

## Level of Exposure Elementary School Teachers to the Implementation Merdeka Curriculum

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study aims to analyse the perceptions and level of exposure of undergraduate primary school teacher candidates to implementing the Merdeka curriculum. The research used a descriptive survey method involving 44 prospective elementary school teacher students from Muhammadiyah Bima University who were selected as survey respondents. Research data was collected using a questionnaire item that was numerically assessed and distributed via Google Forms. Then the research data, analysed using descriptive statistics and percentages to describe the characteristics of the data and respondents in seeing changes in the merdeka curriculum implementation policy in Bima City in the form of tables, graphs, or diagrams to facilitate interpretation. The research findings revealed that around 51% of elementary school prospective teachers fall into the category of moderate exposure to the Merdeka Curriculum. In comparison, 44% have low exposure, and only 5% have high exposure to information and implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This condition is influenced by several factors, among which the most significant factor affecting elementary school teacher candidates is motivation, with 67.4% motivated to explore the Merdeka curriculum. The survey also depicts the most common forms of support provided by the university, including the use of learning resources related to the Merdeka curriculum (41.9%), support through applications in courses (39.5%), support through the dissemination of information about Merdeka curriculum seminars, and some do not provide any support or mentoring (4.7%). Prospective teachers make various efforts to improve their understanding of the independent curriculum implementation policy, such as attending seminars and workshops on the Merdeka curriculum, seeking information independently from reading sources both from textbooks and online sources, discussing with lecturers, and being directly involved in the implementation of the independent curriculum.*

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis persepsi dan tingkat keterpaparan calon guru sekolah dasar jenjang sarjana terhadap implementasi kurikulum

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Merdeka. Penelitian dilakukan dengan metode survei deskriptif dengan melibatkan 44 mahasiswa calon guru sekolah dasar dari Universitas Muhammadiyah Bima dipilih sebagai responden survei. Pengumpulan data penelitian dilakukan dengan menggunakan item kuesioner yang dinilai secara numerik dan disebarakan melalui Google Forms. Kuesioner tersebut berisi butir-butir pernyataan yang berkaitan dengan implementasi kurikulum Merdeka di sekolah dasar. Selanjutnya data penelitian, dianalisis dengan menggunakan statistik deskriptif dan persentase untuk mendeskripsikan karakteristik data dan responden dalam melihat perubahan kebijakan implementasi kurikulum merdeka di Kota Bima dalam bentuk tabel, grafik, atau diagram untuk memudahkan interpretasi. Hasil temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa sekitar 51% calon guru sekolah dasar masuk kategori terpapar sedang terhadap kurikulum merdeka, sementara 44% memiliki terpapar rendah, dan hanya 5% yang memiliki terpapar tinggi terhadap informasi dan implementasi kurikulum merdeka. Kondisi ini dipengaruhi beberapa faktor, di antaranya faktor terbesar yang mempengaruhi calon guru yakni motivasi, dengan 67,4% termotivasi untuk mendalami kurikulum merdeka. Survei tersebut juga menggambarkan bentuk dukungan yang paling banyak diberikan oleh pihak universitas, antara lain penggunaan sumber belajar terkait kurikulum merdeka (41,9%), dukungan melalui penerapan dalam mata kuliah (39,5%), dukungan melalui sosialisasi seminar terkait kurikulum merdeka, dan ada juga yang tidak memberikan dukungan atau pendampingan (4,7%). Terdapat berbagai upaya yang dilakukan calon guru dalam meningkatkan pemahamannya terhadap kebijakan implementasi kurikulum merdeka seperti; mengikuti seminar dan workshop tentang kurikulum merdeka, mencari informasi secara mandiri dari sumber bacaan baik dari buku teks maupun sumber online, berdiskusi dengan dosen, dan terlibat langsung dalam implementasi kurikulum merdeka.

**Keywords:** *Teachers' Exposure, Merdeka Curriculum, Elementary School.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The implementation of the curriculum is seen as a process of transmitting knowledge and transforming functional skills in terms of character education for students. It is also considered a national agenda to promote quality education reforms to become more competitive, responsive, and adaptive in line with other nations (Sofyan et al., 2021). The changes in the education curriculum, such as the transition from the 2013 curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum, are focused on students' academic competencies and oriented towards strengthening students' behaviour to produce competent, adaptive, and morally upright graduates. Through the curriculum changes, it is expected that students will develop religious character, empathy, respect for differences, honesty, respect, cooperation, discipline, creativity, independence, and responsibility towards oneself, others, and the social environment (Saputri et al., 2022). However, the government's policy of implementing the transition from the 2013 curriculum to the Merdeka curriculum has generated various pros and cons among the public. Some view the curriculum changes as less populist in terms of education policy. Issues such as the readiness of human resources, especially teachers, which needs to be accompanied by

sufficient training, and the fulfilment of supporting facilities and infrastructure, have been raised. However, the implementation of curriculum changes is not merely a technical process but involves all stakeholders, including the government, educational leaders, communities, educators, and educational practitioners, in the development, socialization, and implementation of the new curriculum within the school environment.

Theoretically, the policy of changing the education curriculum and implementing the Merdeka curriculum can also be seen from several theoretical constructions that form the basis for change: 1) Social Change Theory. Social change theory can be a foundation for understanding how changes in curriculum systems (from previous curricula) affect teacher behaviour, attitudes, and practices. This approach looks at how changes in education policy at the macro level affect individuals at the micro level specifically for primary school teachers. 2) Diffusion of Innovations Theory. Rogers et al. (2008) introduced this theory and explained how, why, and at what speed new ideas and technologies spread in culture. In implementing the Independent Curriculum, this theory can be used to understand the process of elementary school teachers adopting the new curriculum. 3) Social Learning Theory. This theory, popularized by Bandura (1986), focuses on how people learn from their environment through observation, imitation, and modelling. This theory is used to understand how teachers learn and implement independent curricula through their social and professional interactions (Lakum et al., 2024; Liddle & Mantha, 2023).

On the other hand, the changes in curriculum implementation are related to the principle of relevance, ensuring that the learning materials align with the needs of students and the quality of education provided in schools aligns with the demands of the job market (Brundrett & Duncan, 2015; Lee & Ro, 2024). In this context, understanding the implementation of the curriculum is crucial for prospective teachers in applying practical teaching principles to students in primary schools. Understanding the process of curriculum innovation is inseparable from the success of education. The progress or setback of education depends on how much teachers appreciate their roles in implementing the curriculum, including their understanding of the curriculum itself (Gandasari et al., 2022; Prihatini & Sugiarti, 2022). Hence, prospective teachers need to teach students in line with the curriculum objectives. With curriculum innovation, it would be easier for teachers to gauge the progress of education accurately. Curriculum and instructional innovations are intended to introduce new ideas, concepts, or specific actions in the field of curriculum and instruction to address educational challenges (Brundrett & Duncan, 2015; Cantika, 2022).

The implementation process of the Merdeka curriculum in elementary schools is crucial to examine because primary education is the initial stage of formal education that plays a significant role in shaping students' character and abilities (Kemendikbudristek, 2021). Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in primary schools also presents challenges as it must adhere to the established competency standards and provide meaningful learning experiences for students. Therefore, prospective teachers in educational institutions are obliged to understand and implement the educational curriculum changes, including the Merdeka Curriculum (Muzakki et al., 2023; Pertiwi et al., 2023; Rahayu, 2022). Therefore, prospective teachers need to understand how to implement an independent curriculum through creative and innovative learning designs that align with curriculum objectives. In addition, the level of undergraduate exposure of prospective teachers to the independent curriculum will affect their future role as teachers in providing

classroom instruction and how effectively they can motivate students to learn effectively within educational institutions.

This condition is also reinforced by several previous research results, which describe various problems in implementing the new curriculum including many teachers having difficulty adopting the Merdeka Curriculum due to a lack of adequate training and resources, teachers who are more familiar with technology tend to adopt curriculum changes that utilise technology more quickly; the need for ongoing training and support from stakeholders is critical to the successful implementation of the new curriculum, and generally teachers' perceptions of curriculum change are influenced by their experience, administrative support, and available resources. It is crucial to stress the need for ongoing training and support, as these factors play a significant role in successfully implementing the new curriculum (Nugraha et al., 2022; Yunitasari et al., 2023).

However, when examined, the description of previous research findings tends to focus on general challenges and teacher perceptions. Still, only some precisely measure individual teachers' exposure to the Merdeka Curriculum and how they adapt it in daily practice. Previous research findings have examined the need to understand the specific factors that influence the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, such as support from school leaders, availability of resources, and individual teacher characteristics (Faujiyah et al., 2024; Hidayah et al., 2022). The direction of the implementation of this research is intended to examine the level of individual teachers' exposure to the Merdeka Curriculum, including how they get information, the training received, and how they implement the curriculum in the classroom. This research also seeks to explore the factors that support or hinder teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, including the role of training, administrative support, and collaboration between teachers.

On the other hand, a number of previous research findings also show the importance of technology. Still, not specifically in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum and research shows the importance of training, but a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of training specifically for the Merdeka Curriculum is still lacking (Nugraha et al., 2022). While the projection of this research, it was conducted to investigate the extent to which technology is used in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and how it affects the level of teacher exposure and adaptation. This research is also intended to assess the effectiveness of existing training programmes in preparing teachers to implement the Merdeka Curriculum and its significant impact on teachers' exposure levels, thereby underlining the importance of the Merdeka Curriculum in education.

Departing from this description, the study is intended to see the exposure of prospective elementary school teachers in Bima City, which is needed to obtain a clear understanding of the level of exposure of prospective teachers in elementary schools to the process of change and implementation of the Independent Curriculum. The purpose of this study is to outline three crucial aspects, including 1) Exposure of elementary school teachers to the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum; 2) Factors affecting elementary school teachers to the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum; and 3) Efforts of elementary school teachers to increase exposure to Merdeka curriculum. This research is expected to provide input for educational policymakers to improve socialisation stages in implementing the Merdeka curriculum in primary schools in Bima City. The findings of this research can also benefit prospective teacher candidates

by enhancing their understanding and knowledge regarding implementing the Merdeka curriculum in elementary schools in Bima.

## II. METHOD

This research used descriptive survey research to map information and evaluate statements from several respondents regarding research issues (Creswell, 2019). In this context, this descriptive survey research aims to measure the perceptions and level of exposure of individual prospective teacher students to implementing the Merdeka curriculum in elementary schools in Bima. This survey adopts a quantitative research strategy with questionnaire items assessed numerically by the respondents (Braun et al., 2021; Ponto, 2015; Trentelman et al., 2016).

In this study, the prospective teacher students are positioned as the primary respondents. Their role is crucial as they are the ones currently pursuing undergraduate education in the primary school teacher education study programme within the Faculty of Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Bima. The approach in this study uses numerical and statistical data to measure and analyse teacher perceptions related to implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, with the understanding that their insights are invaluable to the research.

Data collected directly from respondents, in this case prospective elementary school teachers in the college area who are the subject of the study. In this study, the position of prospective elementary school teachers at Muhammadiyah Bima University became the primary respondents to examine their perceptions and views on implementing the Merdeka curriculum. The respondents of this research consist of 44 prospective elementary school teachers from Muhammadiyah Bima University. Data collection was conducted using an electronic questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. The questionnaire contained statement items related to implementing the Merdeka curriculum in primary schools. The questionnaire responses were processed using Microsoft Excel. Subsequently, the final results of the research were descriptively analyzed regarding the level of exposure of prospective elementary school teachers to the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in Bima.

The results of the study related to the level of exposure of elementary school teacher candidates to the Implementation of the Merdeka curriculum were analysed using descriptive statistics and percentages. This systematic analysis was used to describe the characteristics of the data and respondents in viewing the policy changes in implementing the independent curriculum at the education unit level. The results of data analysis are described in the form of tables, graphs, or diagrams to facilitate interpretation. The final section concludes the analysis results by linking research findings with existing theory or literature. It makes recommendations based on research findings for further development and implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This systematic and rigorous research analysis ensures that the results of the descriptive survey research on elementary school teachers' exposure level to the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum are valid and reliable, providing an informative reference for the development of further study.

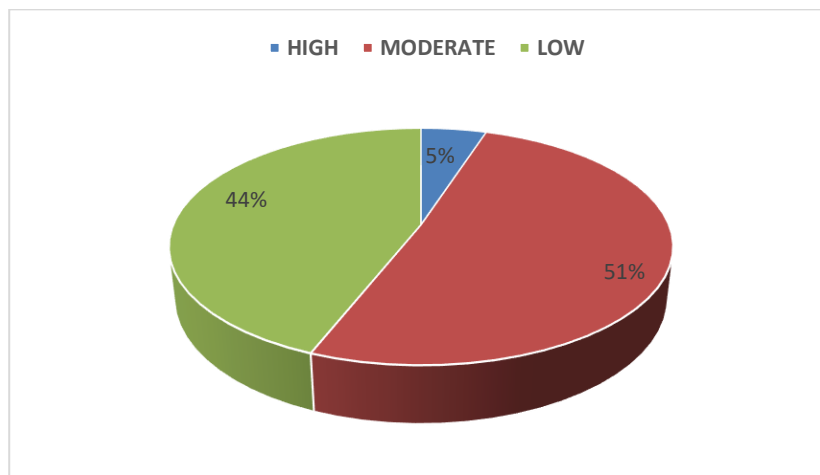
## III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The discussion on implementing the Merdeka curriculum also significantly impacts the success of curriculum implementation within schools. On the other hand, changes in school curriculum implementation policies require teachers and prospective teachers to be more innovative and adaptive academically, particularly regarding the government's curriculum implementation policy, including the level of exposure to implementing the Merdeka curriculum in primary schools in Bima.

### **Exposure Elementary School Teachers to the Implementation Merdeka Curriculum**

The understanding of prospective teachers when implementing the education curriculum is an integral part of the success of curriculum implementation in the school environment. In this context, the socialization and formulation of learning in the scope of higher education related to changes in the education curriculum, such as the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, is a responsibility that the government and higher education institutions must carry out. Their role is crucial in ensuring prospective teachers are well-prepared for the changes. According to survey findings about the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation in educational settings, prospective elementary school teachers' students, particularly those in the Bima region, must fully understand information about the Merdeka Curriculum's concept. Even the findings of the perceptual study of future teachers' students indicate that the conceptual application of the Merdeka Curriculum has received little exposure (Anwar et al., 2023).

On the other hand, several survey respondents illustrated that only a few prospective elementary school teacher students knew the conception and implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. On the other hand, several survey respondents illustrated that only a few prospective elementary school teacher students knew the conception and implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This less adaptive condition will have an impact on the formation of a lack of conceptual insight for prospective elementary school teachers in fulfilling the responsibility of effective lesson planning by the enactment of the Merdeka curriculum, even though their position as prospective teachers requires them to be introduced to projected curriculum changes that apply at the national level of education. Thus, a prospective teacher's readiness to perform their educational tasks and responsibilities in the classroom is positively impacted by their comprehension of the curriculum. In connection, the following describes the description related to the exposure of prospective elementary school teacher students to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum:



**Figure 1. Prospective teachers' exposure to merdeka curriculum**

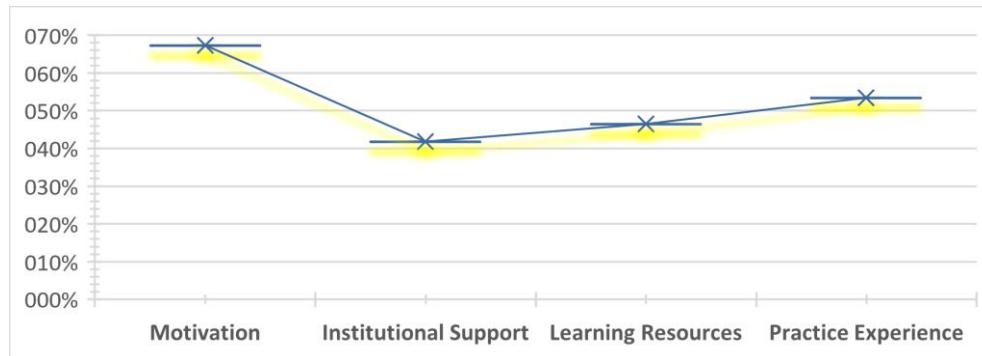
Based on the questionnaire analysis, it is known that 51% of prospective elementary school teacher students are in the category of moderate exposure to the independent curriculum. 44% of students have low exposure, and the remaining 5% have high exposure to information and implementation of the independent curriculum. The moderate exposure condition indicates difficulties or problems for prospective teacher students in implementing the independent curriculum as a reference for preparing to become educators. In line with research from Rindayati et al. (2022), the problems experienced by prospective educators in developing learning tools include not being able to read CP properly, not being able to compile TP (learning objectives from existing CP (learning outcomes), not being able to compile ATP (flow of learning objectives) from TP, difficulty developing teaching modules, and the independent curriculum allow thematic forms. Prospective elementary school teacher students must be prepared to be able to answer the demands of the Merdeka Curriculum. This situation analysis was carried out by observing and searching the literature related to issues in the independent curriculum and found that the independent curriculum requires prospective teacher students to master four teacher competencies: implementing differentiated learning, understanding and being able to guide students to achieve the Pancasila learner profile, and having the ability to guide students to design projects. This form of demand is the basis for the need for more exposure to independent curriculum in prospective teacher students (Retnowati et al., 2023).

Changes in the curriculum have caused the preparation of learning tools to undergo several changes, including in the K13 curriculum, which used to have essential competencies (KD), now changes to competency achievements written from several paragraph sentences (Han & Lee, 2024). In the independent curriculum, indicators do not exist and go directly to learning objectives. There are 3 phases in the independent curriculum, so educators must collaborate with each phase to achieve learning objectives. Changes in the curriculum and several changes in the preparation of learning tools make it difficult for educators to develop learning tools due to internal and external factors. Among them are external factors accustomed to being fixated on teacher and student books, and educators must be creative and innovative in developing learning tools. Internal factors include the lack of understanding of changes in the independent curriculum in developing principles and procedures for creating themes. Hence, an educator needs help or has to think extra in developing integrated learning tools (Indarwati, 2021).

**Factors Affecting Elementary School Teachers to the Implementation Merdeka Curriculum**

Various factors can affect the level of exposure of prospective elementary school teacher students to the importance of changes in the education curriculum, including those related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. In general, the survey results show that the influencing factors are classified into the categories of external factors and internal factors. In this case, external factors emphasize various aspects such as adaptive learning, seminar activities, workshops, internships, enrichment, or academic projects in other higher education institutions that encourage students' conceptual understanding. Meanwhile, this internal factor depends on the self-motivation of prospective elementary school teacher students to seek information through digital platforms related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Naatonis et al.,

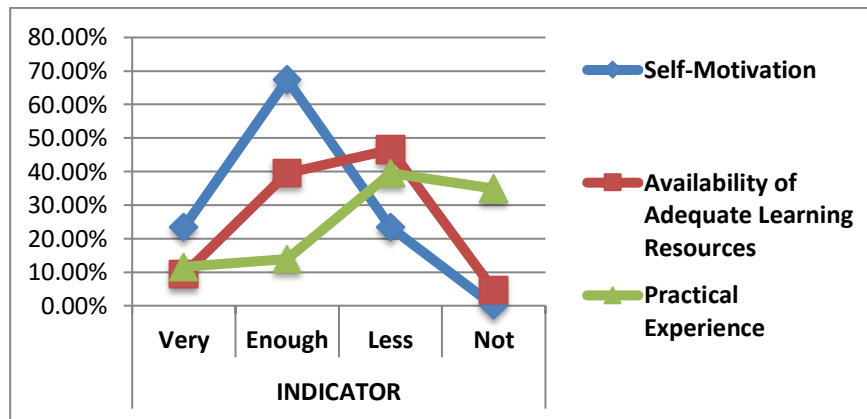
2022). In this regard, a description of several factors that influence the level of exposure of prospective primary school teachers to the Merdeka curriculum can be explained in the following graphic:



**Figure 2.** Factors affecting exposure to the Merdeka curriculum

Referring to the graph above, several factors can influence exposure to the Merdeka Curriculum among prospective primary school teachers. Generally, the highest factor is the student's motivation, while the lowest is institutional support. The institution providing education and educational personnel (LPTK) refers to the institutional support mentioned. Implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka in schools is still ongoing, and its success depends on the willingness of school leaders and prospective teachers/teachers to change their mindsets and adapt to the new curriculum. The Kurikulum Merdeka is designed to be dynamic and in line with the development of knowledge and technology, and it is evaluated to ensure that it meets the needs of the community and graduates (Indarta et al., 2022; Rahayu, 2022). The Merdeka Curriculum is also intended to overcome the slump in learning during the pandemic by giving teachers and principals the freedom to develop the curriculum according to the needs and potential of students (Rahmadayanti & Hartoyo, 2022). The results of this study are in line with several previous research descriptions and also describe various factors that are considered to influence the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, among others: 1) The importance of the role of motivating and fostering prospective teachers in implementing the curriculum independently; 2) Modification of learning resources or models such as the phases of the Project Based Learning (PjBL) model and blended learning into Project Based Blended Learning (PjB2L); 3) Supervision of learning by madrasah supervisors with classroom visits in supervision and guidance on the implementation of the independent curriculum in fostered elementary schools; 4) Communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure in schools as supporting factors for the implementation of the independent curriculum, and 5) The importance of sound financial and administrative governance in running the program as an essential aspect for the successful implementation of the independent curriculum within the school scope (Fahlevi, 2022; Isa et al., 2022; Maulana et al., 2022; Wahyuni, 2023).

Generally speaking, aspiring primary school teachers' exposure to the Merdeka curriculum is governed by their drive to learn about its application. Motivation is the leading indicator that helps prospective elementary school teachers in Bima understand the development of the Merdeka Curriculum. This condition can be explained in the following graphic:



**Figure 3.** Supporting indicators for the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum

A more specific review of the indicators of the supporting factors for implementing the independent curriculum is presented in the graph above. There is a relationship between the indicators of sufficient motivation, sufficient availability of learning resources, and sufficient practical experience. The intended relationship is that a sufficiently high level of availability of learning resources will also result in motivation and allow students to participate in or carry out practical experience activities. It is also supported by conditions where the availability of low (inadequate) learning resources is different from student motivation that does not exist. This then impacts the low level of student practical experience (not following).

Self-motivation is one of the most significant factors that influence a person's movement. Of the 44 respondents of prospective elementary school teachers, it is known that 67.4% of students are motivated to explore the independent curriculum. Only a small proportion, namely 9.3% of students are less motivated. Further data exploration shows that students' low motivation is influenced by the lack of encouragement from campus institutions to broaden students' insights regarding the independent curriculum. Meanwhile, the high number of motivated students is because these students have been introduced to their curriculum and received encouragement from the institution through lecture activities, field experiences, and seminars held by the institution and outside the institution related to the independent curriculum (Carlson et al., 2024). Educators and educational personnel play a crucial role in this process, as they are responsible for providing learning and practical experiences for prospective teacher students related to curriculum developments, especially the current curriculum, namely their curriculum. Various forms of support and assistance can be carried out by LPTK to prepare prospective teacher students to apply their knowledge to the school where they serve after completing their studies. Based on the survey results, it is known that the most common form of support provided by the campus is through the use of learning resources related to the independent curriculum (41.9%), support through applications in courses (39.5%), support through disseminating information related to seminars or training on the independent curriculum, and some do not provide support or assistance (4.7%).

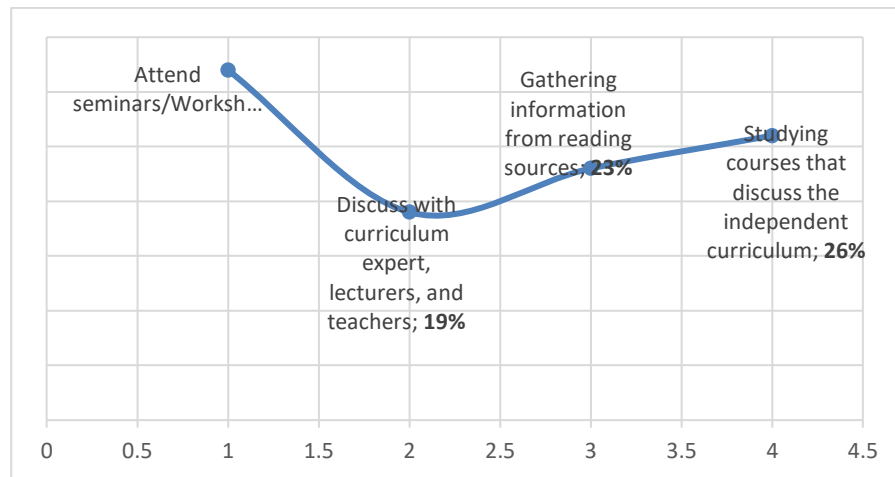
The form of support through the provision of learning resources is still limited to providing links to journal articles, electronic reading modules for the independent curriculum, and learning videos. These resources, while valuable, may not fully cover the breadth of the independent curriculum. Support for increasing information to prospective teacher students regarding the independent curriculum through course

applications is carried out by revising the lecture curriculum towards an independent curriculum, where educational courses have applied lecture material related to the independent curriculum and lecture assignments both theory and practice are related to the independent curriculum. Learning resources are one of the factors that can influence prospective teachers' exposure to the independent curriculum. Based on the survey results, it is known that 46.5% of learning resources related to the independent curriculum are in the inadequate category so prospective elementary school teacher students do not get a few reading materials as references to knowledge from learning resources on campus, especially printed learning resources that can be accessed by students in the campus library. Meanwhile, 39.5% of other learning resources are in an adequate category and can be accessed by students, such as the availability of internet access on campus to download reading material from online sites and journal articles.

Efforts to deepen students' understanding of the independent curriculum, which is a new curriculum and has been implemented in Indonesia, can be pursued in addition to providing material exposure in the form of theories. One effective way to do this is by providing real practical experience of the application of the independent curriculum at the elementary school education level for prospective elementary school teachers. These practical experience activities are not only an opportunity for students to apply theory in a real-world context, but also to evaluate and develop independent curriculum tools. The results of the questionnaire survey show that the opportunity to engage in practical experience is rarely provided to students. Some forms of practical experience that have been collected from survey data are the most (53.5%) through lecture assignments such as analyzing the theory of curriculum change, making differentiated lesson plans, and doing project-based assignments. 23.3% of students have had the opportunity to implement an independent curriculum through learning activities during PPL in elementary schools. Course field practices such as interviewing teachers and students in schools that implement an independent curriculum and microteaching based on an independent curriculum. The remaining 7% of students get the opportunity to be involved in the independent curriculum through workshops.

### **Efforts of Elementary School Teachers to Increase Exposure to the Merdeka Curriculum**

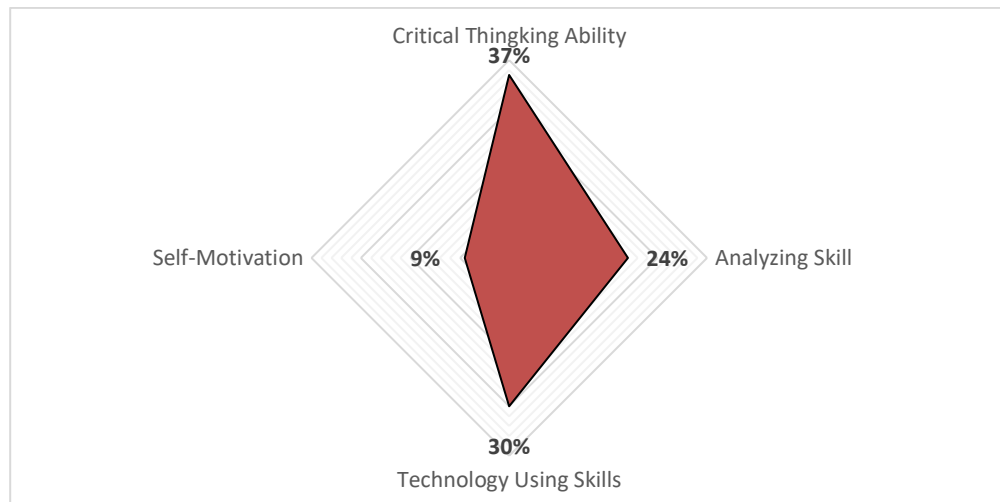
Recognizing the significance of comprehending and implementing the Merdeka Curriculum for the longevity of prospective elementary school teachers' careers, students are motivated to increase exposure to all forms of information and activities related to the Merdeka curriculum. The efforts that have been and are being taken by prospective elementary school teacher students in increasing exposure to the Merdeka Curriculum include: 1) most of the prospective teacher students who were respondents participated in seminars or workshops as many as 32.6% both offline and online (webinars); 2) a total of 25.6% of students seriously explore lecture activities that discuss, connect, or make the Merdeka Curriculum as class lecture material; 3) 23.3% of students independently collect information from reading sources obtained from textbooks and online sources; and 4) a small number of students, namely 18.6%, discuss with curriculum experts, lecturers or teachers who already understand more profoundly and are directly involved in implementing a Merdeka Curriculum outside of lecture activities.



**Figure 4.** Forms of student efforts in increasing exposure to the Merdeka curriculum

In this context, in practice, there are several things that must be done by school leaders of prospective teacher students in optimizing the implementation of the independent curriculum within the school, among others; 1) Attend training sessions (workshops) to learn how to optimize curriculum implementation, 2) Discussing with experts (coaching) as an effective method for developing creative and innovative ideas, 3) optimizing the learning community in implementing the Independent Curriculum, 4) Conducting training and developing the competence of prospective teachers / teachers in compiling and implementing a curriculum that is in accordance with the characteristics of students, 5) Improving the quality and quantity of educational resources, such as textbooks, learning media, and other supporting facilities, 6) Increasing parental participation and involvement in the learning process, so as to create synergy between schools and families in supporting students' education, and 7) Conducting regular evaluation and monitoring of the implementation of the independent curriculum, so that the necessary improvements can be made (Hagiworo & Dwi E, 2023; Kemendikbudristek, 2023).

Regarding students' efforts to enhance their exposure to the Merdeka curriculum, students also feel the need to improve their self-competence to support their endeavours. The self-competence areas that students need to enhance include critical thinking skills (37.2%) to support their understanding of the concepts related to curriculum planning, proficiency in using technology and information tools (30.2%) which is an important skill to access more information through the online world, analytical skills (23.3%) that are beneficial for analyzing students' abilities and evaluating learning, and self-motivation (9.3%) which has the lowest percentage because the majority of students are already motivated to increase their exposure to Merdeka curriculum.



**Figure 5.** *personal competencies that prospective primary school teacher students need to improve in facing the Merdeka curriculum*

The core concept of the *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) curriculum is to encourage students to explore and develop their interests and talents. The curriculum is more straightforward and in-depth than previous curricula, and it aims to provide students with a more independent and meaningful learning experience. This approach facilitates prospective teacher students in organizing meaningful learning activities for school students. The same research also found that, in general, prospective teachers in elementary schools have a positive perception and appreciation for implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum in elementary schools. Prospective teacher students integrate the essential characteristics of the Pancasila Student Profile into their teaching, which is related to several dimensions, including 1) faith, 2) global citizenship, 3) cooperation, 4) independence, 5) critical thinking, and 6) creativity (Sunarni & Karyono, 2023). Based on this perspective, prospective teacher students in elementary schools must have academic readiness and embrace the principles of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum within the educational institution. Prospective teacher students in Bima have met these readiness requirements with a relatively high percentage, as presented in Figure 5.

Affirming this, several other studies have also outlined various factors that influence the implementation of the independent curriculum within the school setting. Firstly, supportive factors for curriculum implementation can be carried out in various ways, such as forming a learning committee at the institutional level. Additionally, conducting House Training (IHT) on the Independent Curriculum at the school, formulating the school's vision, mission, and objectives according to its characteristics, holding meetings with the curriculum development team, as well as studying and utilizing the provided guidelines and manuals are among the factors that support the implementation of the independent curriculum. The Directorate General of Teachers and Educational Personnel of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology consults and coordinates with school facilitators and supervising officers, highlighting the important role of school principals as mediators, motivators, supervisors, and evaluators in the implementation of the independent curriculum. School principals play a crucial role in mediating between the curriculum developers and the teachers, motivating the teachers to embrace the new curriculum, supervising the implementation process, and evaluating its effectiveness. Secondly, factors that hinder the implementation process of

the independent curriculum within schools include the lack of smooth internet connectivity as a means for teachers to utilize technology in teaching, the suboptimal implementation of differentiated learning in line with the goals of the independent curriculum, insufficient use of information technology in the implementation of the independent curriculum, and bureaucratic factors such as communication, resources, and disposition (Umma & Abida, 2023).

Many empirical studies illustrate the importance of various indicators that influence the success of curriculum implementation in schools. For instance, the implementation of a quality curriculum is reflected in the formulation of vision and objectives, conducive learning environments, availability of physical resources, an adequate number of teachers, opportunities for professional development, motivation of prospective teacher students, sufficient human resource training, effective school leadership, contributions from external organizations, parental involvement, and research supporting the improvement of curriculum implementation (Huang, 2024; Lin & Chen, 2024). This study is believed to be a positive effort in fulfilling various supporting aspects of implementing the independent curriculum and providing a positive impact on the achievement of implementing the independent curriculum in educational institutions, including elementary schools in Bima.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

The exposure of prospective primary school teachers to the Merdeka Curriculum is a critical aspect outlined in this research survey. The results showed that most prospective elementary teacher students still need more exposure to the Merdeka curriculum. Only 51% of students are in the medium exposure category, while 44% have low exposure, and the remaining 5% have high exposure. This low exposure indicates difficulties or challenges in implementing the Merdeka curriculum as preparation for becoming an educator. This study also shows that the factors that influence the level of exposure of prospective teacher students to the Merdeka curriculum include individual motivation, institutional support, and available learning resources. Individual motivation was the most influential factor in exposure, while institutional support was still relatively low. Teacher education institutions (LPTK) must provide better support and assistance to prospective students facing curriculum changes. Prospective primary school teachers have also increased their exposure to the Merdeka curriculum by attending seminars or workshops, delving into coursework that discusses the Merdeka curriculum, and participating in practical experiences. Therefore, educational institutions and relevant parties need to enhance support and assistance for primary school teachers in facing the changes in the Merdeka curriculum. Students also need to continuously improve their motivation and understanding of the Merdeka curriculum through relevant activities to be prepared and capable of implementing it as competent educators.

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completing the writing of this article. This article can contribute to developing research in learning and curriculum development in primary schools.

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