# THE PERCEPTION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS OF MERDEKA BELAJAR (INDEPENDENT LEARNING) POLICIES IN THE FRAMEWORK OF INCREASING TEACHER CREATIVITY IN THE LEARNING PROCESS

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze the perceptions of elementary school teachers towards the independent learning policy in order to increase teacher creativity in the learning process. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study method. The subjects in this study were six elementary school teachers, three teachers in SD Islam Al Azhar 5 Kemandoran and three teachers in SDN Srengseng 06. The results of this study indicate that the four *Merdeka Belajar* policy programs are positive towards teachers' perception. According to them, the policy can help improve teaching creativity. However, in terms of socialization and implementation guidance, support is still lacking. The supporting training programs for implementation also need to be further enhanced. Besides that, it is necessary to have a standard reference for teacher administration so that it can be understood and implemented properly and correctly by teachers in the learning process.

Keywords: Teacher, Perception, Independent Learning Policy, Creativity

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Education is an essential thing in the life of every human being. This is because education is able to improve the quality of human life in all aspects. Education also plays a role in the development of a country. Without high-quality education, a nation cannot advance and will eventually become underdeveloped. Therefore, policies that are in line with societal conditions and worldwide trends are required to achieve quality education. In this sense, Indonesia's human resource development can benefit greatly from education policy.

Through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, the Indonesian government has implemented ground-breaking policies to address educational issues, particularly in efforts to raise the standard of education in Indonesia to keep up with the times. Because it aligns the educational process with the advancement of science and technology in this digital era, this policy innovation is crucial. This policy is then used as a guideline for education stakeholders to develop their learning process at each level of education.

The Minister of Education and Culture, Research and Technology, Nadiem Makarim launched a new idea for Indonesian education, namely in the form of a policy called "Merdeka Belajar". Nadiem in Yamin & Syahrir (2020:127) states that *Merdeka Belajar* (independent learning) is a freedom of thought both for students and especially for teachers. This policy gives teachers and students the freedom to choose how they will learn. Additionally, teachers are allowed the freedom to organize curriculum and conduct assessments that reflect students' comprehension.

Since the end of 2019, precisely from December 11 to February 22 2022 the Ministry of Education and Culture and Higher Education has issued seventeen *Merdeka Belajar* policy programs which are expected to be able to improve the quality of human resources in the

education sector. The existence of this policy certainly has an impact on teachers because they are one of the important actors in the running of the educational process.

Each teacher views and prepares for government policy differently. If there is a positive perception, the instructor will be more eager to put it into practice; nevertheless, if there is a negative perception, implementation issues will arise. According to Shaleh (2008:111), perception is unique since it is based on one's experience, and everyone's experiences are undoubtedly unique. In addition to experience, Thoha in Wardani & Hermuningsih (2016:201) states that perception can be influenced by two factors, namely internal factors such as feelings, behavior and personality, prejudice, expectations, attention (focus), learning process, physical state, psychology, values , interests, and motivation as well as external factors such as family background, information obtained, knowledge and needs around, intensity, size, opposites, repetition, novelty, and familiarity.

The existence of the Merdeka Belajar policy according to Nadiem Makarim in the GTK Secretariat (2020) aims to create a pleasant learning atmosphere so that schools, teachers and students can improve their abilities and maximize their potential. Based on this, one of the abilities that is expected to increase is the teacher's creative ability in managing learning. Teachers with a creative flair can have a positive impact on students. A teacher is said to be creative if, according to Sudrajat, Setivaningsih, and Sarimanah (2020:71), he is good at spotting opportunities, enjoys learning new things, is receptive to receiving new things that are better, is driven from within, enjoys challenging activities, can come up with original ideas, benefit the environment, and can produce something new. A person is said to be creative without necessarily having to develop something brand-new and unique, according to Baron in Ali & Muhammad (2006:41), but rather can be a mixture of aspects that have previously been present in the past. Giving teachers the freedom to create the subject being taught will have a positive impact on the learning process in the classroom, especially for students, claims Sholehuddin (2010:75-76). In order for students to be able to effectively study independently, they will be given the flexibility to grow in accordance with their interests and talents. Along with actively seeking and processing knowledge, students will also make learning relevant as the teacher takes on the role of an imaginative facilitator. On the other hand, if a rigid system is used, it may limit the flexibility with which teachers can design the learning experience. The RPP simplification program, the teacher mobilization program, the mobilizing school program, as well as the independent curriculum program and the independent teaching platform are among the seventeen projects included in the Merdeka Belajar policy that can boost teacher innovation. However, a teacher must also have a solid grasp of the policy program in order to foster strong creativity.

According to a preliminary study conducted in SD Islam Al Azhar 5 Kemandoran and SDN Srengseng 06 (which have implemented these four policy programs), the knowledge acquired regarding these four policy programs is frequently changing and lacking, which affects teachers' comprehension. Additionally, it is believed that these two schools are not receiving adequate socialization, instruction, or guidance. Based on this, teachers' perceptions of the policies implemented, especially the four policy programs, will be impacted if the government does not provide thorough and equitable socialization, good technical guidance to schools, and an attitude of accepting openness from the teachers themselves. Therefore, researchers conducted research on "Elementary School Teacher Perceptions of *Merdeka Belajar* Policy in the Context of Increasing Teacher Creativity in the Learning Process."

## THEORITICAL REVIEW

#### **Teacher Perception**

Rakhmat (2012:50) argues that perception is the experience of objects, events, or relationships that are obtained by concluding and translating information. Leavitt in Sobur

(2013:445) reveals that perception narrowly is a view, namely how one perceives something, while broadly perception is an understanding of how one perceives and interprets something. According to Slameto (2015:102) perception is a process that involves the entry of information into the human brain. Through perception, humans will continue to interact with the environment through the senses they have, such as the senses of hearing, sight, touch, smell, and taste. As for the elements of perception according to the Ministry of Education and Culture in Alngulya (2016:30-31), namely selection, interpretation, and behavior.

There are three basic stages in the process of perception, according to Sobur (2013:447), including:

- 1. Selection stage. At this stage, the sensory organs undergo a process of selecting stimuli from external or internal sources, which can vary in intensity and type.
- 2. Interpretation, is the process of managing information so that it has meaning for someone. This stage is influenced by several factors such as past experience, motivation, character, intelligence, and a certain value. Interpretation can also be influenced by a person's ability to classify the information he receives, namely the process of reducing complex information to simple ones.
- 3. After the process of interpretation and perception, both of them will form a behavior as a reaction. So, perception is the selection, interpretation, and rounding of information that arrives.

In addition, Sobur (2013:452-455) asserts that a person's perspective is influenced by two factors: Internal elements are those that are personal to an individual, such as psychological needs, history, experiences, personality, and self-acceptance. Contrarily, external elements are those that come from outside the person, such as intensity, size, contrast, motion, repetition, familiarity, and novelty.

#### Policy

According to Hasbullah (2016:38), policy is generally understood to be a formulation of governmental decrees that serves as a model for conduct when addressing a problem when there are objectives, plans, and programs that must be implemented. According to Nata (2010:393), a policy is a directive or a method developed to address a problem that is being faced. In contrast to laws and regulations, policies are more malleable and interpretive, even though they restrict what is allowed and what is not allowed, according to Arwildayanto, Arifin, and Warni (2018:6). Political scientist Harold-Lasswell and philosopher Abraham Kaplan in Miftah Thoha (2005:60) revealed that policies or *policies are projected programs of goals, values, and practices. Policy can be formulated as a projected program of goals, values and practices.* Meanwhile, in the view of Carl Frederick "*it is essential for the policy concept that there be a goal, objective, or purpose*". It is very fundamental for a policy concept to have a goal, target, and desire.

The birth of a policy will very much depend on the ultimate goal to be realized, therefore the existence of a policy is closely related to the political conditions or the rulers at that time. Therefore, in political science policy is often interpreted as a collection of decisions taken by an actor or by a political group in an effort to choose goals and ways to achieve these goals. Those who make policies have the power to implement them. (Ahmad Supandi and Sanusi, 1988:11) His position in government has required him to issue policies according to the position he is holding. In the context of education, it is also known as educational policy (Ali Imron, 1996:12-13). Educational policy means the policy of a government to regulate education in the country. Carter V. Good (1975:58) defines educational policy as a judgment based on a value system and several assessments of situational factors; these considerations are a general plan that is used as a guideline for making decisions so that goals can be achieved.

According to Suyanto in Daga (2021:1075), Merdeka Belajar is defined as independent learning, which is a government policy intended to be utilized as a guide in enhancing the quality of education in order to generate exceptional students and graduates who are ready to face future difficulties. Hermanu (2020: 4–75) claims that independent learning can be seen as a government decision to free the educational system from burdensome restraints and restrict the room for educators and students to be innovative. Therefore, the availability of Merdeka Belajar can give educators and students the freedom to select the subjects they want to study in accordance with their preferences and interests. According to Yamin & Syahrir (2020:127), the Minister of Education and Culture Nadiem Makarim, Merdeka Belajar is thinking freedom for both students and particularly for teachers or educators. The existence of independent learning liberates teachers and students to determine their own learning. Additionally, teachers are given the freedom to administer tests to pupils that are more in line with their comprehension. From the foregoing explanation, it can be inferred that the Merdeka Belajar policy is a directive issued by the government through the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, which acts as a roadmap for enhancing the current educational system in order to raise educational quality. This is accomplished by giving teachers and students the freedom to choose their own educational paths in accordance with their preferences and interests. Additionally, it tries to improve both teachers' and students' creative capacities. **Increasing Teacher Creativity** 

Moeliono in Pagappong (2015 3) considered that improvement is a process or method of enhancing abilities to become better. Uno & Mohamad (2011:154) argues that creativity is the ability to combine something that has never existed before and the ability to create new ideas and solutions. Indicators of a creative teacher, according to Uno (2009:21), include having a keen interest in learning new things, asking good questions frequently, offering many solutions to a problem, daring to argue directly, appreciating beauty, upholding one's own principles, being resistant to peer pressure, having a good sense of humor, having a vivid imagination, and being able to work independently.

## **Previous Studies**

- 1. Teachers' Perceptions of the Implementation of the Merdeka Belajar (Independent Learning) Curriculum in Elementary Schools. This research was conducted by Sunarini and Hari Karyono and has been published in the Journal on Education Volume 05, No. 02, January-February 2023. The research results indicate that: (1) Teachers have a positive perception and appreciation for the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in elementary schools. (2) Teachers play a crucial role in the curriculum development and implementation process in elementary schools, and the success of implementing the curriculum largely depends on the intensity of teachers' implementation in the classroom. (3) Teachers possess the ability to develop and implement the curriculum, as well as design classroom activities, with the aim of improving teaching quality and the learning process. (4) The socialization and specific training related to the formation of Pancasila learner profiles are not yet maximized. (5) Not all teachers in elementary schools are implementing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. (6) Not all teachers have IT skills. (7) The challenges in implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum are attributed to the lack of stable internet access, particularly in remote schools with difficult geographical access to the internet.
- 2. Elementary School Teachers' Perception in Utilizing the Merdeka Mengajar Platform. This research was conducted by Valentina Triscova, Febrizka Alya Rahma, Ajeng Aura Nurlillahi and published in Aksara: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia Special Edition: The 1st National Seminar on Language Month FKIP Unbari (December 2022). The research results indicate that teachers are aided by the Merdeka Mengajar platform in understanding the concept of independent curriculum. However, the

teachers have not fully utilized the *Merdeka Mengajar* platform, as evidenced by the interview results showing that there are still many features available on the platform that teachers have not been able to access.

- 3. Teachers' Perception of the Implementation of the Sekolah Penggerak (Catalyst School) Program in Elementary Schools. This research was conducted by Sri Marmoah, Siti Istiyati, Hasan Mahfud, Supianto, Sukarno and published in DWIJA CENDEKIA: Journal of Pedagogical Research, Volume 6, Issue 2, 2022. The research findings indicate that the level of perception among elementary school teachers in Sragen district towards the Sekolah Penggerak program is positively responded to.
- 4. Elementary School Teachers' Perception in North Jakarta and Kepulauan Seribu Regarding the Merdeka Curriculum. This research was conducted by Dendi Wijaya Saputra, Muhamad Sofian Hadi and published in HOLISTIKA: Scientific Journal of PGSD, Volume 6, Issue 1, May 2022. The research findings indicate that (1) Elementary school teachers have a positive perception of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. (2) There are five factors that influence teachers' perception of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, namely teachers' teaching experience, educational background, teacher training, previous personal experience, and teachers' educational degrees. (3) Teachers' perception influences how they deliver the learning process to students. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that teachers' perception of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum significantly influences the teaching and learning process provided by elementary school teachers.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the results of the research conducted in both schools, a description of the results of the research can be presented as follows:

1. Merdeka Belajar Policy

The *Merdeka Belajar* policy issued by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture through Circular of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 14 of 2019 concerning Simplification of Learning Implementation Plans, Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology Regulation No. 26 of 2022 concerning *Guru Penggerak* (Catalyst Teacher) Education, Decree of the Minister of Education, Culture. Research and Technology No.162/M/2021 Concerning *Sekolah Penggerak* (Catalyst School) Programs, and through Decree of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology No.56/M/2022 Concerning Guidelines for Implementing Curriculum in the Context of Restoring Learning have been implemented by the two schools. The existence of these four new policy programs can be understood as a guide or direction that must be followed to advance education and enhance its quality, and improve the existing human resources in schools.

The implementation of the simplified Lesson Plan (RPP) program in both schools has been going well. However, there has not been a significant perceived change because the simplification of the RPP only helps teachers in condensing their lesson plans. On the other hand, the implementation of the *Sekolah Penggerak* Program and the *Merdeka* Curriculum differs between the two schools. The program has been implemented in grades 1, 2, 4, and 5 at SD Islam Al Azhar 5 Kemandoran, and they are already in their second year of implementation. In contrast, SDN Srengseng 06 is in its first year of implementing both programs and has only implemented them in grades 1 and 4. Overall, the implementation of the *Sekolah Penggerak* Program and the *Merdeka* Curriculum in both schools has had a positive impact on learning. The previous learning method which used to involve merely listening to the teacher in the classroom, has become more enjoyable by

engaging students in learning activities outside the classroom, such as directly studying plants and their parts.

In addition, this program also organizes many projects so that students can experience direct learning, such as projects making regional specialties and projects making works of art. The works, such as food and goods made by students, will be exhibited so that all school members and parents can see and buy them. Not only that, students are also given more opportunities for students to discuss with each other and present the results of discussions or their findings.

Assessments are also made not only from the results or values they get, but also from the process they go through as well as the attitudes shown, can be included in the assessment. It's just that, for teacher administration there is still no basic reference from the government so this condition confuses teachers. The information obtained can also change suddenly so that what is given is incomplete and confusing which one the teacher should learn and understand.

2. Teacher Perception

According to Sobur (2013:447), the occurrence of perception consists of three stages: selection, interpretation, and reaction. In the first stage, which is the selection stage, the teachers in both schools have heard about the four policy programs. The information they obtained came from their respective school principals. In addition to the school principals, the teachers also received information from their colleagues and through social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and the official website of the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud) and the Ministry of Research and Technology/National Research and Innovation Agency (Ristek Dikti).

Furthermore, at the interpretation stage there is a process of giving meaning to the information that has been obtained. This stage is influenced by experience, motivation, character, and much more. Based on this, the meaning or views given by teachers regarding the independent learning policy are of course different and these differences in views are a natural thing as expressed by Shaleh (2008:111) that views or perceptions are individual because of different experiences. different for each individual.

The implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* policy and the simplification of the Lesson Plan (RPP) program is considered to assist teachers in creating more concise lesson plans as the components of the RPP become simpler. Regarding the *Guru Penggerak* Program, teachers perceive it as aiming to enhance the quality and competence of teachers through various training and materials provided. However, the implementation of this program is only available for teachers who are willing to participate.

Furthermore, the *Sekolah Penggerak* program is perceived to enhance the quality of schools, teachers, and students. With the presence of *Sekolah Penggerak*, the learning process becomes more tailored to the needs of the students, requiring teachers to be more creative in delivering lessons. The created learning environment becomes more enjoyable with projects that incorporate the profile of Pancasila learners, aligned with the students' subject matter. Assessment is not solely based on exercises or tests but also considers attendance, social interaction, and focus during learning. Similarly, with the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum and the *Merdeka Mengajar* platform, the focus of learning shifts to the students. Students are encouraged to be more active in seeking information and exploring. Moreover, students receive direct learning experiences through practical activities or projects.

With this curriculum the teacher can choose which material will be taught to students so that students do not receive too much material, the most important thing is that students understand the meaning of what is learned. The *Merdeka Mengajar* platform can also make it easier for teachers to find examples of questions or additional material for students.

However, in terms of administration, there is no basic reference from the government so that teachers still have difficulties in making the administration and the socialization provided is felt to be lacking and has not involved all teachers.

After the process of interpretation and selection, they both contribute to forming a reaction or behavior. The reaction given by the teachers towards these four policy programs is that they accept and support the existence of these programs. This can be observed when the teachers are given tasks and responsibilities to implement these programs, as their reaction is to promptly respond and carry them out effectively.

3. Teacher Creativity

The implementation of the four independent learning policy programs has led to an increase in teachers' creativity in both schools. This is evidenced by the improvement in the creativity indicator of enjoying learning new things. According to Sudrajat, Setyaningsih, & Sarimanah (2020:71), enjoying learning new things is an indicator of increased creativity. In line with this statement, Uno (2009:21) also states that a person can be considered creative if they have a strong sense of curiosity and enjoy learning new things. This can be seen from the actions of the teachers actively seeking information and further learning about these four policy programs. Additionally, the teachers are willing to learn and improve their teaching methods and innovate in their teaching to achieve the learning goals.

The second indicator is being open to accepting better new things. Sudrajat, Setyaningsih, & Sarimanah (2020:71) state that a person who is open to accepting better new things is a creative person, and the teachers in both schools highly embrace the existence of these four policy programs because these programs are considered a positive step towards improving the quality of human resources and education in Indonesia.

The third indicator is having responsibility and commitment to tasks. According to Dedi Supriadi in Yusuf & Nurihsan (2006:247), a creative person is someone who has responsibility and commitment to tasks. This can be seen from the teachers' attitudes, stating that every given task is a responsibility that must be carried out well. Likewise, the teachers take immediate action in preparing the necessary resources and learning about each program to be implemented.

The fourth indicator is the ability to solve problems. According to Dedi Supriadi in Yusuf & Nurihsan (2006:247), a creative person is characterized by their ability to solve problems, just like the teachers in both schools. Despite feeling that the program's socialization is inadequate, the information provided is often changing, and there is a lack of fundamental guidelines in administration, the teachers collaborate by discussing with the school principals and colleagues from the same or different schools to find solutions to the existing problems. Thus, the teachers are not just waiting for directions from the government but actively seeking solutions to the issues they encounter.

# CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION Conclusion

Based on the research findings, teachers perceive the four independent learning policy programs positively and believe that these programs can enhance their creativity in facilitating the learning process, resulting in a more enjoyable experience for both teachers and students. However, there are some shortcomings identified in terms of program socialization and implementation instructions. Teachers feel that there is a lack of adequate socialization and training to enhance their understanding of the program implementation. Additionally, from an administrative perspective, the absence of clear guidelines and reference materials from the government poses challenges for teachers in organizing their administrative tasks. These findings highlight the need for improved socialization efforts, comprehensive training programs, and clearer administrative guidelines to support the successful implementation of the independent learning policy programs in schools.

## Suggestion

- 1. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology through the Office of Education in each district/city to immediately carry out socialization and provide technical guidance regarding the substance and implementation of the independent learning policy for teachers.
- 2. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology to publish a practical guidebook for the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* policy to be disseminated to teachers.
- 3. Each headmaster should be more active in coordinating with the District/City Education Office regarding the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* policy, so that any obstacles in the field can be identified and resolved properly and quickly.
- 4. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology through the Office of Education in each district/city needs to create a complaint box or complaint service regarding the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* policy.

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