

Assessing Teacher Readiness for Merdeka Curriculum Implementation: A Case Study in Bulukumba Regency

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum requires teachers to adapt to more flexible, student-centered, and competency-based learning approaches. However, teacher readiness remains a major challenge, particularly in non-urban contexts, where limited professional capacity may hinder effective curriculum enactment. This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine factors influencing teacher readiness for Merdeka Curriculum implementation in public elementary schools in Rilau Ale Subdistrict, Bulukumba Regency. A total of 109 teachers were randomly selected from 25 schools. Data were collected using a validated Likert-scale questionnaire, with reliability coefficients exceeding 0.80 (Cronbach's alpha). Descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression analyses were used to analyze the data. The findings indicate that teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum predominantly falls within low-to-moderate and very low categories, while preparedness in developing instructional materials is largely moderate. Assessment and evaluation competence emerged as the weakest dimension of readiness. Multiple regression analysis revealed that curriculum understanding, instructional material preparation, and assessment competence jointly had a significant effect on teacher readiness ($R^2 = 0.368$, $p < 0.001$). These results suggest that teacher readiness is shaped by interconnected cognitive and instructional capacities, while a substantial proportion of variance is influenced by contextual factors beyond the scope of this study. The findings highlight the need for targeted professional development, particularly in assessment literacy and instructional design, to support effective Merdeka Curriculum implementation in non-urban educational settings.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Educational systems worldwide are increasingly challenged to adapt to rapid social, technological, and economic transformations. In response, curriculum reforms have shifted away from rigid, content-heavy structures toward more flexible, student-centered, and competency-based frameworks that emphasize critical thinking, creativity, and lifelong learning. In Indonesia, this paradigm shift is embodied in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, a national reform initiative designed to grant greater pedagogical autonomy to schools and teachers while promoting differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and authentic assessment (Fullan, 2020; Kemendikbud, 2022).

Despite its progressive vision, the success of the Merdeka Curriculum depends largely on teachers as the primary agents of change. Curriculum reform, regardless of its conceptual sophistication, remains ineffective if teachers lack the readiness to interpret, enact, and sustain new instructional and assessment practices in classrooms. International and national studies consistently identify teacher readiness as a decisive factor in determining whether curriculum innovations translate into meaningful learning experiences or remain symbolic policy artifacts (Guskey, 2002; Fullan, 2007; Nurzen, 2022).

Teacher readiness, however, is not a singular or static construct. Contemporary educational research conceptualizes readiness as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing cognitive understanding, pedagogical capacity, and assessment literacy, all of which interact with contextual and organizational conditions (Hasyim et al., 2024). In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers are expected not only to understand curriculum documents, but also to design flexible instructional materials, facilitate student-centered learning, and apply comprehensive assessment strategies that capture cognitive, non-cognitive, and skills-based outcomes (Ramdani et al., 2023; de Vries et al., 2024).

While a growing body of research has examined teacher readiness for Merdeka Curriculum implementation, much of the existing literature remains descriptive and fragmented. Prior studies often investigate isolated variables—such as curriculum understanding, training participation, or technological competence—without integrating them into a coherent theoretical model of teacher change (Jamjemah et al., 2022; Yunida, 2022). As a result, empirical findings frequently confirm that teachers are “moderately ready” or “not fully prepared,” but provide limited explanatory insight into how and why specific competencies interact to shape readiness within reform-oriented contexts.

To address this gap, the present study draws on two influential theories of educational change: Guskey’s model of teacher change and Fullan’s theory of educational reform. Guskey (2002) argues that meaningful changes in teachers’ beliefs and attitudes occur after they observe positive outcomes resulting from new instructional practices. From this perspective, readiness is closely linked to teachers’ capacity to enact curriculum reforms in practice, particularly through instructional design and assessment. Complementing this view, Fullan (2007, 2020) emphasizes that sustainable reform requires the alignment of three core components: clarity of reform goals, capacity building at the practitioner level, and contextual support within schools. Together, these frameworks suggest that teacher readiness emerges from the interaction between curriculum comprehension (clarity), instructional and assessment competence (capacity), and the practical realities of school contexts.

Building on these theoretical foundations, this study conceptualizes teacher readiness for Merdeka Curriculum implementation as an integrated construct shaped by three interrelated dimensions. First, curriculum understanding reflects teachers’ cognitive clarity regarding the philosophy, structure, and pedagogical principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, including differentiated instruction and competency-based learning. Second, instructional material preparation represents teachers’ capacity to translate curriculum principles into concrete learning designs, such as lesson plans, teaching modules, and learning media. Third, assessment and evaluation competence captures teachers’ ability to implement diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment practices aligned with authentic and holistic learning objectives.

This integrative perspective offers a departure from prior studies that treat these dimensions as independent variables without theoretical linkage. By positioning curriculum understanding, instructional preparation, and assessment competence as interconnected mechanisms of teacher

readiness, the present study contributes to a more coherent and theory-informed understanding of how curriculum reforms are enacted at the classroom level.

Contextual factors further underscore the importance of this investigation. Non-urban and semi-rural regions in Indonesia often face structural constraints such as limited access to professional development, uneven technological infrastructure, and reduced exposure to policy dissemination platforms (Halawa et al., 2024). Teachers in these settings may experience curriculum reform not as empowerment, but as an additional burden layered onto existing workload pressures (Suriadi et al., 2021). Consequently, examining teacher readiness in such contexts provides critical insights into equity-related dimensions of national curriculum implementation that are frequently overlooked in large-scale policy evaluations.

Rilau Ale Subdistrict in Bulukumba Regency represents a relevant case for exploring these dynamics. As a non-urban educational setting, it reflects the realities faced by many Indonesian elementary schools navigating curriculum reform with limited institutional support. Investigating teacher readiness in this context allows for an empirically grounded analysis of how national curriculum policies are interpreted and operationalized at the local level.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the individual and collective influence of teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum, instructional material preparation, and assessment competence on overall teacher readiness in public elementary schools. By integrating established theories of teacher change with empirical analysis in a non-urban context, this study seeks to move beyond descriptive assessments of readiness and offer a theoretically grounded explanation of the mechanisms that shape teachers' capacity to implement curriculum reform.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to both theory and practice. Theoretically, the study advances an integrated model of teacher readiness aligned with change theory. Practically, it provides evidence-based insights for policymakers, school leaders, and teacher educators seeking to design professional development and support systems that strengthen the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in contexts with limited structural capacity.

Teacher readiness to implement curriculum reform is widely recognized as a multidimensional construct shaped by both cognitive and professional capacities. In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, readiness is influenced not only by teachers' conceptual understanding of curriculum principles, but also by their ability to translate these principles into instructional practice and assessment strategies. Drawing on theories of teacher change and educational reform, this study assumes that curriculum understanding provides the foundational clarity necessary for reform adoption, while instructional material preparation and assessment competence represent key enactment mechanisms at the classroom level. These dimensions are expected to operate both independently and collectively in shaping teachers' readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. Based on this theoretical reasoning, the following hypotheses are formulated to examine the relationships among these variables in public elementary schools in Rilau Ale District, Bulukumba Regency.

- H1: There is a significant relationship between teachers' understanding of Merdeka Curriculum and implementation readiness across primary schools in Rilau Ale Sub-district, Bulukumba Regency.
- H2: There is a significant relationship between the preparation of teaching materials and teachers' readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum in all public elementary schools in Rilau Ale District, Bulukumba Regency.
- H3: There is a statistically significant relationship between assessment and evaluation competencies in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and teacher readiness in all public elementary schools in Rilau Ale District, Bulukumba Regency.
- H4: There is a significant multivariate relationship between understanding the Merdeka Curriculum, preparation of learning materials, assessment competencies, and overall readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum.

2. METHODS

This research uses ex post facto research methods. Ex post facto research examines causal relationships that are not manipulated by the researchers.

2.1 Population and sample

The study population comprises all homeroom teachers (n=150) across elementary schools in Rilau Ale Subdistrict. A sample representing the population's quantitative and qualitative characteristics was selected using simple random sampling technique. This approach ensured random selection of participants without stratification by grade level, gender, or teacher classification. The final sample included 109 teachers. The unit of analysis in this research is individual teachers, with each educator being evaluated based on their readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum.

Determination of the sample based on the formula above using a 5% significance level, namely:

$$s = \frac{N}{nd^2 + 1} = \frac{150}{150 \cdot 0,05^2 + 1} = \frac{150}{1,37} = 109,48$$

Determining the validation results of each item contained in the questionnaire, how to see the Output value in the correlation table in the total item column section or by comparing rcount with rtable as follows:

1. If $r_{\text{count}} > r_{\text{table}}$, then the instrument is valid, otherwise it is invalid
2. If the probability (sig) is 0.05 then the instrument is valid, otherwise it is invalid.

2.2 Data Collection Technique

The questionnaire used in this study is a questionnaire with a Likert scale, the teacher responds to statements with 5 alternative answers, namely, Strongly Agree (SS), Agree (S), Undecided (RG), Disagree (TS), and Strongly Disagree (STS). And the documentation that researchers use is to collect existing data at State Elementary Schools in Rilau Ale District, this data the author uses to obtain data as support in this study.

2.3 Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis technique employed in this study is descriptive analysis, which is primarily used to describe the research data in general. The statistics used include the highest value, lowest value, mean (average), median, mode, range, and standard deviation. And inferential analysis is carried out by testing prerequisite assumptions (multicollinearity and correlation tests) and hypothesis testing (Simple Linear Regression Test and Multiple Linear Regression).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Descriptive Analysis

To provide an initial overview of teachers' conceptual clarity regarding the Merdeka Curriculum, a descriptive analysis was conducted to examine the distribution of respondents' levels of curriculum understanding. This analysis aims to identify the general pattern of teachers' comprehension across predefined categories, thereby offering a foundational context for subsequent inferential analyses. The categorization of teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Categorization of Merdeka Curriculum Understanding

Category	Interval	Frequency	%
Very Low	61 - 65	23	21%
Low	66 - 70	15	14%
Moderately Low	71 - 75	24	22%
Moderate	76 - 80	22	20%
Moderately High	81 - 85	17	16%
High	86 - 90	4	4%
Very High	91- 95	4	4%
Total		109	100%

Source: Research Data in 2025

As presented in the preceding table, the “Moderately Low” comprehension category (score range 71-75) demonstrates the highest frequency (n = 24, 22%), indicating that this range contains the modal distribution of the data. Conversely, both the “High” and “Very High” categories exhibit the lowest frequencies (n = 4 each, 4%), suggesting that these superior performance levels occur infrequently within the dataset. The aggregate frequency count (N=109) and proportional distribution ($\Sigma=100\%$) confirm accurate computational validation.

Table 2. Categorization of Teaching Material

Category	Interval	Frequency	%
Very Low	51 - 56	3	3%
Low	57 - 62	10	9%
Moderately Low	63 - 68	20	18%
Moderate	69 - 74	49	45%
Moderately High	75 - 80	18	17%
High	81 - 86	6	6%
Very High	87 - 92	3	3%
Total		109	100%

Source: Research Data in 2025

As evidenced in the preceding table, the “Moderate” preparation category (score range 69-74) represents the modal distribution, with the highest frequency (n = 49, 45%), indicating that this mid-range level predominates among respondents. In contrast, the extreme categories (“Very Low” and “Very High”) demonstrate the lowest frequencies (n=3 each, 3%), reflecting the rarity of outlier scores. The complete dataset (N=109) shows proportional integrity with cumulative percentages totaling 100%.

Table 3. Categorization of Evaluation and Assessment

Category	Interval	Frequency	%
Very Low	67 - 71	16	15%
Low	72 - 76	39	36%
Moderately Low	77 - 81	29	27%
Moderate	82 - 86	14	13%
Moderately High	87 - 91	6	6%
High	92 - 96	5	5%
Very High	97 - 101	0	0%
Total		109	100%

Source: Research Data in 2025

As presented in the preceding table, the “Low” proficiency category (score range 72-76) represents the modal group with the highest frequency (n = 39, 36%), indicating that this range contains the majority of observations. Notably, the “Very High” classification (97-101) demonstrated null frequency

(n=0, 0%), revealing a complete absence of top-tier scores in the dataset. The total sample (N=109) maintains proportional validity with cumulative percentages reaching 100%.

Table 4. Categorization of Teacher Readiness

Category	Interval	Frequency	%
Very Low	59 - 64	3	3%
Low	65 - 70	11	10%
Moderately Low	71 - 76	41	38%
Moderate	77 - 82	40	37%
Moderately High	83 - 88	10	9%
High	89 - 94	3	3%
Very High	95 -100	1	1%
Total		109	100%

Source: Research Data in 2025

The data presented in the table indicate that the majority of teachers fall within moderate-low readiness categories: 41 respondents (38%) scored between 71-76 (moderate-low), while 40 respondents (37%) scored between 77-82 (moderate), suggesting that overall teacher readiness for Merdeka Curriculum implementation remains at a lower-intermediate level.

3.2 Inferential Analysis

The multicollinearity analysis revealed that all variables demonstrated acceptable tolerance values (> 0.10) and VIF scores (< 10.00), indicating no multicollinearity issues. Consequently, the regression model was deemed appropriate for further analysis. Pearson correlation tests showed statistically significant relationships between all independent variables and teacher readiness for curriculum implementation. The strongest correlation emerged between teaching materials and teacher readiness ($r = 0.562$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting a moderately strong positive association.

Table 5. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis of X_1 , X_2 , X_3 on Y

		ANOVA ^a				
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1573.525	3	524.508	20.422	.000 ^b
	Residual	2696.713	105	25.683		
	Total	4270.239	108			

a. Dependent Variable: Y_Teacher Readiness

b. Predictors: (Constant), X3_Evaluation, X1_Merdeka Curriculum Understanding, X2_Teaching Material

Source: Research Data in 2025

Table 5 demonstrates that the multiple regression analysis yielded statistically significant results ($F = 20.422$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the three independent variables collectively contribute to teacher readiness. The model explains 36.8% of the variance in teacher readiness ($R^2 = 0.368$), with curriculum understanding, teaching materials, and assessment practices serving as significant predictors. The remaining variance (63.2%) is attributable to factors beyond the current model.

To determine the magnitude of each independent variable's influence on teacher readiness in curriculum implementation, separate simple linear regression analyses were conducted for each variable. The analysis results are presented in the following table:

Table 6. Beta Coefficient

Independent Variable	B (Coefficient)	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	Sig. (p)
Understanding the Independent Curriculum	0.383	0.066	0.491	5.837	0
Teaching Tools	0.498	0.071	0.562	7.037	< 0.01
Evaluation and Assessment	0.432	0.086	0.436	5.008	0

The regression analysis results demonstrate that all three independent variables significantly influence teacher readiness ($p < 0.01$), with teaching materials exhibiting the strongest effect ($\beta = 0.562$), followed by Merdeka curriculum understanding ($\beta = 0.491$) and assessment/evaluation practices ($\beta = 0.436$). These findings indicate that among these key factors, the availability and quality of teaching materials serve as the most critical determinant in enhancing teachers' preparedness for curriculum implementation, highlighting the importance of prioritizing instructional resource development to support successful adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Discussions

The findings of this study indicate that teachers' readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum remains largely situated at a low-to-moderate level, reflecting partial adaptation to the demands of curriculum reform. Descriptive results show that teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum is predominantly clustered within the low-moderate and very low categories. This pattern suggests that, although the curriculum has been formally introduced, many teachers have not yet achieved sufficient conceptual clarity regarding its philosophical foundations, pedagogical orientation, and implementation mechanisms. From a theoretical perspective, this finding aligns with Fullan's (2007, 2020) assertion that lack of clarity regarding reform goals constitutes a major barrier to successful educational change.

Inferential analysis confirms that teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum significantly influences their readiness to implement it. This result supports the notion that curriculum comprehension serves as a foundational cognitive condition for readiness, as teachers who understand curriculum principles are better positioned to interpret policy expectations and align their instructional decisions accordingly. Consistent with Guskey's (2002) model of teacher change, conceptual understanding enables teachers to engage meaningfully with new practices, thereby strengthening their confidence and preparedness for reform implementation.

Regarding instructional material preparation, the findings reveal that most teachers demonstrate a moderate level of readiness, with only a small proportion classified as very low. However, regression analysis indicates that instructional material preparation exerts the strongest influence on teacher readiness among the three examined variables. This result underscores the central role of instructional enactment in curriculum reform. The ability to design lesson plans, learning modules, and instructional media represents the concrete translation of curriculum policy into classroom practice. In line with Guskey's (2002) argument, teacher readiness is reinforced when educators successfully implement new instructional strategies and observe their practical feasibility. Thus, instructional material preparation functions not merely as a technical skill, but as a key mechanism through which curriculum understanding is operationalized.

In contrast, assessment and evaluation competence emerges as the most challenging dimension of teacher readiness. A substantial proportion of teachers fall into the low category, and none demonstrate very high assessment competence. Although assessment skills significantly influence readiness, the relatively lower proficiency levels suggest that teachers struggle to shift from traditional, summative

assessment models toward diagnostic, formative, and authentic assessment approaches emphasized by the Merdeka Curriculum. This finding corroborates previous research indicating that assessment reform often lags behind instructional change due to limited training and deeply embedded assessment cultures (de Vries et al., 2024; Ramdani et al., 2023). Without adequate assessment literacy, teachers may perceive curriculum reform as administratively demanding rather than pedagogically meaningful, thereby constraining their readiness.

The multiple regression analysis demonstrates that curriculum understanding, instructional material preparation, and assessment competence collectively explain 36.8% of the variance in teacher readiness. While this proportion indicates a meaningful explanatory contribution, it also suggests that teacher readiness is influenced by a broader set of contextual and organizational factors not captured in the current model. This finding is consistent with Fullan's (2020) assertion that sustainable reform depends not only on individual capacity, but also on supportive leadership, institutional culture, and access to resources. Factors such as principal leadership, professional learning communities, technological infrastructure, and workload distribution may account for the remaining unexplained variance.

The results of this study are consistent with prior research emphasizing the importance of professional capacity in curriculum implementation. Jamjemah et al. (2022) found that elementary school teachers in non-urban contexts often experience difficulties adapting to curriculum reforms due to limited training opportunities and structural constraints. Similarly, Mpuangnan (2024) demonstrated that teacher readiness is strongly associated with the intensity of professional development and the active involvement of school leaders. The present findings extend this literature by empirically demonstrating that instructional material preparation plays a particularly decisive role in shaping readiness within the Merdeka Curriculum context.

Contextual considerations further reinforce the significance of these findings. In non-urban areas such as Rilau Ale Subdistrict, teachers frequently encounter challenges related to infrastructure, access to professional development, and policy dissemination (Halawa et al., 2024; Suriadi et al., 2021). Consequently, curriculum reform may be experienced as an additional burden rather than an empowering opportunity. These conditions highlight the necessity of context-sensitive interventions that address both individual competencies and systemic constraints.

Overall, this study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that teacher readiness for curriculum reform is best understood as an integrated construct shaped by curriculum understanding, instructional enactment, and assessment competence. The findings suggest that efforts to enhance readiness should move beyond isolated training initiatives and instead adopt a coherent capacity-building strategy that aligns conceptual clarity with practical support. Future research should expand the geographical scope of investigation, incorporate organizational and motivational variables, and employ mixed-methods approaches to deepen understanding of the mechanisms through which teacher readiness evolves over time.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that teachers' readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum is significantly influenced by their curriculum understanding, instructional material preparation, and assessment competence in public elementary schools in Rilau Ale Subdistrict, Bulukumba Regency. The findings reveal that most teachers exhibit low-to-moderate levels of curriculum understanding, moderate preparedness in developing instructional materials, and relatively limited assessment competence, with none reaching a very high level in assessment literacy. Collectively, these factors account for 36.8% of the variance in teacher readiness, underscoring the central role of professional capacity in curriculum reform while also indicating that a substantial proportion of readiness is shaped by unexamined contextual factors. A key limitation of this study lies in its reliance on a cross-sectional survey design and a restricted set of variables within a single non-urban context, which limits broader

generalization and causal inference. Accordingly, future research should expand the geographical scope to include urban–rural comparisons, incorporate additional organizational and motivational variables such as school leadership and technological access, and adopt mixed-methods and longitudinal designs to capture the dynamic and contextualized nature of teacher readiness in large-scale curriculum reforms.

Ethical Consideration: This study strictly adhered to ethical research principles. All participants were active teachers who provided written informed consent prior to participation. Participant identities were anonymized to ensure confidentiality and privacy protection. No data manipulation occurred; all analyzed data originated from authentic respondent answers collected through validated questionnaires.

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