



## The Relationship Between Pre-Service Teachers' Understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum and Their Teaching Readiness

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**Abstract:** This study aims to analyze the relationship between pre-service teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum and their teaching readiness. The research employed a quantitative correlational method with a sample of seventh-semester students from the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education at Siliwangi University, selected through a simple random sampling technique. Data were collected using a Likert-scale questionnaire that had been tested for validity and reliability. The results of the Pearson correlation test showed a very strong and positive relationship, with a correlation coefficient of 0.909, indicating that a deep understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum significantly contributes to teaching readiness. This study highlights the importance of mastering the concepts, characteristics, and objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum in preparing future teachers to face the challenges of project-based learning and character development among students. The findings are expected to serve as a foundation for teacher education programs to improve the quality of graduates who are ready to effectively implement the Merdeka Curriculum.

**Keywords:** Merdeka curriculum, pre-service teacher, teaching readiness

### Introduction

Education plays a crucial role in the progress of a nation. In Indonesia, the education system continuously evolves and adapts to meet the demands of the times (Indrajit, 2016). The national curriculum has undergone several revisions, including the transition from the School-Based Curriculum (Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan, KTSP) to the 2013 Curriculum. On February 1, 2021, the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, Nadiem Makarim, introduced a new curriculum known as Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn). This curriculum began implementation in the 2021/2022 academic year in 2,500 schools across 34 provinces and 111 districts/cities in Indonesia (Rahayu et al., 2021).

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has significant implications for pre-service teachers, particularly in preparing them to design and implement instruction aligned with the curriculum's principles. As future educators, they are not only required to understand the theoretical foundations of this new curriculum but are also expected to apply it practically in the classroom to

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promote more independent, critical, and contextual learning for students (Halimah, 2022). In addition, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes the importance of creativity, adaptability, and character development among students, which demands that pre-service teachers possess strong teaching readiness and relevant skills to face various challenges in the learning process (Wijaya & Mulyadi, 2023).

Understanding the Merdeka Curriculum is essential for pre-service teachers, particularly because this curriculum requires a high level of adaptability in addressing the diverse needs of students. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes project-based and problem-solving learning approaches, aiming to develop students' critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication skills (Kunaifi & Wahyudi, 2024). It is designed to foster curiosity in the learning process, enabling teachers to adjust teaching methods and materials according to students' potential, interests, and learning pace. Pre-service teachers therefore need not only to understand the structure and philosophical foundations of the Merdeka Curriculum but also to master pedagogical skills that allow them to adapt to dynamic classroom conditions (Prihatini & Sugiarti, 2022; Andriyani et al., 2024). Adaptation skills in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum include the ability to design flexible lesson plans, select appropriate teaching methods, and conduct assessments that emphasize character development and students' critical skills. In the context of this study, understanding the Merdeka Curriculum is considered closely related to teaching readiness, as pre-service teachers with a strong grasp of this curriculum are more confident and better equipped to address challenges in the teaching and learning process.

The role of teaching readiness among pre-service teachers serves as a key indicator of the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Pre-service teachers who demonstrate strong teaching readiness are capable of designing learning activities aligned with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes project-based learning, differentiation, and the optimal development of students' potential (Wahyudi & Puspitasari, 2022). In this context, teaching readiness not only encompasses mastery of subject matter but also includes skills in classroom management and the ability to adapt to diverse student characteristics (Andriana, 2020). Therefore, this study is important in exploring the relationship between pre-service teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum and their teaching readiness, in order to determine the extent to which such understanding contributes to their ability to implement the curriculum effectively.

This study is highly relevant given the increasingly widespread implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in schools across Indonesia. In recent years, research has shown that curriculum understanding and teaching readiness are key determinants of teaching quality, especially in educational settings that have adopted new curricula such as the Merdeka Curriculum (Rohani & Priyadi, 2021). However, there remains a gap in the existing literature regarding pre-service teachers' readiness, as few studies have specifically examined the relationship between their understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum and their teaching readiness (Nugroho et al., 2022). Therefore, this study is essential in providing a conceptual foundation to improve the quality of teacher education in accordance with the demands of the Merdeka Curriculum.

A lack of understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum among pre-service teachers can lead to various problems in the learning process, particularly in designing innovative and flexible lesson plans. Difficulties in comprehending the new curriculum may also hinder pre-service teachers from applying appropriate instructional strategies, thereby reducing the effectiveness of the learning experience delivered to students (Prasetya & Handayani, 2019). Insufficient teaching readiness has a direct impact on the quality of education in schools and may affect students' character development and skill acquisition, which are not aligned with the intended goals of the Merdeka Curriculum (Utami & Kurniawati, 2021).

Various solutions can be implemented to enhance pre-service teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum. One possible approach is through intensive training programs that emphasize the practical aspects of curriculum implementation (Saputra, 2023; Irvani et al., 2024). Another solution involves modifications in teacher education programs, in which the curriculum for pre-service teachers should be adjusted to better prepare them for the challenges posed by the Merdeka Curriculum (Susanti, 2020). In this study, the chosen approach is to analyze the relationship between curriculum

understanding and teaching readiness, which can serve as a foundation for recommendations aimed at strengthening teacher education.

Based on the aforementioned background, this study aims to determine the relationship between pre-service teachers' level of understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum and its influence on their teaching readiness. The results of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for teacher education programs in preparing graduates who are better equipped to implement the new curriculum. Furthermore, the findings may also serve as a reference for policymakers and educational institutions in designing more effective training curricula that equip pre-service teachers with in-depth understanding and optimal readiness to teach in accordance with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum.

## Method

The method used in this study was a quantitative correlational approach. Correlational research is a type of study that aims to examine the relationship and degree of association between two or more variables without any intervention or manipulation of those variables (Fraenkel & N.E, 2008). The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between pre-service teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum (X) and their teaching readiness (Y).

This study was conducted at Siliwangi University in November 2024. The population of the study consisted of seventh-semester students from the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education at Siliwangi University who had either completed their School Field Practice (Program Latihan Profesi, PLP) or had taken the Curriculum Education course. The sampling technique employed was simple random sampling, with the sample size comprising approximately 10–15% of the total population.

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of a series of items that respondents were required to answer, focusing on their understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum and their teaching readiness as pre-service teachers.

The scoring system in the questionnaire employed a Likert scale ranging from positive to negative responses. The Likert scale is a measurement technique used to assess responses in a questionnaire (Taluke et al., 2019). The rubric for the Likert scale used in this study follows Sugiyono (2013), as presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Likert Scale Assessment Rubric

Score	Category	Symbol
5	Strong Agree	SA
4	Agree	A
3	Neutral	N
2	Disagree	D
1	Strong Disagree	SD

This study utilized two types of questionnaires: a questionnaire on understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum, which consisted of 15 statements with three indicators, and a questionnaire on teaching readiness, which consisted of 20 statements with four indicators. The indicators for each questionnaire are presented in Table 2 and Table 3.

**Table 2.** Indicators of the Questionnaire on Understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum

No	Indicators of Understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum
1	Understanding of the basic concepts and characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum
2	Knowledge of the components of the Merdeka Curriculum
3	Understanding of the learning objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum

**Table 3.** Teaching Readiness Questionnaire Indicators

No	Indicators of Teaching Readiness Questionnaire
1	Skills in designing also include selecting learning methods and media.
2	Skills in conducting assessments
3	Skills in managing the class
4	Positive attitudes towards the Independent Curriculum

The questionnaire was distributed after conducting validity and reliability tests. Content validity testing was carried out by experts, and the instrument was considered valid if the calculated correlation value  $r_{calc}$  was greater than the critical value  $r_{table}$ ; otherwise, it was deemed invalid if  $r_{calc} < r_{table}$ . Reliability testing was conducted using the Cronbach's Alpha method to measure the instrument's appropriateness and internal consistency (Irawan et al., 2017; Sanaky, 2021). The reliability test results were evaluated based on the criteria presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Reliability Criteria

Reliability Coefficient	Interpretation
0.80 – 1.00	Very High
0.60 – 0.80	High
0.40 – 0.60	Moderate
0.20 – 0.40	Low
0.00 – 0.20	Very Low

The collected data were analyzed to examine the distribution and general tendencies of the responses, including the calculation of mean scores and percentages for each indicator of both variables. Subsequently, a normality test was conducted, followed by a Pearson correlation test if the data were normally distributed, or a Spearman correlation test if the data were not normally distributed. The interpretation of correlation coefficient values is presented in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Interpretation of Correlation Coefficients

Correlation Coefficient	Interpretation
0.00 – 0.09	Very Weak Relationship
0.10 – 0.29	Weak Relationship
0.30 – 0.49	Moderate Relationship
0.50 – 0.69	Strong Relationship
0.70 – 1.00	Very Strong Relationship
+ Sign	Positive Correlation
- Sign	Negative Correlation

## Result and Discussion

This study aimed to identify the relationship between pre-service teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum and their teaching readiness. Questionnaire data were collected from 37 respondents using a Likert scale with scores ranging from 1 to 4. In the initial stage of data analysis, validity and reliability tests of the instruments were conducted. The results of the validity, reliability, normality, and correlation tests are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Interpretation of Correlation Coefficients

Analysis	Results
Validity Test	All items are valid with $r_{count} > r_{table}$ (0.325).
Reliability Test	Cronbach's Alpha value = 0.951 (reliable instrument).
Normality Test	Variable X (Understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum): 0.667 (normally distributed). Variable Y (Teaching Readiness): 0.922 (normally distributed).
Pearson Correlation Test	Positive correlation value = 0.909 (very strong and positive relationship).

Based on tests conducted using Microsoft Excel Office 16, all questionnaire items were valid, with  $r_{calc} > r_{table}$  (0.325). Reliability was assessed using the Cronbach's Alpha method with IBM SPSS Statistics version 29.0.1.0. The instrument was deemed reliable with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.951.

The normality test was conducted using the Shapiro-Wilk method because the sample size was fewer than 50 participants. The results of the normality test showed that the significance value for variable X (understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum) was 0.677, and for variable Y (teaching readiness) was 0.922, both of which were greater than 0.05. This indicates that the data were normally distributed. Therefore, the Pearson correlation test was employed to analyze the relationship between the two variables. The results of the Pearson correlation analysis revealed a positive significance value of 0.909, indicating a very strong and positive correlation between pre-service teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum and their teaching readiness.

These results reveal that a deep understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum greatly influences pre-service teachers' readiness to face the dynamics of classroom teaching. The Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes project-based learning, differentiation, and student character development, requires teachers to possess strong adaptive skills. Pre-service teachers who have a solid understanding of this curriculum are better able to design learning activities that are contextual, innovative, and responsive to students' needs.

This study also highlights the importance of skills in designing effective teaching methods, conducting appropriate assessments, and managing classrooms efficiently. Pre-service teachers who possess a strong understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum are able to adapt their instructional strategies to students' potential and needs, thereby creating a more interactive and meaningful learning environment. Teaching readiness encompasses not only technical aspects, such as lesson planning, but also the ability to manage classroom dynamics in a positive and constructive manner.

In addition, the findings also indicate that an understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum can enhance pre-service teachers' confidence in teaching. High self-confidence plays an essential role in creating a supportive and productive learning environment. Pre-service teachers who are well-prepared to teach are more capable of overcoming challenges in the field, such as the diversity of student characteristics, the need for varied instructional methods, and the demands of conducting authentic assessments.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research, which emphasized that teachers' teaching readiness is strongly influenced by an adequate understanding of the implemented curriculum (Rohani & Priyadi, 2021). The Merdeka Curriculum, designed to provide teachers with flexibility in determining learning strategies, requires comprehensive understanding so that teachers can deliver instruction tailored to the individual needs of their students.

This study also provides a foundation for developing teacher education programs that are more oriented toward the practical implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Universities can strengthen teacher education curricula by incorporating intensive training components that focus on mastery of this new curriculum. Furthermore, continuous and field-based experiential training can help pre-service teachers develop more applicable and relevant teaching skills.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates a very strong and positive relationship between pre-service teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum and their teaching readiness. A deep understanding of the concepts, characteristics, and learning objectives within the Merdeka Curriculum significantly contributes to pre-service teachers' preparedness to carry out their teaching responsibilities. These findings underscore the importance of strengthening curriculum comprehension through intensive training and adjustments in teacher education programs. Such measures will better equip pre-service teachers to effectively implement the Merdeka Curriculum within classroom learning contexts.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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