



Indonesian Teachers' Beliefs and Competencies in Implementing the Indonesian Prototype Curriculum to Promote SDG Goal 4

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores how Indonesian teachers align their beliefs and competencies with curriculum reform, specifically Kurikulum Merdeka and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) - Quality Education. Semi-structured interviews with teachers from elite private and international schools reveal key themes, such as holistic student development, innovative teaching, and curriculum flexibility. ATLAS.ti aids thematic analysis. The study emphasizes the crucial role of external professional support in addressing teachers' mental health challenges and promoting overall well-being. The research provides insights into the complex relationship between teacher beliefs, competencies, and curriculum implementation. It offers valuable perspectives for policymakers, curriculum developers, and educators striving for quality education. The research recognizes potential limitations, including its focus on specific Indonesian teachers and the qualitative nature of the study. Future studies could diversify participants and further explore the impact of teacher well-being on educational practices.

Keywords: *ATLAS.ti; Kurikulum Merdeka; Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4); teacher beliefs; teacher competencies*

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INTRODUCTION

The quality of education extends beyond resource allocation, emphasizing the importance of strategies and educators' autonomy (Biesta, 2021). The power dynamics between policymakers and educators are hotly debated, with policymakers shaping policies that impact education direction (Hooge, Burns, & Wilkoszewski, 2012). However, the practicality and effectiveness of these policies necessitate the input of educators, given their firsthand experience (Parkor & Alfaro, 2022). Globally, educators grapple with challenges in adapting to the rapidly evolving education landscape, transitioning from traditional to student-centered models (Watkins, 2022). This shift significantly impacts educators' professional autonomy, raising questions about the effectiveness of reforms (Watkins, 2022). Compounding these challenges is the weight of standardized testing, constraining educators and limiting their ability to address individual student needs (Schipper et al., 2018; Aydin, Ozfidan, & Carothers, 2017). The struggle to balance meeting assessment demands while providing a holistic education adds complexity to educators' roles.

The crux of the matter lies in the interplay between teachers' beliefs and competencies. Beliefs, rooted convictions influencing pedagogy, interacting with practical competencies that translate these convictions into tangible classroom practices (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). However, this interplay is intricate, influenced by personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, and the evolving educational landscape (Schipper et al., 2018). Understanding this dynamic becomes particularly crucial in the Indonesian context, where the alignment of teachers' beliefs and competencies within Kurikulum Merdeka is explored in light of SDG Goal 4. Such alignment holds the potential to create a harmonious and effective education system (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

The aspiration for quality education is a shared global vision that transcends borders and cultures (Hooge, Burns, & Wilkoszewski, 2012). This vision aligns with the United Nations' commitment to SDG 4, emphasizing inclusive and equitable quality education (UN, 2018). As the world's fourth most populous country, Indonesia is actively pursuing educational reform through Kurikulum Merdeka, aiming for learner autonomy and critical thinking (Pelaez & Usma, 2017). The success of this reform hinges on the alignment of teachers' beliefs and competencies, underscoring their pivotal role in turning policy into practice (Kohl et al., 2022). While teachers are increasingly recognized as essential stakeholders in education policymaking, misalignment between beliefs and competencies poses challenges (Schipper et al., 2018). Teachers' voices, informed by their on-the-ground experiences, can contribute constructively to policymaking discussions when aligned with broader educational goals and policies (Watkins, 2022; Kohl et al., 2022). However, the evolving nature of educational philosophies, changing pedagogical trends, and external constraints may lead to misalignment, emphasizing the need for ongoing professional development and support to bridge the gap (Aydin, Ozfidan, & Carothers, 2017).

The study addresses critical challenges in the Indonesian educational landscape, including curriculum implementation challenges associated with the Indonesian Prototype Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka). It explores how teachers' beliefs and competencies impact curriculum implementation, particularly in aligning practices with curriculum goals. Additionally, the research tackles teacher professional development challenges, investigating competencies alignment with curriculum objectives and examining the interplay between teachers' beliefs and competencies in the context of SDG Goal 4.

Existing literature offers insights into teachers' beliefs, competencies, and curriculum implementation, but a research gap remains. The International Handbook of Research on Teachers' Beliefs (Fives & Gill, 2014) is one of the few pieces of literature that offers a comprehensive overview of teachers' beliefs. More recent studies touch on the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices (McKenney, Bradley, & Boschman, 2011; Rietdijk, van Weijen, Janssen, van den Bergh, & Rijlaarsdam, 2018). Some studies by Indonesian scholars explore teaching strategies within Kurikulum Merdeka (Sihombing et al., 2021; Kurdiati, 2022; Sartini & Mulyono, 2022; Nugrohadi, et al., 2022; Herwanti et al., 2022; Haryati, Anar, & Ghuforon, 2022; Rizki & Fakhruhnisa, 2022), introducing innovative approaches (Supriyono, 2022), yet fall short in addressing the significance of teachers' beliefs and its alignment with SDG Goal 4.

Addressing this research gap, this study aims to investigate Indonesian teachers' beliefs about Kurikulum Merdeka and their alignment with SDG Goal 4, examine teachers' competencies in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka, and assess alignment or discrepancy between teachers' beliefs, competencies, and SDG Goal 4 objectives. These objectives hold practical significance for policymakers, educators, and institutions striving to realize the transformative potential of Kurikulum Merdeka and SDG 4.

METHOD

The study employs a primary data collection method centered on semi-structured interviews, delving into teachers' beliefs, competencies, and challenges related to implementing Kurikulum Merdeka and aligning with SDG Goal 4. The convenience sampling method was used to select five teachers from diverse backgrounds who participated in this study through in-depth interviews. They were chosen for their experience as 'guru penggerak' or transformative teachers in their respective schools. For data analysis, the study adopts a robust approach using thematic analysis facilitated by ATLAS.ti software. This process integrates both automated and manual coding, codebook development, and the application of tools such as Co-occurrence Analysis, Cross-code Documents, and Query Tools. During the analysis in ATLAS.ti, a total of 71 distinct codes were generated to capture various themes in the data. These codes were then interconnected, forming a network comprising 27 codes. The network

is constructed to ensure unambiguous connections between codes and minimize the potential impact of software errors. Within this network, five overarching parent codes were identified to provide a higher-level categorization for a more organized representation of the data. This network subsequently serves as a reliable reference point for conducting thematic analysis in the results section. Ethical considerations are a focal point, addressed through the acquisition of consent forms from interviewees and the consistent use of pseudonyms throughout the data analysis and reporting stages (Figure 1).

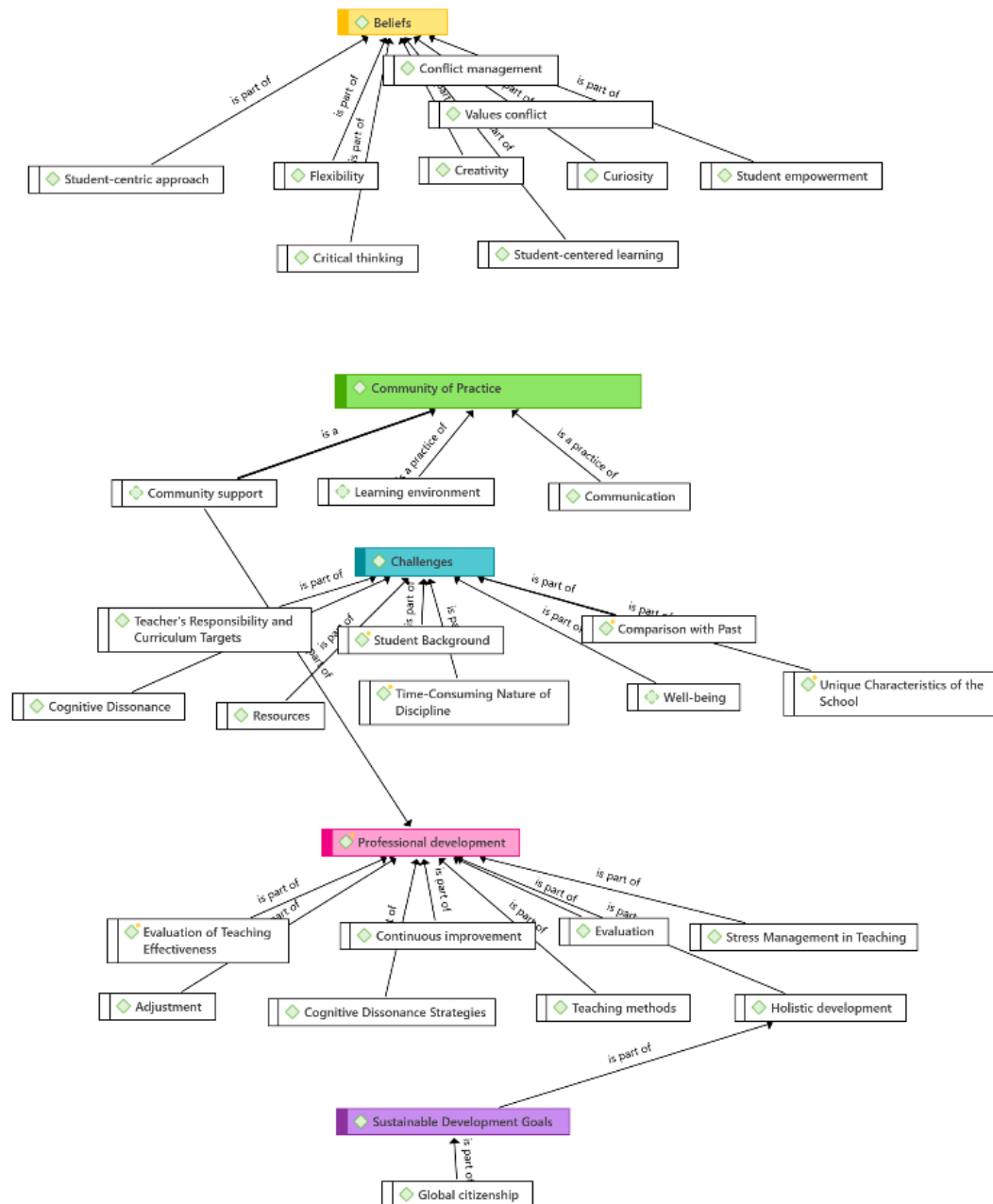


Figure 1. Codes Network

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis resulted in six themes (table 1), namely familiarity with SDG Goal 4, two types of dissonance, flexibility in curriculum and teaching materials, collaboration and support, workloads and teacher

well-being, and aspirations for policymaking. Overall, the attitudes toward Kurikulum Merdeka are predominantly favorable and harmonize effectively with teachers' beliefs. Their competencies in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka are supported by classroom autonomy and collaborative communities.

Table 1. Generated Themes

Theme	Key Findings	Quotes
Familiarity with SDG Goal 4	Strong familiarity, and alignment between beliefs and SDG 4 principles	Putri
Flexibility in curriculum and teaching materials	Autonomy in tailoring teaching materials	Suci and Dina
Two types of dissonance	Between personal and school values, between personal beliefs and students' abilities	Putri and Suci
Collaboration and support	School initiatives for teacher development and parental engagement	Arum
Workloads and teacher well-being	Challenges that come with the autonomy in tailoring the teaching materials	Mutia
Aspirations for policymaking	Stability in curriculum	Dina and Suci

Familiarity with SDG Goal 4

In the interviews, teachers displayed a strong familiarity with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) - Quality Education. They recognized the goal's significance and understood its implications for their role as educators. Teachers acknowledged the importance of aligning their beliefs and competencies with SDG 4 principles, emphasizing the crucial role of education in promoting holistic development, innovative teaching methods, and curriculum flexibility. The findings indicate that teachers view SDG 4 as a guiding framework for shaping their teaching practices, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the goal's relevance within the Indonesian educational context.

"The objectives outlined in SDG Goal 4 resonate seamlessly with my teaching philosophy. I am dedicated to not only the academic dimension but also to fostering the holistic development of my students. My aim is to nurture skillful thinkers and independent learners, ensuring that I provide them with the utmost quality in their educational journey." (Putri, INT-1)

Familiarity with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) can significantly enhance teaching practices by providing educators with a comprehensive framework for quality education. Understanding the principles embedded in SDG 4 allows teachers to align their instructional strategies with global standards, emphasizing inclusive and equitable education. This familiarity fosters a holistic approach to student development, encouraging educators to go beyond academic instruction and consider the socio-emotional, moral, and practical aspects of learning. By integrating SDG 4 into teaching practices, educators can contribute to creating a learning environment that prepares students to be informed, responsible, and engaged global citizens. It promotes a forward-thinking educational experience that addresses the diverse needs of students and aligns with broader initiatives for sustainable and inclusive education. These findings align with existing literature (UNESCO, 2019; Parry & Metzger, 2023; Mota et al., 2023) that highlights the importance of integrating global goals, such as SDG 4, into educational practices for a comprehensive and inclusive approach. The positive attitudes of teachers towards SDG 4 indicate a shared commitment to contributing to a holistic educational experience in the Indonesian context.

Flexibility in Curriculum and Teaching Materials

The adaptability of the curriculum under Kurikulum Merdeka is regarded as a positive shift. Teachers are afforded the freedom to tailor their approach according to students' abilities. While some schools follow a template, others have the autonomy to design their teaching materials from scratch. This flexibility allows educators to customize their methods and content, fostering an environment that can better meet the diverse needs of students.

“The teachers at the school are free to design our teaching modules. However, the school agrees on the format, so there's an agreed-upon format. But the content is flexible. When setting the learning goals each time we create a teaching module, we still use the goals provided in the teacher's handbook, but it doesn't mean we have to stick to them. For example, if the learning goal is too high, we teachers have to adjust it according to the student's abilities. So, in my opinion, it's more flexible compared to the previous curriculum.” (Suci, INT-1)

For teachers who must create teaching materials from scratch, the process is acknowledged as time-consuming. However, the effort invested is deemed worthwhile as it allows for a personalized and tailored approach to address the diverse components of the curriculum. Despite the challenge of crafting materials independently, teachers recognize the value of this dynamic and flexible curriculum.

“The curriculum's dynamism poses a unique challenge as the school does not provide textbooks, despite aligning with the national curriculum. Teachers, including myself, have the freedom to craft teaching materials from scratch. This requires a significant investment of time and effort, but it also allows for a more tailored approach to the curriculum's diverse components.” (Dina, INT-1)

The ability to personalize learning aligns with principles of student-centered approaches (Whalley et al., 2021) and supports the implementation of personalized learning strategies (Joan, 2013). The challenges faced by teachers in creating materials independently highlight the dedication required for this personalized approach, suggesting a need for additional support mechanisms to streamline the process and enhancing student engagement (Zhang, Basham & Yang, 2023).

Collaboration and Support

Teachers value collaborative networks, such as Yayasan Guru Belajar, Semua Murid Semua Guru, and Komunitas Belajar which foster shared learning among teachers. These collaborations provide additional resources, diverse perspectives, and innovative teaching methods. The support mechanisms within the school, including regular meetings and discussions among teachers, create a collaborative environment where experiences are shared, and practical solutions are explored.

“This is one thing I like about the Merdeka curriculum. Teachers are encouraged not to work alone but together. There is something called a learning community. In this learning community, I feel there is a greater opportunity for teachers to share. In regular meetings, we usually listen, especially to our superiors. Whereas in the learning community, we hear more about teachers' complaints, share more about our treatment methods, discuss administration, and teaching methods, and reflect more. So, we can learn more practically. It's like that in the learning community.” (Arum, INT-1)

Schools offer developmental initiatives for parents, including parenting seminars featuring guest speakers. These programs have proven successful, evident in the enthusiastic response from parents and their testimonials on the positive impact of the seminars in enhancing their understanding of their children. Parents express satisfaction with the seminars, noting that the expert insights have contributed significantly to their open-mindedness and improved comprehension of their children's needs and behaviors. Success is underscored by the fact that some parents are even eager to share this valuable resource with friends who are not part of the school community, highlighting the broad-reaching benefits of these initiatives.

“Some parents seem happy with the seminars. They often rely on personal experiences, so when an expert comes, parents say they become more open-minded and try to understand their children better. There was even a parent who asked, “Can I bring a friend who is not from our school?” (Arum, INT-1)

This collaborative environment is in line with the concept of collaborative professionalism, known to enhance student outcomes and teacher professional development (Yulianti et al., 2022; Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Mandarakas, 2014; Hargreaves, & O’Connor, 2018). The support mechanisms within schools, including regular meetings and discussions among teachers, contribute to a collaborative environment where experiences are shared, and practical solutions are explored. Furthermore, engaging parents through seminars has proven successful in enhancing their understanding of their children's needs, emphasizing the broader societal impact of such initiatives.

Workloads and Teacher Well-being

While relishing flexibility and autonomy in crafting teaching materials, teachers consistently express the difficulties and stresses associated with delivering high-quality education within the dynamic curriculum. These challenges, stemming from the need to fulfill diverse educational objectives, adapt to curriculum shifts, and independently develop teaching materials, can impose significant stress and feelings of being overburdened on teachers. This emphasizes the necessity of prioritizing teacher well-being in the context of educational changes and underscores the importance of establishing supportive mechanisms within schools (Ao et al., 2023; Dreer, 2022; Hascher & Weber, 2021; and Liu, 2023).

“Recognizing the toll it takes on my mental health, I have sought support both within and outside the school. The institution provides resources for professional development, and personally, I’ve taken the step to consult with a psychologist. It’s crucial to prioritize mental well-being, and seeking external support has been a valuable part of my coping mechanism.” (Mutia, INT-1)

Seeking professional assistance has proven beneficial for teachers, aiding not only in identifying stressors but also in effectively managing them.

“Consulting with a psychologist has been instrumental in helping me navigate the challenges and pressures of my role. It provides a confidential space to discuss concerns, gain insights into managing stress, and develop coping strategies. It’s an ongoing process, but it has positively influenced my overall well-being and resilience in handling the demands of the profession.” (Mutia, INT-1)

The proactive steps taken by teachers, such as seeking professional assistance and consulting with psychologists, highlight the importance of personal well-being in navigating the demands of their roles. These findings underscore the need for schools and policymakers to implement supportive mechanisms that address teacher well-being amid evolving educational landscapes.

Aspirations for Policymaking

Teachers express hope for better preparation in launching new policies, especially concerning curricula. The emphasis is on policymakers considering teachers' best interests, addressing challenges, and ensuring successful policy implementation.

“I believe having the teacher's best interest at heart during the policy-making process would greatly benefit educators in general. Better preparation, thorough consideration of the challenges teachers may face, and a comprehensive understanding of the educational landscape can contribute to the successful implementation of policies, including new curricula.” (Dina, INT-1)

Teachers also express their desire for the curriculum to remain stable and not undergo changes with shifts in the governing department, as they consider the current curriculum to be the most suitable thus far.

"I hope this curriculum can last a long time and not change when the higher-ups change. There have been many changes that I have felt but have not been felt by other teachers. I hope other teachers can feel the comfort of using the Merdeka curriculum." (Suci, Int-1)

Stable curricula provide teachers with a foundation for effective instructional planning and implementation. Curriculum changes can disrupt instructional continuity, impacting teacher efficacy and student learning outcomes. This aligns with established principles emphasizing the benefits of stability in curriculum, providing teachers with a foundation for effective instructional planning and implementation (Darling-Hammond, 2017). The desire for curriculum stability resonates with the broader educational community's call for continuity and consistency in curriculum design, minimizing disruptions to instructional continuity and optimizing teacher efficacy.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative study explores Indonesian teachers' alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) in Kurikulum Merdeka. Achieving its objectives, the study provides insights into teachers' perspectives, emphasizing their familiarity with SDG Goal 4 and its influence on teaching philosophies. This alignment guides comprehensive instructional strategies, fostering student development, innovative methods, and curriculum flexibility. Positive perceptions of Kurikulum Merdeka's flexibility empower teachers to craft tailored materials. Collaborative networks and support are vital for professional development. Despite challenges, prioritizing teacher well-being is crucial. The study suggests future research on well-being's broader impact and advocates policymakers considering teachers' interests.

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