

## FROM TRAINING TO PRACTICE: A COMMUNITY-BASED MENTORING MODEL FOR IMPLEMENTING KURIKULUM MERDEKA

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**Abstrak:** Kurikulum Merdeka sangat penting karena mengedepankan otonomi guru dan pembelajaran yang berpusat pada siswa, namun kerangka kerjanya yang bersifat terbuka sering kali menimbulkan tantangan dalam penerapannya secara konsisten di tingkat sekolah. Untuk mengatasi masalah ini, inisiatif pengabdian masyarakat ini berupaya mengembangkan dan menilai model pendampingan berbasis masyarakat dengan menggunakan pendekatan *Community-Based Participatory Research* (CBPR). Tujuannya adalah untuk menciptakan kerangka kerja yang terukur yang secara efektif mendukung guru dan pemimpin sekolah saat mereka menerjemahkan prinsip-prinsip kurikulum ke dalam praktik di kelas. Proses ini melibatkan sesi pendampingan kolaboratif di mana para pemimpin sekolah dipandu dalam merancang Kurikulum Operasional Madrasah (KOM), sementara para guru menerima dukungan langsung dalam mengembangkan rencana pelajaran, membuat alat penilaian, dan melaksanakan *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila dan Rahmatan Lil Alamin* (P5RA). Umpan balik yang berulang dan diskusi reflektif memastikan bahwa proses pendampingan bersifat adaptif terhadap kebutuhan peserta, menumbuhkan rasa kepemilikan dan mendorong praktik pedagogi yang berkelanjutan. Model ini menunjukkan keefektifannya di dua sekolah menengah pertama Islam, di mana Sekolah B secara konsisten mengungguli Sekolah A dalam hal perencanaan, pengajaran, dan penilaian. Selain itu, sesi refleksi kolaboratif secara khusus meningkatkan efikasi diri guru, dengan 92% peserta menyatakan peningkatan kepercayaan diri dalam kemampuan mereka untuk mengimplementasikan kurikulum. Pendekatan pendampingan ini juga menghasilkan peningkatan partisipasi aktif siswa sebesar 25%, yang mengindikasikan adanya peningkatan yang signifikan dalam keterlibatan siswa di kelas. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa pendampingan yang terstruktur dan berbasis masyarakat dapat menjembatani kesenjangan antara pelatihan teoritis dan penerapan praktis, menawarkan kepada para pemangku kepentingan pendidikan sebuah kerangka kerja yang kuat untuk mengubah kegiatan pelatihan yang terisolasi menjadi komunitas praktik yang berkelanjutan.

**Kata kunci:** kurikulum merdeka, penelitian partisipatif berbasis masyarakat, otonomi guru, pembelajaran yang berpusat pada siswa, model pendampingan

**Abstract:** *Kurikulum Merdeka* is highly significant because it prioritizes teacher autonomy and student-centered learning, yet its open-ended framework often poses challenges for consistent implementation at the school level. To address these issues, this community service initiative sought to develop and assess a community-based mentoring model using a *Community-Based Participatory Research* (CBPR) approach. The goal was to create a scalable framework that effectively supports teachers and school leaders as they translate the curriculum's principles into actual classroom practices. The process involved collaborative mentoring sessions in which school leaders were guided in designing the *Kurikulum Operasional Madrasah* (KOM). At the same time, teachers received hands-on support in developing lesson plans, crafting assessment tools, and implementing *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila dan Rahmatan Lil Alamin* (P5RA) projects. Iterative feedback and reflective discussions ensured that the mentoring process was adaptive to participants' needs, cultivating a sense of ownership and fostering sustainable pedagogical practices. The model demonstrated its effectiveness across two Islamic junior high schools, where School B consistently outperformed School A in planning, instruction, and assessment. Moreover, collaborative reflection sessions notably enhanced teacher self-efficacy, with 92% of participants expressing increased confidence in their ability to implement the curriculum. This mentoring approach also resulted in a 25% rise in active student participation, indicating a significant boost in classroom engagement. The findings suggest that structured, community-driven mentoring can bridge the gap between theoretical training and

practical application, offering educational stakeholders a robust framework for transforming isolated training events into enduring communities of practice.

**Keywords:** kurikulum merdeka, community-based participatory research, teacher autonomy, student-centered learning, mentoring model

## **Introduction**

In the contemporary era, characterized by rapid developments and transformations, the education curriculum finds itself subject to incessant revisions. Technological advancements, societal shifts, and the evolving demands of an ever-changing world necessitate ongoing adjustments to ensure the relevance of the curriculum. Such adaptations are crucial for equipping learners with the requisite skills and competencies that are essential in the 21st century (Dendodi et al., 2024). In this context, the current *Kurikulum Merdeka* emerges as a pertinent and suitable response to the evolving needs of learners. The introduction of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* has precipitated a substantial transformation in the Indonesian education system, marking a departure from the preceding curriculum, which was regarded as more rigid, to a more flexible curriculum that prepares students to confront the challenges of the 21st century.

The previous curriculum, known as *Kurikulum 2013*, has been deemed inadequate in adapting to the educational and community needs of the digital and global era. The prevailing pedagogy, characterized by a strong emphasis on rote memorization and top-down content delivery, has been critiqued as inadequate for fully realizing the potential of learners (Aufa et al., 2024; Gumilar et al., 2023). In the contemporary global context, marked by rapid technological advancement, the need for students to develop critical thinking, creative thinking, and independent learning skills has become paramount (Nafi'ah et al., 2023). In response to these challenges, the *Kurikulum Merdeka* has been devised as a remedial measure.

This curriculum is designed to transform the educational paradigm, shifting from a predominantly teacher-centered approach to a student-centered one (Almarisi, 2023; Cahayani et al., 2023; Pertiwi et al., 2022). It enables educators to adapt learning to the unique needs, abilities, achievements, and interests of students, ensuring that they can learn most effectively. This approach is often referred to as Teaching at the Right Level (Hadiawati et al., 2024; Suharyani et al., 2023). A key feature of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is its emphasis on cultivating a comprehensive understanding of the principles of the Proyek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila dan Rahmatan Lil Alamin (P5RA) among students. This objective is aimed at fostering not only academic excellence but also the development of strong character in students.

However, the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in practice presents significant challenges. Principal and teacher challenges include the need to enhance pedagogical competencies, the integration of learning plans, assessment design, and the implementation of PP5RA (Sucipto et al., 2024). Prior research findings indicate that numerous teachers encounter challenges in adapting to the demands of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, particularly in designing and implementing student-centered learning (Azzarkasyi, 2024; Ervia et al., 2024). This difficulty is

further exacerbated by teachers' limited comprehension of differentiated learning, the integration of P5RA into learning practices, and their inadequate mastery of technology (Dendodi et al., 2024; Sucipto et al., 2024).

While numerous studies have examined the *Kurikulum Merdeka* since its inception, the majority have focused on theoretical aspects, including curriculum policy analysis, literature reviews, and the evaluation of curriculum documents. Consequently, these studies offer only a limited and conceptual understanding of the vision, mission, and principles underpinning the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Few studies have explored the community-based assistance approach as a means of implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* appropriately and effectively. This study aims to address this knowledge gap.

Numerous training courses and workshops have been developed for teachers, with the primary objective being to provide conceptual understanding of the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Makrif et al., 2023; Muhardini et al., 2023; Salsinha et al., 2024). However, these activities are typically limited to a single implementation, often with limited time allocated, resulting in the absence of concrete guidelines for implementing these concepts in the classroom setting. Consequently, teachers frequently encounter difficulties in integrating training content into effective learning practices. Indeed, the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is contingent on the capacity and capabilities of existing principals and teachers.

It is anticipated that through effective and continuous assistance, the challenges associated with implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* can be surmounted, especially in Aceh schools. This program is designed to function as a learning tool for teachers, with the objective of enhancing their skills in implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. This participatory approach is expected to enhance teachers' competencies and cultivate a sense of ownership over the curriculum, thereby positively impacting educational quality (Tobondo, 2024).

The community-based mentoring program under scrutiny in this study encompasses not only the delivery of training materials but also direct assistance in the classroom. Assistance activities will include observations of learning practices, reflective discussions, and collaboration among principals, teachers, and assistants. In this case, mentoring focuses on several essentials in the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, such as designing the Kurikulum Operasional Madrasah (KOM), developing lesson plans, compiling assessment tools, and implementing P5RA. Through this approach, teachers and principals will be given the flexibility to practice the concepts of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* directly in the classroom, while receiving feedback from the facilitator.

The community-based mentoring program offers a forum for educators to share their experiences, best practices, and challenges encountered in implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. This collaborative environment fosters the exchange of ideas and strategies, leading to the identification of effective solutions to address these challenges. Research has demonstrated that a continuous mentoring program provides more comprehensive support for teachers than a single training event. The ongoing support and feedback facilitate significant and impactful improvements in teaching practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2021; Mullen & Fallen, 2022). In alignment with the aforementioned points, it is hypothesized that this community-based mentoring approach aligns with the principles of Bandura's social learning

theory, particularly with regard to the concepts of observation, imitation, and modeling (Bandura, 2014).

Based on the aforementioned background, the objective of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of a community-based mentoring approach that supports principals and teachers in implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. The central problem formulated in this study is as follows: To what extent is the community-based mentoring approach effective in supporting teachers and principals in implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka*? To examine this, the CBPR approach will be adopted to involve the school community in implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

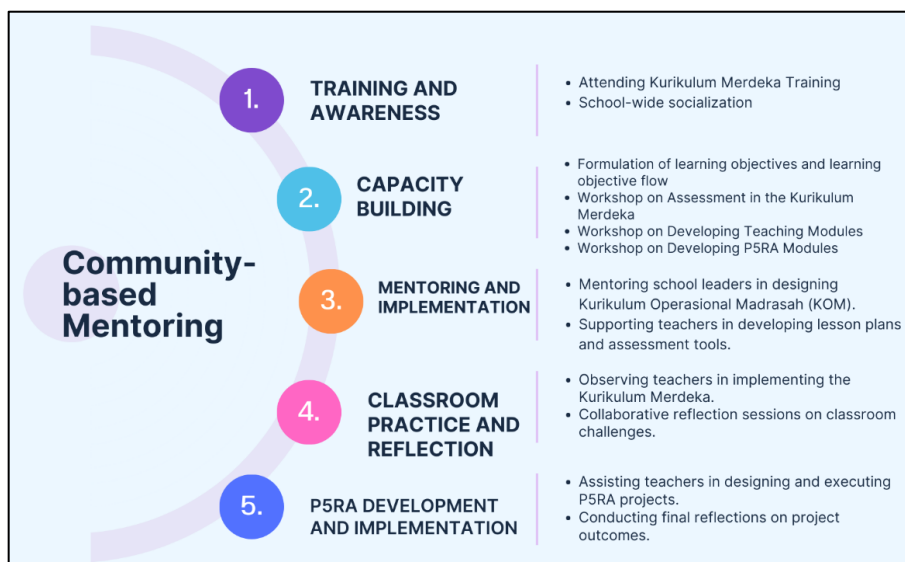
## **Methods**

Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) was chosen as the research design for this study due to its collaborative nature, which actively involves community members, stakeholders, and researchers in all phases of the research process. Its suitability lies in its capacity for iterative learning and reflection within real educational settings, enabling the study to address the unique challenges and opportunities of implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka* in Aceh schools. By engaging school leaders and teachers as co-researchers, CBPR ensured that interventions were tailored to participants' needs, fostering ownership and sustainability (Coombe et al., 2020). The iterative nature of CBPR facilitated continuous feedback loops, allowing the research to remain responsive to the evolving needs of participants and the educational context.

The study was conducted in Islamic junior high schools that had participated in training programs organized by *Balai Diklat Kegamaan Aceh*. The community of this program are participants of the training included principals, vice principals responsible for curriculum affairs, and teachers from these schools. These individuals were selected based on their active engagement in *Kurikulum Merdeka* training and their roles in implementing the curriculum within their respective schools. The selection criteria for participants were designed to ensure that the study involved individuals who were directly involved in the curriculum implementation process. Thus, these schools had demonstrated a commitment to adopting *Kurikulum Merdeka* through their participation in training programs.

The study was structured into five distinct phases (Figure 1), each designed to build the capacity of school leaders and teachers to implement *Kurikulum Merdeka*. These phases were informed by the principles of CBPR, emphasizing collaboration, capacity building, and iterative learning. The phases described below are similar to the stages in the Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach that has been used in a number of previous studies. A similar model was also adopted by another study, which divided the CBPAR stages into In-Service Learning 1 (planning), On-Service Learning (implementation and observation), and In-Service Learning 2 (reflection and dissemination) in the context of improving mathematics teacher competence (Yestina et al., 2023). Similar studies also applied almost identical phases. These phases included participatory processes from the identification of needs, community

involvement in planning and implementation of activities, to evaluation and program sustainability (Fauzi et al., 2023).



**Figure 1.** Mentoring Model

Phase 1 focused on training and awareness, building foundational knowledge of Kurikulum Merdeka. Facilitators and participants attended training by *Balai Diklat Kegamaan Aceh* on its principles, goals, and implementation. They then conducted school-wide socialization to share insights with staff, fostering a collaborative approach to implementation. Phase 2 is capacity-building workshops. The second phase involved a series of workshops designed to build the capacity of participants in key areas of *Kurikulum Merdeka* implementation. These workshops were interactive and hands-on, allowing teachers to apply their learning in real-time and receive direct feedback from facilitators and peers (Juandi, 2018; Tupamahu et al., 2025).

Phase 2 focused on capacity building through facilitator-led workshops. Teachers learned to formulate learning objectives and design learning trajectories, develop competency-based assessment tools, create teaching modules integrating curriculum principles, and design P5RA modules to support *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila dan Rahmatan Lil Alamin*, ensuring effective *Kurikulum Merdeka* implementation.

Phase 3 is mentoring and implementation. In the third phase, participants engaged in ongoing mentoring to facilitate the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* within their schools. This phase focused on two key areas: mentoring school leaders and supporting teachers. School leaders were guided in designing the *Kurikulum Operasional Madrasah (KOM)*, a school-level operational curriculum tailored to align with the principles of *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Simultaneously, teachers received support in developing lesson plans and assessment tools that adhered to the curriculum's framework. Mentors provided constructive feedback and assistance to ensure that the materials were both practical and effective. The mentoring process was highly collaborative, fostering a partnership between mentors and participants to address challenges, refine strategies, and enhance the overall implementation process (Annisah et al., 2024; Silva et al., 2025).

Phase 4 is classroom practice and reflection. The fourth phase emphasized the practical application of *Kurikulum Merdeka* in classroom settings. Teachers were observed as they implemented the curriculum, with a focus on their teaching strategies, student engagement, and the alignment of classroom practices with the curriculum's objectives. Following these observations, participants engaged in collaborative reflection sessions to discuss challenges encountered in the classroom and to identify strategies for improvement. These sessions fostered a supportive environment where participants could share experiences, learn from one another, and refine their teaching practices to better align with the curriculum's goals (Susilowati et al., 2025).

Phase 5 is P5RA development and implementation. The final phase focused on the development and implementation of *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila dan Rahmatan Lil Alamin* (P5RA) projects. Teachers were guided in designing projects that integrated the principles of Pancasila and *Rahmatan Lil Alamin*, aiming to promote students' character development and holistic learning. Once the projects were designed, teachers implemented them in their classrooms with ongoing support from mentors to ensure effective execution. Following the implementation, participants engaged in final reflection sessions to evaluate the outcomes of the projects, discussing their successes, challenges, and the lessons learned throughout the process. This reflection is an important point for formulating sustainable development measures, including adjustments to future learning designs (Susilowati et al., 2025).

The study employed a mixed-methods approach to data collection, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to capture a comprehensive understanding of the implementation process. Qualitative data were collected through observations, interviews, and reflection discussions. Observations focused on participants' engagement in workshops, mentoring sessions, and classroom practices. Interviews and reflection discussions provided insights into participants' experiences, challenges, and perceptions of the curriculum implementation process.

Meanwhile, quantitative data were collected to measure improvements in teacher competency. In this case, the improvement of teacher competence in the context of the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* can be measured through three main domains, namely learning planning, learning implementation, and assessment and reflection. In the aspect of learning planning, the indicators used include the ability of teachers to develop differentiated Lesson Plans (RPP) that accommodate the diversity of student characteristics. Teachers are also expected to be able to integrate learning objectives with Learning Outcomes (CP) and the Pancasila Student Profile, as well as develop initial diagnostic assessments and formative assessments that are in line with the principles of liberating learning (Lestari et al., 2023).

In the domain of learning implementation, teacher competence is reflected in their skills in applying active and collaborative learning strategies, as well as their ability to manage the classroom adaptively according to the interests, learning styles, and needs of students. Furthermore, teachers also need to demonstrate an understanding and application of

differentiated learning principles and character building through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project and Rahmatan Lil Alamin (P5RA) in a contextual and participatory manner (Damiati et al., 2024).

In terms of assessment and reflection, teacher competence is measured based on their ability to design authentic assessment instruments that are capable of measuring competence comprehensively, including knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Teachers are also expected to be able to critically analyze student learning outcomes to design appropriate follow-up learning activities. In addition, the implementation of collaborative and continuous learning reflection is an important indicator in creating a learning culture that supports the continuous professional development of teachers (Aisyah et al., 2025; Rosidah et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, quantitative data were collected to measure improvements in teacher competency through pre-test and post-test assessments, which evaluated participants' knowledge and pedagogical skills before and after the capacity-building interventions. Each assessment consisted of 14 items designed to align with the core competencies targeted by the program, lesson planning, assessment design, and instructional delivery. The instruments underwent a content validation process involving 3 experts, who reviewed the items for relevance, clarity, and alignment with learning objectives. A pilot test was conducted with a sample of 15 teachers to evaluate the reliability and effectiveness of the items. Statistical analysis showed that item difficulty indices ranged from 0.40 to 0.78, indicating moderate to high levels of appropriateness. Discrimination indices ranged from 0.30 to 0.55, demonstrating good differentiation between high and low performers. The internal consistency reliability, measured using Cronbach's alpha, was 0.87, indicating high reliability. These results confirmed that the instrument was both valid and reliable for measuring changes in teacher competency.

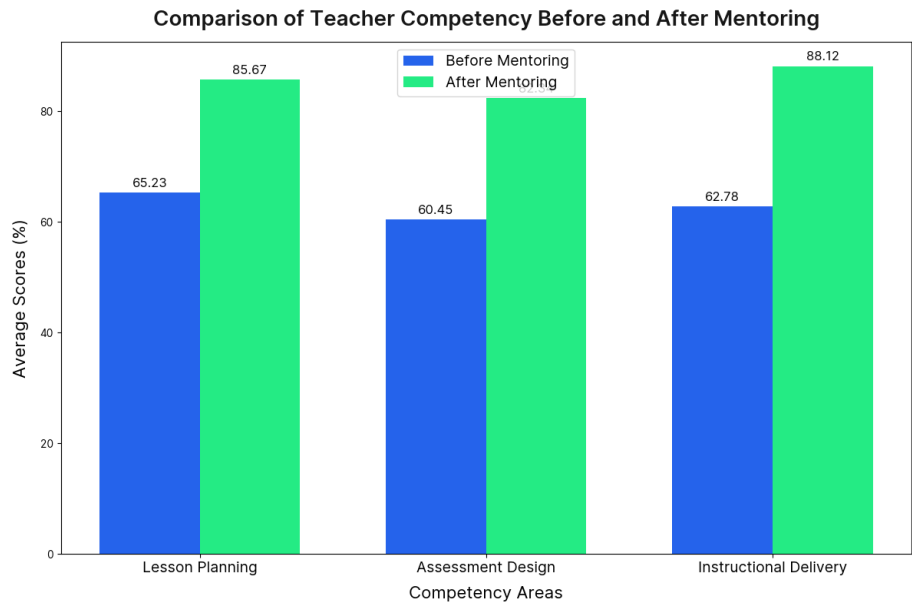
The data analysis process was rigorously designed to ensure the validity and depth of interpretation. Qualitative data analysis used thematic analysis, a systematic process for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes in data (Heriyanto, 2018). In addition, quantitative data were analyzed using a descriptive statistical approach to assess changes in teacher competence before and after the intervention. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods is a mixed-methods approach commonly used in educational research to produce a comprehensive understanding (Habibullah et al., 2025).

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Increased Teacher Competency**

The mentoring program led to significant improvements in teacher competency across three key areas: lesson planning, assessment design, and instructional delivery. Pre-mentoring assessments revealed average scores of 65.23%, 60.45%, and 62.78% in these areas, respectively. Post-mentoring evaluations showed substantial increases, with scores rising to 85.67%, 82.34%, and 88.12%. This represents an average improvement of 23.89% across all competency areas. Figure 2 illustrates the comparison of teacher skills before and after mentoring, highlighting the program's effectiveness in enhancing teacher capabilities.





**Figure 2.** Comparison of Teacher Competency Before and After Mentoring

The observed improvement in teacher competency highlights the transformative potential of targeted mentoring programs. Pre-mentoring scores in lesson planning, assessment design, and instructional delivery, respectively, reflect the challenges faced by teachers in adapting to the demands of *Kurikulum Merdeka*. These challenges align with previous research indicating that many Indonesian teachers struggle with the curriculum's emphasis on student-centered learning and project-based approaches (Azzarkasyi, 2024; Ervia et al., 2024). The post-mentoring scores indicate that the mentoring program effectively addressed these challenges, equipping teachers with the skills and confidence needed to implement the curriculum successfully.

The mentoring sessions provided a structured framework for professional development, combining theoretical knowledge with practical applications. This approach aligns with Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism, which emphasizes the role of guided learning and social interaction in skill acquisition. By engaging in collaborative activities and receiving personalized feedback, teachers were able to internalize new pedagogical strategies and apply them in their classrooms. The significant improvement in instructional delivery, in particular, suggests that the mentoring program not only enhanced teachers' technical skills but also fostered a deeper understanding of the curriculum's underlying principles.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research on the effectiveness of mentoring in teacher professional development. Darling-Hammond et al. (2021) argue that mentoring programs that provide ongoing support and feedback are more effective than traditional one-time workshops in promoting sustained improvements in teaching practices. Similarly, a study highlights the importance of mentoring in helping teachers navigate the complexities of curriculum implementation and adapt to new pedagogical approaches (Mullen & Fallen, 2022).



In the context of *Kurikulum Merdeka*, the results align with research findings that participatory approaches to professional development can enhance teacher competency and foster a sense of ownership over the curriculum (Tobondo, 2024). The collaborative nature of the mentoring program in this study mirrors the principles of CBPR, which emphasizes the importance of involving stakeholders in the design and implementation of interventions. By actively engaging teachers in the mentoring process, the program not only addressed their immediate skill gaps but also empowered them to take an active role in their professional growth.

However, the findings also highlight some areas of divergence from existing literature. For instance, while previous studies have emphasized the role of mentoring in reducing teacher resistance to change, this study found that some teachers initially resisted the mentoring program due to concerns about time constraints and workload (Ali & Adel, 2020; Zoutendijk & Mpisi, 2022). This suggests that additional measures, such as providing incentives or reducing administrative burdens, may be needed to ensure the successful implementation of mentoring programs in similar contexts.

The results of this study have important implications for understanding the mechanisms through which mentoring programs influence teacher competency. The significant improvement in all three competency areas suggests that the mentoring program facilitated both cognitive and affective changes among teachers. From a cognitive perspective, the program provided teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to implement *Kurikulum Merdeka* effectively. This aligns with Bandura's social learning theory, which posits that learning occurs through observation, imitation, and modeling. By observing and interacting with mentors, teachers were able to acquire new strategies and techniques that they could apply in their own classrooms.

From an affective perspective, the mentoring program helped to build teachers' confidence and self-efficacy, which are critical for sustained professional growth. According to Bandura, self-efficacy beliefs influence individuals' motivation, effort, and persistence in the face of challenges (Bandura, 2014). The personalized feedback and encouragement provided by mentors likely contributed to the observed improvements in teacher competency by enhancing teachers' belief in their ability to succeed. This is particularly important in the context of *Kurikulum Merdeka*, which requires teachers to adopt innovative and student-centered approaches that may initially feel unfamiliar or intimidating.

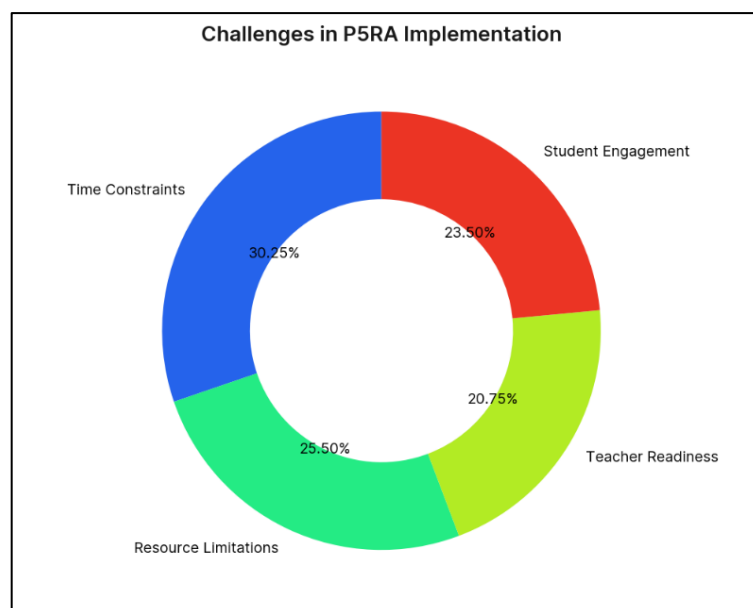
The findings also support the application of CBPR principles in educational settings. By involving teachers in the design and implementation of the mentoring program, the study created a sense of ownership and accountability that likely contributed to its success. This aligns with Freire's concept of dialogic learning, which emphasizes the importance of collaboration and mutual respect in fostering meaningful and sustainable change (Indah, 2021). The mentoring program's emphasis on reflection and continuous improvement further reinforces the value of CBPR as a framework for professional development.

The findings suggest that additional measures may be needed to address the challenges associated with mentoring programs, such as time constraints and workload. Providing

incentives, reducing administrative burdens, and integrating mentoring into teachers' regular schedules could help ensure the successful implementation of such programs in similar contexts.

### Effective KOM & P5RA Development

The mentoring model enabled the successful development of the *Kurikulum Operasional Madrasah (KOM)* in both schools. School leaders reported that the collaborative mentoring sessions provided them with the necessary guidance to align the KOM with the principles of *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Teachers also demonstrated a strong understanding of P5RA principles, successfully designing and implementing projects that integrated character development and holistic learning. However, challenges were identified during P5RA implementation, including time constraints (30.25%), resource limitations (25.50%), teacher readiness (20.75%), and student engagement (23.50%). The pie chart in Figure 3 provides a breakdown of these challenges.



**Figure 3.** Challenges in P5RA Implementation

The development of KOM and P5RA frameworks was marked by a high level of teacher and school leader engagement, with 92% of participants reporting that the mentoring sessions were instrumental in clarifying the curriculum's objectives and translating them into actionable plans. This finding aligns with research that emphasizes the importance of participatory approaches in curriculum development (Alsubaie, 2016). By involving teachers and school leaders in the co-creation process, the mentoring program ensured that the KOM and P5RA frameworks were tailored to the unique needs and contexts of each school.

The mentoring sessions also addressed common challenges associated with curriculum implementation, such as a lack of clarity in guidelines and limited resources. Participants reported that the collaborative nature of the sessions allowed them to share best practices, troubleshoot challenges, and develop innovative solutions. This finding is consistent with the principles of CBPR, which emphasize collaboration, shared decision-making, and capacity building as key to achieving sustainable outcomes (Israel et al., 2020).

The results of this study align with previous research on the benefits of collaborative approaches to curriculum development. For example, a study on the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* found that schools that adopted participatory approaches were more successful in aligning their operational plans with the curriculum's principles (Suryani, 2024). Similarly, research highlights the role of collaborative professional development in fostering teacher ownership and commitment to curriculum implementation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2021).

The findings also support the growing body of literature on project-based learning (PjBL) as a key component of 21st-century education. The P5RA projects, which focused on developing students' critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving skills, are consistent with the principles of PBL. Studies have shown that PjBL can enhance student engagement and learning outcomes by providing authentic, real-world learning experiences (Almulla, 2020; Chang et al., 2024). The success of the P5RA projects in this study underscores the potential of PBL to operationalize the principles of *Kurikulum Merdeka* and foster holistic student development.

The study also highlights the relevance of Bandura's social learning theory, which posits that learning occurs through observation, imitation, and modeling (Bandura, 2014). By participating in mentoring sessions and observing best practices, teachers were able to internalize new strategies and apply them in their contexts. This process of observational learning was further reinforced by the iterative nature of the mentoring sessions, which allowed participants to receive feedback, reflect on their experiences, and refine their approaches.

Despite the overall success of the mentoring program, participants identified several challenges, including time constraints (reported by 30.25% of participants) and limited access to resources. These challenges are consistent with findings that resource limitations and competing priorities often hinder the effective implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Maghfirah, 2024). To address these challenges, future programs should consider providing additional support, such as access to digital resources, flexible scheduling, and ongoing professional development opportunities.

Another challenge highlighted by participants was the need for more targeted support in integrating the P5RA projects into their existing teaching practices. While the mentoring sessions provided a strong foundation, some participants expressed a need for additional guidance on designing and implementing PBL activities. This finding suggests that future programs should include specialized training on PBL methodologies and provide examples of successful projects to inspire and guide teachers.

### **Impact on Classroom Practice**

Observations of classroom practices revealed that teachers effectively adapted new strategies introduced during the mentoring sessions. These strategies included differentiated instruction, formative assessment techniques, and student-centered learning approaches. Teachers reported increased confidence in applying these methods, which resulted in higher levels of student engagement and improved learning outcomes. Students demonstrated greater participation in classroom activities, with teachers noting a 25% increase in active student involvement compared to pre-mentoring observations.

**Table 1.** Impact on Classroom Practice

	Planning	Instruction	Assessment	Teachers
<b>School A</b>	85,34	82,45	80,56	22
<b>School B</b>	88,12	86,78	84,23	26

School B consistently outperformed School A across all differentiated instruction domains (Table 1). In planning, School B scored 88.12% versus School A's 85.34% (2.78% difference). The instructional domain showed the largest gap (4.33%), with School B at 86.78% and School A at 82.45%. Assessment yielded the lowest scores for both schools (School B: 84.23%; School A: 80.56%). A consistent pattern emerged across both institutions: planning scores were highest, followed by instruction, with assessment scoring lowest. This progressive decline indicates teachers were more proficient in preparing for differentiated instruction than implementing or evaluating it. Overall implementation scores averaged 82.78% for School A and 86.38% for School B, suggesting successful implementation at both schools, with School B showing moderately higher proficiency.

The implementation of differentiated instruction in two Islamic junior high schools produced promising results, with observations revealing that teachers effectively adapted new strategies introduced during mentoring sessions. These strategies resulted in a notable 25.00% increase in active student involvement compared to pre-mentoring observations. This finding aligns with research that emphasizes that differentiated instruction fosters increased student engagement and improved learning outcomes when implemented consistently across classroom practices (Handa, 2019).

The instructional domain, however, revealed a more pronounced disparity. School B scored 86.78% compared to School A's 82.45%, a difference of 4.33 percentage points. This discrepancy indicates that the delivery of differentiated content in classroom settings is a more challenging aspect of instructional change. The observed gap aligns with the literature, including research highlights that the practical application of differentiated methodologies often poses greater challenges than initial curriculum planning (Tomlinson, 2017). The significant improvement in active student participation in classrooms, as observed, supports the notion that well-executed instructional interventions can have a substantial impact on student engagement.

These findings underscore the value of targeted mentoring. The post-mentoring increase in teacher confidence and student engagement reiterates the importance of continuous professional development in implementing innovative teaching strategies. Future research should examine the institutional factors that contributed to the observed performance differences between schools and explore effective methods to enhance differentiated assessment practices further. Overall, these results affirm the positive impact of differentiated instruction on instructional processes and student engagement, while also identifying critical areas for future growth and professional support.

### Reflection Outcomes

Collaborative reflection sessions played a pivotal role in enhancing teacher self-efficacy

and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. These sessions provided a structured forum in which teachers could share experiences, discuss challenges, and collaboratively develop solutions. During the reflections, teachers not only exchanged practical insights but also engaged in critical dialogue about the underlying principles of Kurikulum Merdeka. This process contributed significantly to deepening their understanding of the curriculum, prompting many to refine and adapt their teaching practices in alignment with its core values.

The reflective process proved to be transformative, with a remarkable 92% of teachers reporting increased confidence in their ability to implement the curriculum effectively. Such a high level of self-reported confidence suggests that the act of collaborative reflection not only helped teachers reconcile any discrepancies between theory and practice but also empowered them to become proactive agents of change within their classrooms. The sessions served as a catalyst for professional growth, nurturing a supportive community where continuous learning and improvement were paramount. Ultimately, these collaborative reflection sessions demonstrate the practical benefits of fostering open communication and shared accountability among educators, which is essential for the sustained success of innovative educational reforms such as Kurikulum Merdeka.

### **Effectiveness of Community-Driven Mentoring**

The findings of this study align with and contribute to the broader literature on Kurikulum Merdeka implementation, underscoring the effectiveness of community-driven mentoring in addressing teacher resistance and skill gaps. Research on Kurikulum Merdeka, which emphasizes teacher autonomy, student-centered learning, and flexible curriculum design, has noted that many teachers initially struggle with its open-ended nature and the demands for differentiated instruction (Aliyah et al., 2024). The present study's results demonstrate that, through community-driven mentoring, teachers have successfully adapted their practices to implement differentiated instruction effectively. Specifically, observed improvements in planning, instruction, and even assessment strategies reveal that when teachers are supported through collaborative networks, as facilitated by mentoring sessions, they become more proficient in tailoring instruction to meet diverse student needs.

Existing literature has argued that teacher resistance often stems from uncertainty and a lack of confidence in implementing new pedagogical strategies (Bulqis, 2023). This study supports such findings and extends them by showing that community-driven mentoring provides a structured platform for teachers to share challenges and acquire hands-on techniques. The implementation scores evidenced that while planning typically showed higher proficiency, the application in the classroom remained more challenging. This gap is consistent with earlier research, which suggests that while teachers are generally comfortable with theoretical frameworks, the translation of these frameworks into dynamic instructional practices demands continuous support (Rahmadhani et al., 2023; Zulaiha et al., 2023).

Community-driven mentoring is particularly effective because it leverages peer collaboration and shared experiences to build confidence and competence among teachers. By engaging in regular discussions, sharing lesson plans, and observing classroom practices,

teachers are exposed to multiple strategies that foster a more nuanced understanding of differentiated instruction. This social learning process echoes Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, which posits that meaningful learning arises through interactions with more knowledgeable peers. Such peer-driven support systems allow teachers to learn from one another and gradually overcome resistance, as they see firsthand the positive outcomes associated with varied instructional methods. The trust and collegiality nurtured through these mentoring systems are essential for breaking down barriers to change.

Moreover, the community approach directly addresses the skill gaps that impede the effective implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka. In many cases, teachers are compelled to adopt traditional teaching practices due to a lack of training in newer, student-centered methods. The mentoring sessions in this study, however, provided targeted professional development that enhanced teachers' ability to design, deliver, and assess differentiated learning experiences. This systematic approach mitigates the steep learning curve typically associated with innovative curricula, enabling teachers to transition more smoothly into the roles envisioned by Kurikulum Merdeka.

The significant improvements in active student participation, a 25.00% increase post-mentoring, further validate the benefits of community-driven mentoring. As teachers refine and adapt their instructional strategies, there is a corresponding enhancement in classroom engagement and learning outcomes. These findings underscore that community-driven mentoring not only fosters skill development but also results in tangible improvements in student performance, aligning with both national educational goals and international research on effective differentiated instruction.

In summary, the current study reinforces the view that community-driven mentoring is a powerful mechanism for overcoming teacher resistance and filling skill gaps inherent in the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka. By integrating collaborative practices with ongoing professional development, such mentoring creates an environment in which teachers can thrive, ultimately enhancing instructional quality and student engagement.

### **Implications for Policy & Practice**

The findings of this study offer significant implications for schools and policymakers seeking to enhance the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka through effective mentoring frameworks. Schools can adopt this community-driven mentoring approach by establishing structured peer collaboration systems where experienced teachers guide colleagues through differentiated instruction implementation. This approach has been proven effective in improving teachers' pedagogical competence when implemented in a structured manner, as demonstrated in the study by Arifin and Hanif, which emphasizes the effectiveness of school learning communities as a professional development strategy (Arifin & Hanif, [2024](#)). This requires creating dedicated time for regular mentoring sessions, classroom observations, and collaborative planning. School leaders should formalize these mentoring relationships while ensuring they remain collegial rather than evaluative, fostering an environment where teachers feel safe to experiment with new instructional approaches.



Policymakers can support this framework by allocating resources specifically for mentoring programs and recognizing mentoring as a legitimate professional development activity within teacher workloads. Other studies underscore the importance of formal recognition of mentoring activities in teachers' workloads, including the provision of incentives, reduction in teaching hours, and development of mentoring protocols appropriate to the local context (Kurniawan et al., 2024). Additionally, policymakers should consider establishing regional networks of mentor teachers who can support multiple schools, particularly benefiting smaller institutions with limited internal expertise.

Several recommendations emerge from this study for improving Kurikulum Merdeka training programs. First, training should shift from theoretical overviews to practical, classroom-based applications with concrete examples of differentiated instruction in action. Second, professional development should be ongoing rather than one-time events, allowing teachers to implement strategies, receive feedback, and refine their approaches over time. Third, training programs should specifically target the assessment domain, which consistently showed lower implementation scores across both schools. Finally, training should incorporate collaborative elements that mirror the community-driven mentoring approach, enabling teachers to learn from peers while developing the skills to become mentors themselves. By integrating these recommendations, schools and policymakers can create more effective support systems for teachers implementing Kurikulum Merdeka.

## Conclusion

The integration of CBPR mentoring in supporting the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* has shown positive results, with significant improvements in teacher performance in planning, teaching, and assessment, as well as a 25% increase in student participation. This collaborative approach has successfully boosted teachers' confidence, overcome resistance to change, and provided space for professional growth and more effective learning practices. School principals have also felt the positive impact through improved teaching practices and enhanced student learning outcomes, while policymakers have gained strong evidence to support ongoing professional development programs.

However, further research is needed to evaluate the long-term sustainability and adaptability of this mentoring model in various educational contexts. Future studies should examine its effectiveness across different subject areas and diverse school environments. In conclusion, community-based mentoring has proven to be an important bridge between theory and practice in the classroom and a catalyst for more transformative, sustainable, and community-centered educational reform.

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