self-awareness and self-management tend to be better prepared to implement the curriculum. This study also



contributes to the development of more effective and efficient strategies for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

F-test

The F-test was used to determine the significance of the combined effect of the independent variables namely, self-awareness and self-management on the dependent variable, which is readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. Based on the data presented, the analysis results showed that the built regression model had a very high level of significance. This can be seen from the F-calculated value of 138.896, which was much greater than the F-table value of 3.087. Therefore, the regression model was declared to have an excellent ability to explain the variability of readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum.

In addition, the significance value obtained from this regression analysis was minimal, less than 0.05. This indicates that the hypothesis test results were significant and could be relied upon. With a significance level (α) of 0.05, the probability of error in testing the hypothesis was less than 5%. Therefore, it can be concluded that the regression model built had a high level of significance and was feasible to use in explaining the relationship between self-awareness and self-management with readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum.

Coefficient of Determination Test

Based on the information obtained, the developed regression model had a good ability to explain the variability in readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. This is evident from the R value of 0.758, which indicates that the regression model has a strong ability to explain the relationship between the independent variables (self-management and self-awareness) and the dependent variable (readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum). The R-squared value of 0.574 indicated that approximately 57.4% of the variability in readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum could be explained by the regression model. Meanwhile, the Adjusted R-squared value of 0.570 indicated that the regression model still had good explanatory power for the variability in readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum, even after considering the number of variables used in the model. Thus, the regression model developed was proven to have a strong ability in explaining the relationship between the independent variables (self-management and self-awareness) and the dependent variable (readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum).

The results of the study indicated that self-awareness had a significant effect on kindergarten teachers' readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. This finding is consistent with the theory of emotional intelligence proposed by Goleman (1996), which posits that self-awareness serves as the foundation for self-regulation, decision-making, and professional performance. In the teaching context, self-awareness enables reflection on weaknesses and limitations, allowing teaching strategies to be adjusted to meet the objectives of the new curriculum. This finding aligns with the study by Vain (2018), which identified a positive relationship between self-awareness and self-management ability among students. The current study, however, focuses on kindergarten teachers. This means that self-awareness is not only relevant for learners but is also essential for teachers as facilitators of learning. Similarly, Wiyani (2023) emphasised that the low self-awareness of ECE teachers in understanding the Merdeka Curriculum has become a fundamental obstacle to implementation. Thus, this study reinforces the understanding that strengthening self-awareness is a key requirement for the successful implementation of the curriculum at the early childhood level.

In addition to self-awareness, this study also found that self-management had a significant influence on teacher readiness. Zimmerman (2002) emphasised that self-management is closely tied to an individual's ability to set goals, maintain achievement, and adjust their strategies. Teachers who can manage time, emotions, and energy effectively are better prepared to face the administrative burdens as well as the complexity of project-based learning that characterises the Merdeka Curriculum. This finding supports the study by Fu'ad Arif Noor and Sultriso (2019), which demonstrated the influence of self-management on teacher performance in early childhood institutions in Yogyakarta. However, the focus was primarily on performance outcomes. This study strengthens those findings by emphasising the contribution of self-management to teacher readiness in carrying out curriculum changes, making self-management not only an individual skill but also a strategic factor.



Furthermore, the regression analysis in this study demonstrated that self-awareness and self-management, when considered simultaneously, explained 57.4% of the variance in readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. This figure shows that both personal aspects are strong predictors, although other factors, such as institutional support, resource availability, and school policies, still influence 42.6% of readiness. These findings confirm the results of research by Cholifah Tur Rosidah and Pramulia (2021), who highlighted teachers' low readiness in conducting authentic assessments, as well as research by Yohanna Kaldahema Budiman, Mulzza, and Rahman (2023), who found difficulties among ECE teachers in utilising the *Merdeka Mengajar* platform. Thus, it can be concluded that although personal factors play a significant role, external factors also serve as moderating variables that must be considered in determining teacher readiness.

When compared to international studies, the findings of this research are also relevant. A study by James N. Donald, Baljinder K. Sahdra, Brooke Van Zanden, Jasper J. Duineveld, Paul W. B. Atkins, and Sarah L. Marshall (2019) found that self-awareness was positively related to prosocial behaviour, highlighting the importance of intrapersonal aspects in social performance. However, in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, this study's findings expand the meaning of self-awareness, showing that it not only impacts interpersonal behaviour but also the professional readiness of teachers in dealing with curriculum transformation. Other studies, such as those by Katherine J. Mitchem (2001) and Briesch A.L. (2009), revealed that self-management interventions in students contributed positively to academic achievement. This aligns with the current study's findings, but the relevance is drawn to the teacher level. Thus, self-management strategies proven effective for learners have the potential to be adapted as approaches in teachers' professional development.

Overall, the findings of this study emphasise that the success of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at the early childhood level is not only determined by pedagogical or structural aspects but also by teachers' personal capacities. Theoretically, this study enriches the discourse on emotional intelligence and self-regulation by linking them to readiness in implementing curriculum policies. The results can serve as a basis for educational institutions and the government in designing teacher development programs that not only focus on improving technical competence but also on strengthening self-awareness and self-management. Therefore, the transformation of the Merdeka Curriculum in early childhood education has the potential to be carried out more effectively, sustainably, and with tangible impact on improving the quality of learning at an early age.

CONCLUSION

This study showed that self-awareness and self-management had a positive and significant effect on kindergarten teachers' readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum, both partially and simultaneously. Simultaneously, these two variables explained 57.4% of the variance in teacher readiness, while factors outside the scope of this study influenced the remaining variance. This confirms that teachers' personal aspects are key in supporting learning transformation within the Merdeka Curriculum at the early childhood level.

Theoretically, this research enriches the discourse on the role of self-awareness and self-management in the context of early childhood education, particularly within the framework of curriculum policy implementation. The focus on teachers' intrapersonal variables offers a new perspective in studies of curriculum implementation readiness, which have previously tended to emphasize technical or structural aspects. The results of this study can serve as a reference for education providers, teacher training institutions, and the government in designing professional development programs for teachers that emphasize the strengthening of intrapersonal aspects. Thus, efforts to improve teacher competence should not only focus on pedagogical skills but also on personal capacities, which have been proven to affect readiness in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

This research has several limitations. First, the study was conducted exclusively with kindergarten teachers in Sleman Regency; therefore, the generalizability of the results to other regions should be approached with caution. Second, the variables studied were limited to self-awareness and self-management. At the same time, other factors, such as institutional support, resource availability, or experience in attending Merdeka Curriculum training, may also influence teacher readiness. Third, the *ex post facto* research method used limited the ability to directly uncover cause-and-effect relationships. For future research, it is recommended to: (1) expand the scope of regions and sample size so that the



results are more representative, (2) include other variables such as work motivation, school principal leadership, or organizational culture to enrich the analysis, and (3) use mixed-method approaches to gain deeper insights, not only from the quantitative aspect but also from qualitative perspectives.

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