GOLDEN RATIO

Implementation of the Independent Curriculum through the Merdeka Mengajar Platform at the Early Childhood Education Level in West Sumbawa Regency, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at the Early Childhood Education (PAUD) level is a strategic step toward shaping Indonesia's golden generation from an early age. This curriculum emphasizes child-centered learning tailored to individual needs and interests while fostering positive character development through meaningful experiences. Sumbawa Barat Regency, one of the regions adopting the Merdeka Curriculum in PAUD institutions, demonstrates a strong commitment to supporting national educational transformation. The Merdeka Mengajar Platform is a digital tool to assist teachers in understanding, planning, and implementing learning activities aligned with the principles of Merdeka Curriculum. PAUD teachers can access teaching modules, self-paced training, inspirational videos, and diagnostic assessments to design contextual and engaging learning activities through this platform. It also supports continuous teacher competency development. In practice, PAUD teachers in Sumbawa Barat Regency have shown high enthusiasm for using the Merdeka Mengajar Platform. However, challenges such as limited digital infrastructure, technological literacy gaps, and the need for intensive mentoring remain obstacles to overcome. Sustained support from local governments and educational institutions is crucial to optimizing the platform's potential. This study highlights the positive impact of the Merdeka Curriculum and Merdeka Mengajar Platform on enhancing PAUD learning quality, though room for improvement exists. By strengthening teacher training and infrastructure, the platform can become a key driver of adaptive and relevant early childhood education transformation, keeping pace with modern advancements.

Keywords: Independent Curriculum, Freedom to Teach, Early Childhood Education, West Sumbawa, Curriculum Implementation.

I.   Introduction

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is one of the most critical phases in laying the foundation for a child's development, encompassing cognitive, social, emotional, and spiritual aspects. During 0–6, children experience a golden age where their brains develop rapidly. Therefore, education at this stage plays a pivotal role in preparing children for subsequent levels of schooling. Numerous studies have shown that the quality

of early childhood education positively correlates with academic success, social well-being, and emotional stability in adulthood.

Indonesia's education system has undergone significant transformations that are in line with global advancements and demands. One of the major reforms in the national education system is the development of the Merdeka Curriculum. This curriculum was introduced in response to challenges faced during the implementation of previous curricula, particularly in creating learning processes that are relevant, contextual, and student-centered. In the context of ECE, the Merdeka Curriculum is designed to provide educators with the flexibility to design learning plans tailored to children's developmental stages and the local conditions of each educational institution. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes the importance of character development and 21st-century skills, such as critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and communication. This reflects a paradigm shift in education from a teacher-centered approach to a student-centered one. This approach is highly relevant in early childhood education (ECE), as young children learn through play and exploration. Thus, the Merdeka Curriculum encourages teachers to become facilitators who guide children in enjoyable and meaningful learning processes. To support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, the government, through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), has developed a digital platform called the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM). This platform is designed as a support tool for teachers to understand, plan, and implement the Merdeka Curriculum. Through PMM, educators can access various training modules, instructional videos, teaching resources, and a space to share best practices among peers. This initiative is expected to enhance teachers' capabilities and address the challenges of implementing the new curriculum in the field, particularly in regions with limited resources. In West Sumbawa Regency (KSB), implementing the Merdeka Curriculum via the PMM platform is a strategic step toward improving the quality of education, including at the early childhood education (PAUD) level. As one of the regions of West Nusa Tenggara Province, KSB has unique geographical and sociocultural characteristics. Some of its areas are relatively remote coastal and mountainous regions, where access to training and information often poses challenges. Therefore, leveraging technology through PMM is considered an innovative solution to bridge accessibility gaps and uniformly enhance educators' capacities.

According to data from the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2021, the national early childhood participation rate remains relatively low, with only about 60% of children aged 0–6 enrolled in early childhood education (ECE) institutions. Meanwhile, in West Sumbawa Regency, child participation in ECE shows a slightly higher trend but still faces various challenges, including family economic constraints, the limited availability of representative ECE institutions, and low parental awareness of the importance of early education. Given these challenges, implementing the Merdeka Curriculum through a digital approach is expected to catalyze increasing child participation in ECE by improving service quality. In addition to improving access to and quality of Early Childhood Education (PAUD) services, the PMM platform also serves as a key strategy for strengthening teacher capacity. Based on a 2022 survey conducted by the Center for Education Policy Research (Puslitjak), it was found that most PAUD teachers in the West Nusa Tenggara region, including West Sumbawa, reported feeling inadequately prepared to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. This lack of readiness is generally attributed to insufficient intensive training, limited teaching resources, and gaps in understanding the new paradigm in early childhood education.

The PMM (Platform Merdeka Mengajar) offers online and free-to-access features, including self-paced training, teaching tools aligned with learning outcomes, and a forum for educators to share resources. This provides early childhood education (PAUD) teachers opportunities to learn flexibly, develop their skills, and strengthen their professional networks. Additionally, the content presented in PMM is tailored to local contexts, making it relevant to students' needs and the unique characteristics of each school's environment. In this way, teachers are curriculum implementers and designers of contextual, adaptive, and meaningful learning experiences. In its implementation, the success of the Merdeka Curriculum at the PAUD level depends not only on teacher readiness but also on the synergy between educational institutions, local governments, and parents. One of PMM's most significant potential lies in strengthening the relationship between teachers and parents. Parents can actively participate in their child's educational process through features like learning

documentation and child development updates. Fan & Chen's (2001) research demonstrates that parental involvement in education significantly impacts children's academic achievement, social behavior, and psychological well-being.

Furthermore, collaboration between teachers and parents has become increasingly important in the post-COVID-19 pandemic context, where learning processes often occur in hybrid or technology-based formats. Parents have become strategic partners in supporting their children's learning at home. In this situation, the Platform Merdeka Mengajar (PMM) is a tool for teachers and a medium for communication and coordination with parents. With transparent information and active parental involvement, early childhood education is expected to become more integrative and holistic. However, implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Curriculum) and utilizing PMM in regions like West Sumbawa are not without challenges. Uneven internet infrastructure, limited access to digital devices, and low digital literacy among teachers and parents pose significant obstacles. Therefore, the active role of local governments, educational institutions, and civil society organizations is crucial in providing support, whether through training, resource provision, or digital literacy outreach. Only with a robust support ecosystem can curriculum and technological innovations be optimally implemented.

Along with the dynamics of national education policies, conducting in-depth and contextual studies on how the independent curriculum and PMM are implemented in the field, especially in PAUD education units in regions such as West Sumbawa Regency, is important. This research becomes significant because it can reveal various important aspects, ranging from teacher understanding and readiness, the effectiveness of the available training, technical and administrative constraints, to parents' perception of this new curriculum approach. The results of this study are expected to be the basis of policy recommendations for local and central governments to perfect the strategy of implementing the independent curriculum in the future.

On the other hand, this research also aims to contribute to developing more responsive, inclusive, and sustainable educational practices. By exploring the experiences and practices in West Sumbawa Regency, the results of this study can be an inspiration and reference for other regions in Indonesia in adopting and developing an independent curriculum, especially at the PAUD level. In the long run, this effort aligns with the significant mission of national education in creating a generation of Indonesians who are intelligent, characterized, and ready to face global challenges. Along with the dynamics of national education policies that continue to develop, efforts to understand in depth the implementation of the independent curriculum and the Merdeka Teaching Platform (PMM) become increasingly urgent. Changes in the curriculum are not only administrative transformations but also concern paradigm changes in the learning process. Therefore, it is important to conduct contextual studies on how this policy is carried out in an education unit, especially at the Early Childhood Education (PAUD) level, which has a unique characteristic of students and requires an appropriate learning approach.

West Sumbawa Regency, one of Indonesia's regions that continues to improve the quality of education, is a strategic location to see how the Merdeka and PMM curriculum is implemented at the local level. In the regional context, there is a diversity of challenges and potentials that are not always reflected in national policy. Studies of regions such as West Sumbawa provide opportunities to understand the various dynamics of implementing educational policies within the decentralization framework and regional autonomy. This research is significant because it can reveal various crucial aspects of implementing new educational policies. Aspects such as the understanding and readiness of the teacher of the Merdeka curriculum are an important starting point to study. Without adequate understanding, the teacher will have difficulty implementing a learning approach based on children's interests, needs, and potential. In addition, the effectiveness of the training provided through PMM and other paths is also the primary focus. Training that is not contextual or too theoretical is often unable to answer the practical needs of teachers in the field. Therefore, this study will explore the extent of the training received by PAUD educators to increase their competence in applying a new curriculum optimally.

Technical and administrative constraints cannot be ignored. Many PAUD units, especially in the regions, still face issues with facilities and infrastructure, limited internet access, and the lack of technical

support. This situation affects the ability of education units to access and utilize PMM to the fullest. In addition, a high administrative burden can interfere with teachers' focus on providing meaningful educational services to children. Parental perception of the new curriculum approach is also important in successfully implementing the independent curriculum. PAUD is a level of education that is very dependent on the active participation of parents. If parents do not understand or do not support the learning approach offered in the independent curriculum, the early childhood education process can be disrupted. This research will explore the views and levels of parents' involvement in supporting the success of this curriculum.

The results of this study are expected to provide constructive policy recommendations for local and central governments. This recommendation is both evaluative and prospective, offering concrete strategies to improve the training system, increase infrastructure support, and strengthen synergy between the government, educators, and the community. Thus, implementing the Merdeka curriculum in the future can take place more effectively and sustainably. On the other hand, this research also has a dimension of academic and practical contribution to developing more responsive, inclusive, and sustainable educational practices. By exploring the field experience in West Sumbawa, this research seeks to present a real picture of how educational transformation occurs at the grassroots level. This can be an important reference for academics, practitioners, and policymakers when preparing strategic steps.

Experience and practice both found during this research process can be used as a model replicated or adapted by other regions in Indonesia. Each region certainly has its own characteristics, but the basic principles in implementing a successful curriculum can be a joint guide in encouraging and improving the quality of education at the national level. In this context, West Sumbawa Regency has the potential to become a pilot area in implementing an independent curriculum at the PAUD level. In the long run, this whole effort aligns with the grand vision of national education, namely creating an intelligent, character, and tough generation of Indonesians to face challenges. Early age education is the primary foundation in forming children's character and competence, and the independent curriculum is present to ensure that the process takes place significantly. Therefore, the results of this study are expected to contribute to building a better future for Indonesian education. In the long run, overall efforts to strengthen education, primarily through implementing an independent curriculum at various levels, including Early Childhood Education (PAUD), align with the central vision of national education. This vision places education as a strategic foundation for producing Indonesia's future generations who are superior in cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. Thus, every intervention and innovation in the world of education must be based on efforts to create the quality of Indonesian people who are globally competitive.

Early life has a fundamental role in forming children's personality and skills. Early age is a golden age (golden age) that will not be repeated, so it is important to provide the proper stimulation for the growth and development of children. Therefore, serious attention to the quality of PAUD services becomes crucial in supporting the development of Indonesian human resources in the future. The Merdeka Curriculum is present in response to the needs of the times that continue to develop, emphasizing learning centered on students, strengthening character, and flexibility in its implementation. In the context of PAUD, this curriculum encourages a more contextual approach that is fun and in accordance with the stages of child development. This makes the independent curriculum a strategic instrument in supporting meaningful education from an early age. Implementing the independent curriculum at the PAUD level not only demands changes in the learning approach but also requires an increase in the capacity of educators. PAUD teachers are required to understand the philosophy of this curriculum and be able to implement it creatively and innovatively. Thus, training, assistance, and access to learning resources are important in supporting implementation success.

Apart from the teacher's side, the success of the implementation of the independent curriculum is also influenced by the readiness of the PAUD institution itself, including the availability of infrastructure, administrative support, and the involvement of parents in the educational process. Therefore, a holistic and collaborative approach is the key to answering various implementation challenges in the field.

The Merdeka Teaching Platform (PMM) is one of the concrete efforts of the government to support the transformation of national education. This platform provides learning resources, training, and community

sharing communities that teachers can access flexibly. Especially for PAUD teachers in the regions, PMM provides opportunities to improve competence without being limited by geographical constraints. Implementing the independent curriculum at the PAUD level not only demands changes in the learning approach but also requires an increase in the capacity of educators. PAUD teachers are required to understand the philosophy of this curriculum and be able to implement it creatively and innovatively (Kemendikbudristek, 2022a). Thus, training, assistance, and access to learning resources are important in supporting implementation success.

Apart from the teacher side, the success of implementing the independent curriculum is also influenced by the readiness of the PAUD institution itself, including the availability of infrastructure, administrative support, and the involvement of parents in the education process (Unicef Indonesia, 2023). Therefore, a holistic and collaborative approach is the key to answering various implementation challenges in the field. The Merdeka Teaching Platform (PMM) is one of the concrete efforts of the government to support the transformation of national education. This platform provides learning resources, training, and community sharing communities that teachers can access flexibly. Especially for PAUD teachers in the regions, PMM provides an opportunity to improve competence without being limited by geographical constraints (Kemendikbudristek, 2022b). The study of implementing an independent curriculum and using PMM at the PAUD level is critical to see how the policy has been implemented as expected. Field findings can provide an overview of aspects that have been going well and challenges that still need to be overcome. With a contextual research approach, this study's results can mirror the real education conditions in the regions, especially in West Sumbawa Regency.

On the other hand, it is also important to highlight the sustainability dimensions of various educational interventions. Do the programs launched have a long-term impact and can inspire sustainable changes in the education unit? Is there a system of evaluation that measures the program's effectiveness as a whole? These questions encourage the need for studies that are not only descriptive but also reflective and critical. We can formulate more targeted policy recommendations by compiling a comprehensive and data-based study. This recommendation is not only beneficial for the central government but also for local governments, educational institutions, and educators themselves. More than that, the study's results can also be an academic and practical reference for future early childhood education development. Therefore, this research is expected to build a better future for Indonesian education. With a focus on PAUD as the initial foothold of the development of the nation's character, and the independent curriculum as a strategic tool for learning transformation, this effort is part of collective efforts in realizing an intelligent, character, and resilient generation of challenges. With this background, this research is focused on an in-depth exploration of implementing the Merdeka curriculum through the Merdeka Teaching Platform at the PAUD level in West Sumbawa Regency. This research is expected not only to provide a situational picture but also to produce applicable strategic recommendations. Amid the fast flow of changes in education, a comprehensive understanding and a collaborative approach are needed to ensure that every Indonesian child, including those in remote areas, gets the right to quality education from an early age.

II.   Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

The Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) represents a shift in Indonesia's national education paradigm, promoting learner-centered approaches, flexibility in content delivery, and differentiated instruction. This curriculum emphasizes project-based learning, student autonomy, and contextual relevance (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). The curriculum fosters foundational competencies at the Early Childhood Education (ECE) level by aligning pedagogy with developmental needs, emphasizing joyful learning, exploration, and character development (Suryana & Hastuti, 2023).

The Merdeka Mengajar Platform (MMP) was developed as a digital ecosystem to support the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. It provides access to pedagogical resources such as lesson modules, teacher training videos, and exemplary practices. Research suggests that digital platforms like MMP

can improve teacher readiness and instructional quality when supported by sufficient digital literacy and infrastructure (Susanto & Hidayati, 2023; Rahmawati et al., 2022).

Despite its potential, studies reveal that integrating such platforms into early childhood settings poses significant challenges. These include limited access to technology, insufficient training, and varying levels of teacher digital competence (Utami & Prasetyo, 2022). Moreover, successful curriculum implementation often hinges on institutional support, ongoing mentoring, and community engagement (Yuliana, 2023). In the context of rural or underdeveloped regions such as West Sumbawa, these barriers are often more pronounced, requiring context-specific strategies for effective adoption. Thus, the literature underscores the importance of understanding both enablers and constraints in the digital implementation of curriculum reforms in ECE settings. Based on the theoretical and empirical insights, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1:   Using the Merdeka Mengajar Platform positively affects the effectiveness of Independent Curriculum implementation at the Early Childhood Education level in West Sumbawa Regency.

H2:   Teacher digital literacy significantly moderates the relationship between platform usage and curriculum implementation effectiveness.

H3:   Institutional support (e.g., from principals and local education offices) positively influences how the Merdeka Mengajar Platform is utilized in curriculum implementation.

H4:   Access to ICT infrastructure mediates the relationship between teacher competence and the success of Independent Curriculum implementation.

III.   Research Method

The research design used in this study is descriptive qualitative. This design was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the various aspects of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at the PAUD level, primarily using the Merdeka Teaching Platform. This approach is not only focused on numbers or statistics, but rather the meaning contained in participants' actions, practices, and perceptions in a particular context. Descriptive qualitative research provides space for researchers to explain naturally occurring social phenomena. As Creswell (2014) explained, qualitative research aims to explore and understand the meaning associated with individuals or groups of social or humanitarian problems.

The research design used in this study is descriptive qualitative. This design was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the various aspects of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in the Level of Early Childhood Education (PAUD), primarily using the Merdeka Teaching Platform. Descriptive qualitative research allows researchers to explore data in depth, especially related to the subjective experience of teachers, school principals, and other stakeholders in implementing an independent curriculum. This approach is suitable for examining social and cultural dynamics in educational practices, including the challenges and strategies used. The qualitative approach emphasizes understanding of subjective meanings, not just numbers. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) state that qualitative research seeks to understand the world naturally, where researchers are the main instruments in data collection and analysis. In the context of this study, a descriptive qualitative approach was chosen to describe the reality of curriculum implementation based on the perspective of the educational actors in the field. Researchers play an active role in exploring data through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research design is suitable when researchers want to understand the process, meaning, and in-depth experience. This is very relevant in the context of PAUD, where children's learning experiences and teacher interactions play an important role.

This design also pays attention to the social and cultural context that affects the implementation of an independent curriculum. In this case, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) emphasize the importance of context in qualitative research so that the results can reflect the real reality. The strength of this approach lies in its flexibility, which allows researchers to adjust data collection techniques according to the dynamics that occur

in the field. As the research runs, data can be analyzed inductively to find meaningful patterns and themes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Descriptive qualitative research does not intend to test hypotheses or make generalizations but describes the phenomenon in detail. This is in accordance with the objectives of this study, which aims to explore comprehensively how the independent curriculum is applied in PAUD through digital platforms. The selection of informants in this design is purposive, meaning that it is chosen based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. PAUD teachers who actively use the Merdeka Teaching Platform, and principals and educational supervisors, become the primary informants.

Data collection procedures in this study involved direct observations in the PAUD environment, in-depth interviews with educators, and analysis of documents related to implementing the independent curriculum. This aligns with qualitative practices emphasizing data triangulation (Patton, 2015). Researchers use a thematic approach in data analysis to identify important patterns from the interview and observation results. This technique makes it easy for researchers to understand key issues and compile meaningful narratives. This study also upholds the principles of ethical qualitative research, such as informed consent, anonymity, and honesty in data reporting. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), ethics in qualitative research is critical because it involves the trust between researchers and participants. In addition, data validity is maintained through a checking member technique, which asks for confirmation from the participants on the results of the analyzed interviews. This technique ensures that the researchers' interpretation matches the participants' experience.

Qualitative descriptive design in this study also supports the development of a new theory or a new understanding. In this case, the study's results are expected to contribute to understanding the implementation of an independent curriculum in remote areas such as West Sumbawa Regency. By using this design, researchers can understand how PAUD teachers access and utilize the Merdeka Teaching Platform, and how it impacts the quality of early childhood learning. The data collected in this study consisted of two types, namely primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation in the field. Secondary data was obtained from official documents, reports, and previous studies relevant to the research topic. Primary data will include information about the teacher's experience using the Merdeka Teaching Platform and the perception of parents and students towards the Merdeka curriculum. For example, researchers will observe how the teacher integrates technology in learning and how students respond to new teaching methods. This data is critical in understanding how the independent curriculum can be applied effectively in PAUD.

Secondary data sources will include the annual report of the West Sumbawa Regency Education Office, as well as previous studies that discuss the independent curriculum and its application in various regions. According to data from the Education Office, around 60% of PAUD teachers in West Sumbawa Regency have attended training on the Merdeka Curriculum, which shows an effort to increase teaching capacity in this region.

The informants in this study consisted of various parties involved in the early childhood education process. Researchers will involve teachers, school principals, parents, and educational supervisors from the West Sumbawa Regency Education Office. The selection of informants is carried out purposively, based on specific criteria that are relevant to the research topic. Researchers will choose two institutions that represent different conditions and characteristics. This ensures that the data obtained reflects variations in implementing an independent curriculum. For example, researchers will consider institutions with good access to technology and those without, to see the differences in using the Merdeka Teaching Platform. Interviews will be conducted in depth with the informant so that researchers can explore more detailed information about their experiences and views about the independent curriculum. Researchers will also conduct focus group discussions (focus group discussions) with parents to get their perspective on curriculum changes and their impact on children. The informants of this research are as follows:

Table 1. Research Informant

No	Informant's Name	Position
1	Khusnarti, S.Pd. M.M.Inov	Head of the Education and Culture Office of West Sumatra Regency
2	Akhiruddin Juliadi, S.K.M.,M.Si	Secretary of the Department of Education and Culture of West Sumatra Regency
3	Muhlis, S.Pd	Head of the Early Childhood Education and Non-Formal Education Development Division, West Sumatra Regency Education and Culture Office
4	Yeti Kusmawati,S.AP	Head of the Early Childhood Education and Non-Formal Education Institution and Management Section, West Sumatra Regency Education and Culture Office
5	Eni Novianti, S.Pd.AUD	Principal of TK Negeri 4 Taliwang
6	Zahrah, S.Pd	Principal of TK Negeri 1 Taliwang
7	Mulianah Khaironi, S.Pd, M.Pd	Teacher of TK Negeri 1 Taliwang
8	Nur Irawati, S.Pd	Teacher of TK Negeri 4 Taliwang
9	Mega Puspita Rini, S.Pd	Service Operator
10	Putri Ulimah, S.Pd	School Operator

Data collection in this study was carried out through three main instruments: observation, interviews, and documentation. Each instrument is important in collecting comprehensive data on implementing an independent curriculum.

Observation was made to get a direct picture of the learning process in PAUD. The researcher will observe the interaction between the teacher and student and use the Merdeka Teaching Platform in teaching and learning activities. This observation will be made unstructured, so that researchers can capture the dynamics that occur in the classroom. In observations, researchers will record various aspects, such as the teaching methods used, student involvement, and the use of technology. Data from this observation will provide valuable information about how the independent curriculum is applied in daily practice. According to research by Supriyadi (2020), direct observations can provide deeper insights than relying on reports from informants. In-depth interviews will be conducted with teachers, principals, and parents to explore their views on the independent curriculum. This interview will be semi-structured, where researchers have a list of questions that will be asked, but also provide opportunities for informants to share their experiences and opinions freely. Through interviews, researchers hope to understand teachers' challenges in implementing an independent curriculum and how parents see changes in teaching methods. Data from this interview will be one of the primary sources used to analyze the effectiveness of curriculum implementation.

In-depth interviews will be conducted with teachers, principals, and parents to explore their views on implementing the independent curriculum at the PAUD level. This technique was chosen because it can provide rich and contextual information related to the subjective experience of informants in dealing with the dynamics of curriculum implementation. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), in-depth interviews allow researchers to explore the meaning of a person's experience in their social and cultural framework. The type of interview used is semi-structured. In this technique, researchers have prepared interview guidelines containing basic questions, but still provide space for flexibility to informants to express opinions or unexpected but relevant experiences. Yin (2016) states that semi-structured interviews are very effective in qualitative studies because they allow researchers to explore topics widely but remain directed at the research focus. Through this interview, researchers hope to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' challenges in implementing the independent curriculum—for example, obstacles related to using the Merdeka Teaching Platform, pedagogical readiness, or administrative obstacles. In addition, interviews with school principals are expected to provide a perspective on the internal policies of institutions, resource management, and institutional support in the curriculum implementation process. No less important, the involvement of parents in interviews is also an important part of seeing the extent of their understanding and participation in supporting children's learning at home. Parents' perspective is crucial in PAUD because early childhood

education is the responsibility of formal institutions and the family as the first and foremost educational environment (UNESCO, 2015). Parents' understanding of curriculum changes can impact the synergy between school and home, supporting children's development. Data obtained from this interview will be the primary source in analyzing the effectiveness of implementing an independent curriculum in the field. The analysis was conducted with a thematic approach to identify key issues that emerged from informants' experiences. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that thematic analysis is a flexible and valuable method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns in systematic qualitative data.

Documentation will include collecting official documents, such as the curriculum, activity reports, and teacher training records. In addition, researchers will also collect learning materials used in the Merdeka Teaching Platform. This documentation data will help researchers understand the context and framework of implementing the independent curriculum in PAUD. Documentation will also provide concrete evidence of how the curriculum is adapted and applied. According to Arikunto (2010), documentation is one of the effective methods for collecting data that can support research results. Data validity is fundamental in qualitative research to ensure that the information obtained is accurate and trustworthy. In this study, researchers will use several techniques to ensure data validity, such as source triangulation, triangulation of methods, and member checking.

Source triangulation is done by comparing data from various informants, such as teachers, principals, and parents. This way, researchers can ensure that the information obtained is consistent and unbiased. Triangulation of methods will involve using various data collection techniques, such as observation, interviews, and documentation, to verify the findings of each method.

Checking members is done by returning the initial findings to the informant for feedback. It ensures the researchers interpret the data obtained following the informant's view. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking is one effective way to increase data validity in qualitative research. In this study, the data analysis technique used refers to interactive models developed by Miles and Huberman. This model was chosen because it was relevant to the descriptive qualitative approach used in research on implementing the independent curriculum through the Merdeka Teaching Platform at the Early Childhood Education (PAUD) in West Sumbawa Regency. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), qualitative data analysis was carried out interactively and took place continuously from the beginning of the data collection until the entire research process was completed. This process consists of three main components: data reduction (data reduction), data presentation (data display), and drawing conclusions and verification (Conclusion drawing/verification). The following explanation:

1. Data reduction is selecting, simplifying, and focusing raw data obtained from the field. In the context of this research, the data obtained from interviews with PAUD teachers, school principals, and school supervisors, as well as the results of observations of the use of the Merdeka teaching platform in class, will be filtered and classified based on the main themes such as the teacher's understanding of the Merdeka curriculum concept, the integration strategy of the Merdeka Teaching Platform in learning activities, technical and non-technical obstacles in its application in PAUD. This data reduction aims to maintain a fixed research focus on the main objectives and assist in organizing information to be more easily analyzed at the next stage. After the data is reduced, the next step is to present it systematically to make it easier for researchers to see patterns, relationships between categories, and tendencies that arise. The data in this study were presented as descriptive narratives, thematic matrices, and summaries of observations. For example, researchers present findings related to utilizing features on the Merdeka Teaching Platform (such as learning videos, teacher reflections, and diagnostic assessments), then compare them between schools or sub-districts in West Sumbawa Regency. This presentation helps researchers understand the variation of implementation and the factors that influence it.

2. The final stage is the drawing of conclusions based on data that has been reduced and presented. This study concluded by analyzing how PAUD teachers implemented the Merdeka Curriculum

through the Merdeka Teaching Platform, how the platform helped the learning process, and the challenges and solutions encountered.

IV.   Results and Discussion

4.1.   Research Result

TK Negeri 4 Taliwang is in the Bugis neighborhood of Taliwang City. The location of TK Negeri 4 Taliwang is near the river, where the funeral and housing of the population are located. Mountains and rivers can be found around kindergarten 4 Taliwang. TK Negeri 4 is adjacent to the State Elementary School 2 Taliwang and the Taliwang Sector Police. Most villagers are Muslim, and several immigrant families are Christian. Cooperation and cooperation are also a culture often found in the community because the empowerment of cooperation is the vision, mission, and leading action of the West Sumbawa Regency. Most people work as farmers and traders and have an average educational background up to high school.

TK Negeri 4 Taliwang occupies an area of 300 m2 and a permanent building. The 100 m2 page has swings, slides, climbing, and board boards. The school building has a room consisting of 1 principal's room, three classrooms, one classroom for classes 2-3, 1 room as a warehouse room, three bathrooms, and three handwashing places/sinks. Classrooms have reading bookshelves, children's toy racks, shoe racks, and children's equipment. Sources of school operational funding come from government assistance (BOP). In addition, donations are also obtained from student guardians in the form of tools children use, such as mats/carpets that can be used in class or outside the classroom in learning activities. To preserve the culture of West Sumbawa in the community. The West Sumbawa Education and Culture Office follows up by asking the education unit to enter the Taliwang language as one of the local content elements.

TK Negeri 4 Taliwang has a superior school program to support the improvement of character for students, according to the profile of Pancasila students. Students carry out every day from 07.30 to 08.00. The superior program, namely: Voice (Monday Flag Ceremony), instills the value of independent character, discipline, and love for the motherland. In ceremonial activities, students become ceremonial officers. Serasi (Tuesday literacy) The purpose of instilling literacy from an early age in the 4 Taliwang Kindergarten students: activities that are carried out to hear the story, read the story book, and retell the story they hear. Activities are implemented in the school yard, in the reading corner of each class, and sometimes, the children occasionally go to Tadi Tiangnam. Buketday (Wednesday Market Day). To instill currency introduction learning, communication literacy, and plant good business ways from an early age, the implementation of children is scheduled to be sellers and some as buyers. Food, drinks, vegetables, and fruit (garden products) are goods sold. This activity partners with the children's parents. Rich (Thursday Culture) The purpose of instilling love for the culture of the West Sumbawa region in kindergarten 4 Taliwang students includes traditional clothing, West Sumbawa traditional clothing accessories, regional languages, regional dance, West Sumbawa regional songs, and also the musical instruments of the West Sumbawa region. The activities are implemented according to the schedule that has been prepared, and the appearance is in the form of a stage. The first payday (the Movement for the Koran of the Educator's Children together), The Purpose of Instilling the Love of the Koran in the 4 Taliwang Kindergarten Students. Activities are implemented every Friday, and children are grouped with one accompanying teacher. Sakura (Saturday Extracurricular) The Purpose is to help shape the character of students according to the interests and talents of children. There are three extracurricular activities: Tahfiz, regional dance, drawing, and coloring. The activities implemented every Saturday allow children to choose extracurricular activities according to their interests and talents.

Based on the Decree of the Secretary General of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia Number 49/M/2023 concerning Technical Guidelines for the Implementation of Prevention and Management of Violence in the Educational Unit Environment. So the implications of the school should be based on the best interests of children, providing appropriate social, physical, and emotional conditions to promote learning and renewal of identity, so that TK Negeri 4 Taliwang

is trying to implement the environment of Child Friendly School Education Units (SRA). This school environment is intended to protect children's rights towards realizing their best potential inside and outside school. Pillars of Child Friendly Schools: Proactive, Inclusive, Academic and Relevant Effectiveness with Children's Needs, Healthy, Safe and Protecting, Responsive, and Enabling Family and Community Participation.

The main principle of child-friendly schools is that they should be without discrimination or violence, have children's best interests as the primary consideration in every policy, program, and activity, and appreciate children, participatory, accountability, transparency, and culture. Article 4 of Law No.23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection states that children have the right to live, develop, and participate properly according to human dignity and to gain protection from violence and discrimination. One of the above-mentioned is participation, the right to argue and listen to one's voice. Child-friendly schools are open schools that involve children in all activities and social life and encourage children's growth and welfare.

Kindergarten 4 Taliwang has more than 50 students yearly, with various economic problems, family problems, social problems in schools, problems related to lessons, etc. These problems become a burden for children and interfere with the achievement of learning success. For this reason, TK Negeri 4 Taliwang is determined to realize a Child Friendly School (SRA) for the following reasons:

1. Most students have economic problems and family problems (broken home), which impact parents' lack of attention, facilitation, and protection.
2. There is no synergistic understanding among teachers about child-friendly schools (SRA), so teachers do not have the same operational standards in providing educational services to children.
3. A less supportive Learning environment can inhibit the development of children optimally, for example, narrow classrooms are occupied by 2-4 classes.
4. Lack of parental involvement in children's development at school.

Considering the problems above, realizing the status as a Child Friendly School (SRA) for Kindergarten State 4 Taliwang becomes crucial to ensure that all children get a safe, supportive, and stimulating environment to stimulate their development from an early age optimally.

The objectives to be achieved by organizing Child Friendly Schools (SRA) are:

1. Protecting children from all forms of inhuman treatment results in violations of the rights of children.
2. Providing supporting resources to realize child-friendly schools.
3. Carry out education and teaching according to children's interests, talents, and abilities.
4. Provide the same opportunity to children with special needs and other risks to get educational services.
5. Accompany the child when dealing with the law.
6. Refer children to services in accordance with their needs.
7. Ensuring the safety of children in the school area.
8. Providing physical and environmental accessibility.
9. Develop policies and implementation of child protection.
10. Organizing school health business programs.
11. Organizing a clean environment and infrastructure, healthy, and meeting children's health standards and needs.
12. Providing counseling facilities, libraries, and space for work.
13. Applying a clean and healthy behavior program in school.
14. Application of local curriculum and content.
15. Organizing environmentally friendly and environmental awareness programs.
16. Involving children in organizing schools related to the interests of children, and Dapun the Child

Friendly School Program (SRA) in Kindergarten Negeri 4 Taliwang, namely:

1. There is a habituation of 3S (smile, greetings, greetings) in the school environment between all school residents.
2. The teacher uses "icebreakers" to create a pleasant atmosphere in learning activities.
3. Every teacher learning is required to deliver moral messages for about 5 minutes about the dangers of bullying, about tolerance, care for the environment, flocks, things up to date in the field of education, as well as love and pride in schools.
4. Provide space for children to be creative, express, and participate in school activities, and display children's creations in events held by the school.
5. Introducing various traditional child-friendly games, such as bakumus chickens, blangan tombos, bamboo tek-tek, and others, in Thursday (rich) activities.
6. Give special awards for outstanding children, both academic and non-academic achievements.
7. Do not punish children, but every violation is given consequences according to the violation, for the development of character education.
8. Teachers are equipped with knowledge and skills about administering child-friendly schools through workshop activities.

The success of child-friendly schools requires a variety of support from many parties, such as parents, school committees, private institutions, and the government, as well as the active participation of students in realizing child-friendly schools. Kindergarten 4 Taliwang is proud to be a driving school that implements an independent curriculum. To create an innovative and pleasant learning environment, complete the Introduction to the School Environment (MPLS) for two weeks.

MPLS in TK Negeri 4 Taliwang is designed to help children adapt to their new school environment. During these two weeks, children will be introduced to various aspects of school life, ranging from rules and rules, the introduction of classrooms and school facilities, to activities that encourage their social and emotional skills.   With a creative and pleasant approach, we hope this MPLS can be a strong foundation for children in their education, in line with the spirit of an independent curriculum emphasizing freedom, creativity, and fun learning. TK Negeri 4 Taliwang partnered with several parties in providing integrative holistic services for students, including:

1. Educational services partner with the West Sumbawa Regency Education and Culture Office and the Korwil Taliwang District
2. Health and Nutrition Services partner with Taliwang Health Center.
3. Protection services partner with the police in the District/Taliwang Sector Police
4. Care services partner with DP2KBP3A

Referring to the education report card, TK Negeri 1 Taliwang, learning that builds the foundation's ability indicates the best achievement. However, the appropriate learning process for early childhood is an indicator with the lowest achievement caused by low active thinking. Examples of efforts to fix this are strengthening educators' ability to apply learning that involves children actively. The learning process carried out in TK Negeri 1 Taliwang is active learning that involves students to stimulate elements of religious values and character; elements of identity; and elements of the basics of literacy, mathematics, science, technology, engineering, and art. The process of determining the implementation strategy for the development of education units is carried out through meetings/discussions with teachers, education staff, parents/guardians, school committees, and parties related to the implementation of education in TK Negeri 1 Taliwang. Educators designing and implementing learning start by looking for references (learning from various media), then sharing good practices and discussions with fellow educators. In learning, students look enthusiastic about exploring the play activities that have been prepared. Do not forget that educators design and carry out

assessments, such as observation sheets, anecdote records, and work. The education unit identifies the needs of each student through initial diagnosis activities to map the needs of students. All educators, especially class teachers, give attention and assistance to students who need it daily.

Kindergarten 1 Taliwang has 1 Principal, 13 teachers (1 S-2 qualified teacher and 12 S-1 qualified teachers), and three education staff. Kindergarten 1 Taliwang has an internal learning community to carry out good practice sharing activities among fellow teachers in 1 community. Kindergarten 1 Taliwang provides facilities and infrastructure for optimal learning, such as school buildings, classrooms, halls, sanitation, and playgrounds. Kindergarten 1 Taliwang tries to present a safe and healthy environment (physical and mental) for its citizens. Before learning, teachers at Talwang 1 Kindergarten prepare adequate devices to organize optimal learning and manage data, such as annual programs, semester programs, daily activities, and assessment plans. School programs and activities must refer to the vision determined based on the analysis of the context of TK Negeri 1 Taliwang Academic Year 2024-2025. Vision is not just writing without its meaning. To internalize the vision of every school, the vision needs to be socialized regularly. Without understanding the vision, the activities carried out are not directed.

Vision:

Forming a generation of faith, fearing God Almighty, noble, independent, cooperative, global diversity, critical reasoning, and creative.

Mission:
1. Creating a profile of students who believe in God and diligently worship.
2. Preparing a learning environment that fosters children's love for God's creation.
3. Educating moral, creative, advanced, and independent generations.
4. Improve the quality of graduates in accordance with the demands of society, care for the environment, and the development of science and technology (Science and Technology)
5. Creating the school environment for intellectual, social, emotional, and local culture development in global diversity.
6. Fostering the independence of students through planned and continuous self-development activities
7. Realizing the learning process that is actively innovative and fun, creative.

As for the description of TK Negeri 1 Taliwang Academic Year 2024/2025 students, as in Table 1.

Table 1. The Number of Students at TK Negeri 1 Taliwang

No	Class	Gender	Amount	Total
1	TK-A1	Man	8	15
		Woman	7	
2	TK-A2	Man	3	5
		Woman	2	
2	TK-B1	Man	4	15
		Woman	11	
3	TK-B2	Man	10	15
		Woman	5	
4	TK-B3	Man	2	5
		Woman	3	
5	TK-B4	Man	2	5
		Woman	3	
	AMOUNT		60	60

Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum through the Merdeka Platform Teaching at the Level of Early Childhood Education in West Sumbawa Regency.

Table 2. Interview Results with Early Childhood Education Teachers

No	Informant	Aspects explored	Interview Results
1	Informant A (Early Childhood Education Teacher)	Initial understanding time	Since 2022, during online training from the Education Office,
2		Accessibility	I have been using my personal Android phone with the help of the school's Wi-Fi network.
3		Feature usage	I use the Learning Video and Evidence of Work features most often.
4		Perception of benefits	They have been invaluable, as there are many examples of lesson plans and videos of good practices from other teachers.
5		Learning planning	I have adapted the teaching modules and reflections from the PMM into my weekly lesson plans.
6		Team collaboration	Not all of them have; some have struggled because they are unfamiliar with technology.
7		Technical barriers	Internet network constraints and limited phone capacity are factors.
8		Institutional support	The principal has been very supportive and has held internal training.
9		Training & mentoring	I have also had training from the Education Office and the Early Childhood Education Teacher Learning Community.
10		Pedagogical understanding	PMM has helped me understand that children learn through play and exploration.
11	Informant B (Early Childhood Education Teacher)	Evaluation & assessment	I use developmental milestone-based observations as taught in PMM.
12		Content suitability	Quite relevant, although still predominantly for elementary and middle schools. It needs to be adapted for early childhood education (PAUD).
13		Impact on children	Children are more enthusiastic and active because of the fun learning approach.
14		Community participation	Once, I shared a sensory motor learning practice.
15		Self-development	I became more confident because I received many references and inspiration from fellow teachers.
16		Frequency of use	I use it at least twice weekly, especially when developing lesson plans.
17		Implementation impact	The classroom atmosphere is more fun and flexible, and the children are more active and exploratory.
18		Improvement feedback	More PAUD-specific content is needed in a simple format.
19		External support	Yes, through training and monitoring of PMM utilization.
20		Future expectations	I hope PMM continues to be developed and remains free for all teachers.

Table 3. Interview Results with the Head of Early Childhood Education

No	Informant	Aspects explored	Interview Results
1	Informants C and D (Head of Early Childhood Education)	Early Childhood Education Principals' Understanding of the Independent Curriculum	The PAUD principal stated that the Independent Curriculum is a learning approach that focuses on strengthening children's competencies and character through meaningful and enjoyable play activities. This curriculum is considered more flexible and contextualized to the needs of early childhood.
2		Using the Independent Teaching Platform in Lesson Planning	The PAUD principal stated that the Independent Teaching Platform is very helpful in providing teaching aids such as modules, storybooks, learning videos, and online training. However, not all teachers can access it due to device and network limitations.
3		Implementing the Independent Curriculum in Early Childhood Education Classes	Learning is conducted using a more child-centered approach. Teachers can choose learning methods and activities according to children's interests, for example, through simple exploration projects or role-playing.
4		Preschool Teacher Readiness and Competence	Some teachers have participated in training through the Independent Teaching Platform. However, there are challenges in understanding the Independent Curriculum concept and skills in using digital platforms, requiring further technical guidance.

Table 4. Results of an Interview with the Head of the KSB Education and Culture Office

No	Informant	Aspects explored	Interview Results
1	Informant E (Head of the KSB Education and Culture Office)	Policy strategy and implementation assistance	We have developed a program for outreach, training, and mentoring for early childhood education (PAUD) units, and encouraged using PMM as a learning and reflection tool for PAUD teachers.
2		Identification of field obstacles	Some PAUD units still face challenges with internet access and teacher digital literacy. Furthermore, adapting to curriculum changes requires time and intensive mentoring.
3		Technical support and monitoring of PMM use	We regularly monitor school reports and hold technical guidance sessions on PMM usage. We have also formed a team of regional facilitators to assist teachers.
4		Implementation evaluation and follow-up	We conduct quarterly evaluations using platform usage data and feedback from PAUD teachers and principals. The evaluation results are used to improve the program.

Table 5. Results of an Interview with the Secretary of the KSB Education and Culture Office

No	Informant	Aspects explored	Interview Results
1		The role of the service in providing policy	The service provides support through outreach, training, and technical assistance to PAUD teachers and principals so that they

No	Informant	Aspects explored	Interview Results
	Informant F (Secretary of the West Sumatra Education and Culture Office)	and technical support to PAUD units in accessing and implementing PMM.	understand and can utilize the PMM features optimally.

Table 6. Results of the Interview with the Head of the KSB Early Childhood Education Development Division

No	Informant	Aspects explored	Interview Results
1	Informant G (Head of PAUD KSB Development Division)	Policy support, facilitation, and mentoring from the Department	The Department provides technical and policy assistance through training, technical guidance, and expert resource persons using PMM.

Table 7. Results of the interview with the Head of the KSB Early Childhood Education Section

No	Informant	Aspects explored	Interview Results
1	Informant H (Head of Section for Early Childhood Education, KSB)	Institutional support for PMM implementation	The Early Childhood Education Institutional and Management Section provides support by facilitating training, providing information to early childhood education institutions, and assisting with using PMM. It actively provides technical and policy guidance through training and technical guidance, and it provides expert resource persons in using PMM.

Table 8. Interview Results with KSB Education and Culture Operators

No	Informant	Aspects explored	Interview Results
1	Informant I (KSB Education and Culture Operator)	Roles and responsibilities of operators in PMM implementation	Operators are responsible for data collection, PMM account activation, and technical assistance to PAUD units to access and utilize PMM optimally.

Table 9. Interview Results with Early Childhood Education Operators

No	Informant	Aspects explored	Interview Results
1	Informant I (KSB Early Childhood Education Operator)	Roles and responsibilities of operators in PMM implementation	The operator is responsible for data collection, PMM account activation, and technical assistance to PAUD units to access and utilize PMM optimally.

Table 10. Interview Results with Early Childhood Education Teachers

No	Informant	Aspects Explored	Interview Results
1		Understanding of the Independent Curriculum	My understanding of the Independent Curriculum is still not fully in-depth. We have received information, but do not fully understand the material.
2		Availability of Training and Mentoring	The training provided is still limited and more general in nature. Direct assistance from the Education Office or facilitators is also not routine.

No	Informant	Aspects Explored	Interview Results
3	Preschool Teacher	Access and Utilization of the Independent Teaching Platform	We have difficulty accessing the platform due to our institution's unstable internet connections and a lack of technological devices.
4		Human Resource (HR) Readiness	Most early childhood education teachers here are still adapting to technology and more flexible learning approaches.
5		Availability of Facilities and Infrastructure	Many facilities are inadequate, such as educational games, LCD projectors, and internet connections, which are crucial for supporting curriculum implementation.
6		Freedom to Design Differentiated Learning	Although we are given freedom, we are still confused about implementing differentiated learning due to unfamiliarity and a lack of concrete examples.
7		Parents' Role in Supporting the Independent Curriculum	Parents sometimes do not understand the change in approach, so they do not support all activities based on exploration and children's interests.
8		Teachers' Administrative Burden	Although the Independent Curriculum is said to reduce administrative burdens, we still have to prepare numerous reports and other supporting documents.
9		Early Childhood Evaluation and Assessment	Narrative-based assessments take longer, and teachers must closely observe each child individually.

Table 11. Interview Results with the Head of Early Childhood Education

No	Informant	Aspects explored	Interview Results
1	Head Teacher	Teachers' understanding of the Independent Curriculum	Many teachers still do not fully understand the main concepts and principles of the Independent Curriculum. Some teachers are still accustomed to the old approach and feel confused about translating flexible and contextual learning outcomes.
2		Teachers' readiness to develop teaching materials	Teachers experience difficulties in developing teaching modules and assessments that are appropriate to the characteristics of early childhood. The lack of technical training is a significant obstacle. Teachers also feel burdened by adapting teaching materials to their students' diverse needs.
3		Learning facilities and resources	Not all early childhood education (PAUD) schools have facilities that support the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, such as digital-based learning media and

No	Informant	Aspects explored	Interview Results
			educational games. Limited operational budgets make it difficult for institutions to provide diverse learning resources.
4		Availability of training or mentoring	Although outreach and training from the Education Office have been provided, they remain constrained and do not reach all teachers equally. Mentoring from expert sources is also minimal and tends to be one-way.
5		Institutional readiness to support curriculum changes	Institutionally, early childhood education institutions face challenges in managing change. Many principals and education staff are unfamiliar with project-based curriculum management and differentiated learning. Adaptation requires time and a well-thought-out strategy.
6		Support from parents and the community	Not all parents understand the essence of the Independent Curriculum, leading to misconceptions such as the belief that children "play too much" or do not take their learning seriously. This impacts their support for the approaches teachers use in the classroom.
7		Administrative and reporting constraints	Complex administrative reporting still burdens early childhood education (PAUD) teachers. The lack of integration between the Merdeka Mengajar Platform and the institutional system causes teachers to spend more time reporting than planning and reflecting on learning.
8		Teachers' understanding of the Independent Curriculum	Many teachers still do not fully understand the key concepts and principles of the Independent Curriculum. Some teachers are still accustomed to outdated approaches and feel confused about translating flexible and contextual learning outcomes.
9		Teachers' readiness to develop teaching materials	Teachers struggle to develop teaching modules and assessments that are appropriate to the characteristics of early childhood. Lack of technical training is a significant obstacle. Teachers also feel burdened by adapting teaching materials to their students' diverse needs.

4.2. Discussion

Implementing the Independent Curriculum Through the Independent Teaching Platform at the Early Childhood Education Level in West Sumbawa Regency. Based on Table 1 above, the results of interviews with

informants showed that the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum through the Merdeka teaching platform at the level of early childhood education in West Sumbawa Regency. "The initial understanding of PMM since 2022 through trainers from the Education Office". These results indicate that introducing PMM is structured through formal channels, and online training is the government's primary strategy for socializing this platform. Then an interview was conducted again with the two teachers related to accessibility, with the results of the following interviews: "Accessibility, ie, access PMM through a personal Android phone with the support of School Wi-Fi." The accessibility of PMM is very dependent on the devices and networks available. Although there is access, dependence on private facilities indicates the need for support from institutions. Then it was dug back in an interview about the use of PMM features with the results of the teacher, as follows:

"The use of features often uses learning video features and work proof". The results of the interview above show that the implementation of PMM using visual and documentative features like this is interesting for PAUD teachers because it provides real inspiration and directly supports the reflection and practice of learning. The results of the following interview related to the perception of the benefits of PMM are presented as follows. "The perception of benefits feels greatly helped because of many RPP references and good practice videos". The event results show that this positive perception shows the success of PMM in providing practical learning resources that apply to teachers. Interviews were conducted with teachers related to learning planning using PMM as follows.

"Learning planning adapts to the teaching and reflection modules from PMM into the weekly plan ". The interview results show that the teacher uses the PMM functionally as a source and reference in designing learning based on an independent curriculum. This shows the importance of technical training evenly.

"Technical Obstacles: There are network constraints and HP capacity". The interview results above showed Bawha's technical barriers as the main inhibiting factor. This indicates the need to strengthen the ICT infrastructure in the PAUD unit. Then, the following is related to institutional support in implementing PMM.

"The support of the principal's institution is very supportive, including providing internal training". Institutional support is a reinforcing factor in the success of the implementation of PMM at the level of the education unit.

Then an interview with the teacher related to training and assistance in implementing PMM with the interview results, namely "the teacher has attended training from the PAUD teacher's office and community. The results of this interview show that formal and informal training support the teacher's capacity to utilize the PMM to the fullest, which is in accordance with the characteristics of PAUD children. The next interview is related to "Evaluation & Assessment using observations based on development achievements as taught in PMM". Describe how PMM has succeeded in instilling a holistic assessment approach per the principles of early childhood learning.

Another aspect that was explored in the implementation of PMM by conducting interviews with Taliwang 1 TK Teachers as follows;

"Interviews conducted with Tali Taliwang TK 1 Teacher above explore several aspects, namely the aspect of compliance with the results of the interview "Conformity Feeling Relevant Content, but still dominant for elementary and junior high school".

This shows the need to develop more specific content for PAUD, so that it is not just adapted from other levels. Then, in the following interview:

"The impact of PMM implementation on children is more enthusiastic and active because of a pleasant approach". The impact of PMM implementation shows positive changes in class dynamics and children's involvement. The results of interviews related to "participation in the community have shared good practices". It is also interpreted that this participation indicates the emergence of a culture of sharing and reflection between teachers facilitated by PMM. The following interview is related to "Almighty self-development becomes more confident because of many references from other teachers." PMM is a source of teacher professional capacity building and strengthens self-confidence in teaching.

The interview related to the frequency of use found that the results showed "Using PMM at least twice a week." Discussion: This frequency reflects the integration of PMM in the teacher's work routine, especially in learning planning and evaluation. Then, the interview results were related to.

"The Impact of Implementation aspect, in which the class atmosphere became more fun and flexible. PMM contributes to creating an active class that follows the independent curriculum approach to PAUD".

According to the following, in the implementation of PMM related to improvement input, the results of interviews with the teacher showed that "they need more special PAUD content in a simple format". The results of this interview show that this input is important for evaluating the development of platforms in the future to be more responsive to the needs of PAUD teachers.

Then, interviews are related to external support that the teacher "gets training and monitoring from outsiders". The results of this interview show that the role of external parties (offices, communities, NGOs) helped strengthen the sustainability and success of the implementation of PMM. Then, the aspects interviewed with teachers related to "future expectations related to the implementation of PMM, where the teacher hopes that" PMM continues to be developed and remains free ".

In this study, the data were also collected by conducting interviews with two PAUD heads in West Sumbawa Regency.

Figure 1. Interviewing with the Principal of TK Negeri 4 Taliwang

Figure 2. Interviewing with the Principal of TK Negeri 1 Taliwang

The first aspect in common among women with the two school principals was the "Understanding the Head of PAUD of the Free Curriculum". The Head of PAUD shows a pretty good understanding of the independent curriculum, where they view this curriculum as a learning approach that focuses on strengthening competencies and forming children's character. This approach is applied through fun and meaningful play activities, according to early childhood development needs. The flexibility and context are the advantages of the independent curriculum because they allow the PAUD education unit to adjust the learning to the conditions and characteristics of each student. Then, the interview aspects are related to "the use of the Merdeka Teaching Platform in learning planning". Regarding learning planning, the Head of PAUD revealed that the Merdeka teaching platform significantly supports teachers. This platform provides a variety of references, such as teaching modules, story books, learning videos, and online training, that enrich the insight and skills of educators. However, they also conveyed obstacles, especially related to the limitations of technological devices and internet networks that hampered the access of some teachers to the platform. This situation shows the need for infrastructure support so that the use of platforms can be optimal in the PAUD environment. The results of the following interview related to

> "The use of the Merdeka Teaching Platform in learning planning". Regarding learning planning, the Head of PAUD revealed that the Merdeka Teaching Platform significantly supports teachers. This platform provides a variety of references, such as teaching modules, story books, learning videos, and online training, that enrich the insight and skills of educators. However, they also conveyed obstacles, especially related to the limitations of technological devices and internet networks that hampered the access of some teachers to the platform. This situation shows the need for infrastructure support so that the use of platforms can be optimal in the PAUD environment. The results of the interview on aspects of "Implementation of the Free Curriculum in the PAUD Class" and " Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the PAUD Class are carried out with a more child-centered approach. The teacher is given space to design learning methods and activities that are in accordance with the interests and needs of students. Some commonly applied activities include simple exploration projects and role-playing, which aim to encourage creativity, independence, and active involvement of children in the learning process. This approach shows a shift from conventional learning models in a more constructive and participatory direction.

The fourth aspect is "readiness and competence of PAUD teachers". Regarding teacher readiness, the Head of PAUD said that some teachers had attended training through the Merdeka Teaching Platform. However, challenges remain, especially regarding a deep understanding of an independent curriculum and technical ability in using digital platforms. This problem indicates the need for continuous technical assistance and guidance programs so that all teachers can implement the curriculum effectively and optimally. Intensive

coaching is important to increase teacher readiness in welcoming the transformation of learning in PAUD. In addition to teachers and principals of PAUD schools, this research also conducted interviews with parties related to the implementation of PMM in West Sumbawa Regency, namely the Head of the West Sumatra Regency Education and Culture Office, as the policy maker responsible for the applicable commitment. Results of an interview with the Head of the Education and Culture Office of West Sumbawa Regency, exploring aspects of "Policy Strategy and Implementation Assistance". Through the Education and Culture Office, the West Sumbawa Regency Government shows its commitment to implementing the independent curriculum at the PAUD level by developing a strategic program. This program includes structured socialization, training, and assistance to the PAUD unit. This step reflects government awareness of the importance of institutional support for successfully implementing a new curriculum, especially in early childhood education, which requires a specific approach. The training given is not only technical but is also directed at increasing the pedagogical competence of PAUD teachers in understanding the essence of the independent curriculum. Assistance is carried out on an ongoing basis to ensure that changes in the paradigm of learning are truly understood and applied appropriately by educators. This approach aligns with the principle of an independent curriculum that emphasizes holistic learning, centered on children, and contextual. In addition, the service also encourages using the Merdeka Teaching Platform (PMM) as a means of independent learning and reflection for PAUD teachers. This step confirms the importance of the use of technology as a supporter of teacher professionalism. PMM strengthens good practice, expands pedagogical insight, and provides reflection space for teachers in dealing with class dynamics. Thus, this policy strategy is comprehensive because it focuses on training and strengthening digital literacy and using digital platforms. Who was dug up was also related to "Identification of Field Constraints". In the implementation process, it is undeniable that the PAUD unit in West Sumbawa Regency still faces several obstacles. The main obstacles identified include limited internet access in several regions and low digital literacy among teachers. This is undoubtedly a significant challenge in using online PMM, and at the same time, it becomes an indicator of digital gaps that the local government must immediately overcome. In addition to technical problems, other obstacles lie in adapting to curriculum changes. PAUD teachers need time to adjust to the new Merdeka Curriculum paradigm. This shows that changes in educational policy require a transition process that is not only administrative but also cultural, where educators must build new understanding and habits in managing learning.

Responding to these obstacles requires a medium to long-term approach, such as improving technological infrastructure, intensive training, and strengthening teacher motivation. The adaptation process cannot be instant, but must be facilitated with an intensive and sustainable mentoring system. Thus, identifying these obstacles is important for designing further and more contextual and responsive policies on conditions in the field.

The results of interviews related to "Technical Support and Monitoring of PMM Use". The technical support given by the KSB Education Office is one of the important pillars in encouraging the optimization of the use of PMM in the PAUD unit. Monitoring is carried out routinely through school reports, which enable the service to determine the extent of the teacher's use of PMM. This monitoring system is important to ensure that the use of platforms is not only a formality but also really supports improving the quality of learning. In addition, technical guidance activities (Bimtek) regarding using PMM regularly helped strengthen teacher competencies in operating the platform. With the Bimtek, the teacher could understand various PMM features directly, to be able to utilize learning content and training materials that are more optimal. This approach helps bridge the technological gaps that still occur.

Furthermore, forming a regional facilitator team is a strategic step that shows the government's seriousness in overseeing the implementation of policies. This facilitator assists teachers in technical aspects and as agents of change who can motivate and inspire teachers to continue to learn and adapt. With this technical and monitoring support, efforts to implement the independent curriculum become more directed and sustainable. The interview results related to aspects of "evaluation and follow-up implementation". Periodic evaluation is integral to implementing the independent curriculum at the PAUD level, as carried out

by the KSB Education Office every quarter. This evaluation is based on data on the use of PMM and direct feedback from teachers and principals. This step shows the importance of a data-based approach (data-driven) in making educational policies, so that planning and follow-up can be done more measurably and on target. This evaluation process covers quantitative aspects such as the frequency of platform access and qualitative aspects such as the teacher's understanding of the material and the impact on learning practices. By exploring input from stakeholders at the education unit level, the agency can get a complete picture of the effectiveness and implementation of policies. This shows that the local government puts forward a participatory approach in continuous improvement. Follow-up from the evaluation results in the form of program improvements becomes a tangible form of commitment to quality improvement. Adjusting the strategy based on field evaluation makes the assistance and training programs more relevant and contextual. This practice reflects an adaptive policy cycle, where input from implementers in the field is the primary basis for designing further educational interventions. The following is an interview with the Secretary of the KSB Education and Culture Office, as a coordinator or administrative manager responsible for managing documents and supporting data. The results of interviews with the Secretary of the West Sumatra Regency Education and Culture Office related to

> "The Role of the Office in Providing Policy and Technical Support for PAUD Units in Accessing and Implementing PMM". The results of interviews with the Secretary of the West Sumbawa Regency Education and Culture Office (KSB) show that the Office has a strategic role in supporting the PAUD unit in accessing and implementing the Merdeka Teaching Pltruly deepen the material to understand the philosophy and implementation of this curriculumve through various forms of concrete policy interventions, such as socialization, training, and technical assistance activities. This shows the seriousness of the service in guarding the implementation of the independent curriculum, especially at the level of early childhood education.

The socialization carried out aims to introduce and expand the understanding of teachers and the Head of PAUD regarding the benefits and functions of PMM as a professional learning medium. This is an important first step in building the readiness of education units to deal with digital transformation in the world of education. In addition, the training provides space for educators to master PMM features, including independent training materials, learning videos, and contextual teaching references, which are relevant to the characteristics of early childhood. Technical assistance becomes crucial in ensuring that teachers and heads of PAUD know and can use PMM optimally in learning practices. This assistance can minimize obstacles such as digital literacy gaps and confusion in platform navigation. The active role of the office through this facilitation creates a supporting ecosystem that encourages the successful implementation of the independent curriculum at the PAUD level and strengthens the teacher's role as the main subject in educational transformation. Another interview with the Head of the KSB PAUD Development Division. As a coordinator or administrative manager responsible for managing documents and supporting data. The Head of West Sumbawa Regency PAUD Development (KSB) explained that the Education Office actively provided technical assistance and policies to early childhood education actors. This support is realized through routine training and technical guidance (Bimtek), so PAUD educators and managers comprehensively understand the programs and methods applied. In addition, the service also provides competent expert speakers in the use of Quality Management Programs (PMM), which is one of the focuses of coaching. The presence of this resource person is beneficial in strengthening the capacity of educators and ensuring that the program's implementation is in accordance with established standards. The assistance is sustainable, so it is not only at the initial training stage, but also in evaluation and follow-up in the field. With the intensive policy and facilitation support from the agency, the implementation of the PAUD program in West Sumbawa Regency can run more effectively and focus. Informant G emphasized that close collaboration between agencies and education actors is the key to success in improving the quality of early childhood education in the region. This

shows the commitment of local governments to supporting the development of human resources early on. The results of the interview with the head of the KSB PAUD section. "

> "As the training coordinator, I am responsible for training teachers and education personnel in their area. The results of interviews with the Head of the West Sumbawa Regency PAUD Section (KSB), related to institutional support for the implementation of PMM, explained that the PAUD Institutional and Management Section provided significant support in the implementation of the Quality Management Program (PMM) in PAUD institutions in West Sumbawa Regency. This support is realized through the facilitation of various training designed to increase PAUD management's capacity and educators' capacity to understand and implement PMM effectively".

In addition to training, the Institutional Section also actively provides information needed by PAUD institutions related to the mechanisms and procedures for using PMM. This information helps the institution adjust its programs with established quality standards and is a reference material in developing more structured and quality learning activities. Technical assistance is also an important part of the role of the institutional section in supporting the implementation of PMM. This assistance is not only one-way but is carried out intensively and continuously so PAUD institutions can overcome obstacles during the program implementation. Thus, institutional support can encourage the quality of early childhood education services in the region. The results of the interview with the operator of the KSB Dikbud and the results of the interview with the PAUD operator. The results of the interview with the KSB Education and Culture Office operator said

> The role of the operator of the West Sumbawa Regency Education and Culture Office (Dikbud KSB) in the implementation of the Merdeka Teaching Platform (PMM) showed the importance of technical support behind the implementation of curriculum policies. The operator is the frontline in the digital administration process that supports the implementation of PMM in the PAUD unit. With the responsibility for data collection and activation of PMM accounts, the operator's role is crucial so that the education unit can access this platform optimally.

Aside from being a technical implementer, the operator also functions as a digital transformation facilitator. PMM account activation is not only an administrative process, but also a gateway for PAUD teachers to start accessing training materials, teaching devices, and reflection features. Operators ensure that there are no PAUD units left in this digitalization process, both in access and use. The operator's responsibility to provide technical assistance also reflects the need for sustainable support at the operational level. This is important considering that not all PAUD units have the same digital capacity. Therefore, the assistance carried out by the operator is the key to overcoming the technical obstacles faced by the PAUD unit during the PMM implementation process. The role of the Dikbud operator also contributes to integrating valid and accurate educational data. By collecting data, the operator helps ensure that the PAUD and teachers' information in the PMM system is in accordance with real conditions. This data validity is important for policy making and monitoring the effectiveness of PMM implementation in the regions.

The KSB Education and Culture Office operator strategically bridges national policies with field conditions. Through data collection, account activation, and technical assistance, operators helped strengthen the readiness and sustainability of the independent curriculum at the PAUD level. This shows that the technical and administrative aspects cannot be separated from the continuous educational transformation process. Then, the results of interviews with PAUD operators in West Sumbawa Regency play an important role in ensuring that the implementation of the Merdeka Teaching Platform runs thoroughly in the early-age education unit. With the main task of collecting data and activating accounts, PAUD operators are strategically positioned to ensure that all teachers and educators can access PMM without obstacles. This process is the foundation for the success of the maximum use of the platform.

"In practice, PAUD operators become a liaison between the Central System (PMM) and the needs of teachers in the field. Account activation is not only limited to providing access, but also ensures that the teacher uses the account effectively. With technical guidance, operators help direct the teacher to understand the flow of PMM use, ranging from login to exploration of learning content".

Technical assistance provided by operators is crucial, especially given the limited digital literacy skills of some early childhood education (PAUD) teachers. PAUD operators act as patient and diligent mentors, providing technical guidance, from downloading training modules to completing reflection reports. This provides concrete operational support for digital-based learning transformation. In addition to the technical aspects, the role of PAUD operators also reflects a commitment to equal distribution of information access. They ensure that no PAUD units are left behind, both in the city and in remote areas. Operators try to be present as supporters ready to respond to technical problems quickly, so as not to hamper the teaching and learning process in the PAUD unit. With a vital role, PAUD operators are part of the educational ecosystem and should not be ignored. They carry out administrative tasks and become the driving force for implementing PMM at the grassroots level. Their presence strengthens the support structure for the effective and sustainable implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in the scope of West Sumbawa Regency PAUD. To identify the challenges PAUD teachers and institutions face in applying this curriculum. Based on the results of the interview, in the table. Nine discussions above with the teacher of the two PAUD teachers can be obtained, related to the hands of the teacher in applying this curriculum, as follows. The PAUD teacher's understanding of the independent curriculum was still not in-depth, even though socialization existed. This shows that the curriculum introduction process is still surface-level and has not touched the comprehensive substance. The teacher needs time to understand this curriculum's philosophy and implementation truly. This fact reflects the need for a more effective and sustainable training strategy. It is not enough to socialize once; it needs gradual training that targets the concepts, methods, and case studies relevant to the PAUD context. This is important so the teacher feels confident and can run the curriculum. This lack of deep understanding can hamper the implementation of an independent curriculum at the education unit level. Suppose the teacher does not understand the main principles, such as differentiation, interest-based learning, and narrative assessment. In that case, the implementation in the field is not optimal and tends to return to the old approach.

So far, the training available to PAUD teachers is still general and insufficient to answer their specific needs. The teacher feels the training material is too broad and does not touch on the concrete challenges faced in the field. This means the training has not yet fully impacted changes in teaching practices. The assistance is also not running routinely and systematically. The teacher needs the presence of facilitators or mentors who can accompany them regularly, both in learning planning and in implementation and reflection. Without intensive assistance, the teacher will have difficulty innovating independently. Providing adequate training and assistance is the key to supporting the learning transformation expected by the independent curriculum. Without this support, the teacher will remain in the comfort zone and hesitate to adopt new approaches that are more flexible and contextual. Due to infrastructure constraints, PAUD teachers face a significant challenge accessing the Merdeka Teaching Platform (PMM). Unstable internet networks and limitations of digital devices are the main obstacles. This has a direct impact on teacher participation in online training and in accessing teaching devices at PMM. The inability to routinely access PMM makes teachers lose the opportunity to learn independently and get inspiration from good practices on the platform. In fact, PMM is designed as a digital learning center that can be used anytime and anywhere. This condition demands attention from the agency and local government to immediately improve access to technology in the PAUD unit, both through the assistance of devices and the improvement of network infrastructure. Without it, PMM would be lame and only be enjoyed by education units that have advanced digitally.

PAUD teachers in West Sumbawa Regency are still in the adaptation stage of technology and flexible learning approaches emphasized in the independent curriculum. Many teachers are not accustomed to using

technology in their professional learning and development. This adaptation process cannot be done instantly. Teachers need training that focuses on basic to advanced digital skills. In addition, they also need space to practice and make mistakes without pressure, so that transformation occurs naturally and sustainably. Without adequate human resource readiness, the primary purpose of the independent curriculum, namely learning that is in favor of children and contextual, will be challenging to achieve. Therefore, teacher capacity development must be the primary focus when implementing this curriculum. Inadequate facilities and infrastructure are a serious challenge when implementing an independent curriculum at the PAUD level. The teacher mentions the lack of educational game tools, LCD Projectors, and internet connections as the main obstacles in supporting creative and innovative learning activities. Lack of this facility makes it difficult for teachers to apply learning methods that stimulate children's exploration and interests. In fact, the independent curriculum emphasizes the importance of a learning environment that is rich in diverse learning experiences and resources.

Local governments must pay attention to the availability of facilities evenly, not only in cities but also in remote areas. This facility's improvement will directly impact the quality of the learning process and teacher welfare in carrying out their duties. PAUD teachers are given freedom in designing differentiated learning, but this freedom has not been fully utilized. The teacher still feels confused because he is unfamiliar with the approach and lacks examples of concrete applications. The lack of practical references causes teachers to return to uniform and traditional methods. In fact, learning differentiation is very important in accommodating children's needs, interests, and learning abilities. For learning to be differentiated, support is needed in the form of practical guidelines, practice-based training, and learning communities. The teacher must be positioned as a learning designer who can design strategies according to their students' character.

Parental participation is still a challenge in the implementation of an independent curriculum. The teacher said that many parents do not understand a new approach that emphasizes the exploration and interests of children, so support from home is still limited. This lack of understanding often causes miscommunication between teachers and parents. Some parents still measure children's success by memorization or academic skills, not by the exploration or socio-emotional achievement process emphasized in the new curriculum. Therefore, the school and parents need a more intensive communication strategy. Routine socialization and involving parents in school activities can be the first step in building a positive synergy in supporting the child's learning process.

Although the independent curriculum is expected to reduce teachers' administrative burden, PAUD teachers must still compile many reports and supporting documents. This actually interferes with the teacher's time to focus on learning activities. Excessive administrative obligations cause pressure and reduce teacher motivation. The time that should be used to observe and reflect on children's learning is often taken up by preparing reports and filling in specific formats. Simplification of reporting and the digitalization system of user-friendly reports allow teachers to allocate more time for core learning activities. Administrative burden reduction will majorly impact the quality of teacher and child interaction.

Narrative-based evaluation in early childhood is a positive but challenging approach. The teacher needs to observe and record the development of children individually, which certainly requires a lot of time and accuracy. This process is very different from quantitative assessments that are instant. The teacher is required to have sharp observation skills and the ability to write a description of children's development accurately and meaningfully. To support the implementation of this assessment, teachers need to be equipped with efficient observation aids and training in preparing the narrative of child development. That way, evaluation is not only a burden, but a valuable reflection tool in learning development. Furthermore, the results are in the table. 10. Interview with the Head of PAUD in West Sumbawa Regency.

1. Teacher Understanding of The Independent Curriculum
   Many PAUD teachers still do not comprehend the concepts and basic principles of the independent curriculum. This not-yet-intact understanding is the main obstacle in implementing the curriculum, especially in adjusting the learning approach to be more flexible and contextual. This reflects the

need to increase curriculum literacy for PAUD educators. Teachers accustomed to the old approach find it difficult to move to a new approach that prioritizes freedom of learning, differentiation, and project-based learning. The confusion is seen when the teacher must interpret learning achievements that are no longer linear or targeted numbers, as in the previous curriculum. Most teachers assume that flexible learning achievements are confusing because they do not provide a definite reference in preparing learning goals. This obscurity makes the teacher hesitate in designing learning activities that are meaningful and appropriate to the stage of child development. In addition, limited references and easily understood guidelines become obstacles in increasing teacher understanding. Many teachers need concrete examples and direct practice compared to reading theoretical curriculum documents. For this reason, increasing teacher capacity through sustainable and focused training is needed. This training targets theoretical aspects and allows teachers to contextually discuss, practice, and reflect on the Merdeka curriculum approach.

2. Teacher Readiness in Compiling Teaching Devices

PAUD teachers face many obstacles in compiling teaching devices, mainly because of the lack of technical training. The preparation of teaching and assessment modules requires a deep understanding of the characteristics of early childhood and how to link them to the learning achievements in the independent curriculum. The teacher finds designing contextual and meaningful learning challenging because they are unfamiliar with this curriculum's new format and approach. In addition, not all teachers have the pedagogical skills to prepare formative assessments that are in accordance with the development of children. Very diverse student conditions also add to the complexity in compiling teaching devices. Teachers are required to design adaptive and responsive learning to the needs of children, but the ability to conduct differentiation is not yet evenly distributed. Many teachers feel burdened because they have to adjust teaching devices individually, without adequate support from the work team or learning community. This causes some teachers to compile teaching devices only as administrative formalities, not as a learning reflection tool. More applicable training is needed, accompanied by technical assistance in preparing appropriate teaching devices. Giving concrete examples and direct practice will help teachers understand and apply the independent curriculum in their daily learning activities.

3. Facility and Learning Sources

Not all PAUD units have adequate facilities to implement the independent curriculum optimally. The limitations of educational game tools, interactive learning media, and digital devices make it challenging to develop contextual and fun learning. The limited operational budget makes it difficult for institutions to meet the needs of varied learning resources. In fact, the independent curriculum encourages using various sources and media as part of experience-based learning. Some PAUDs still rely on conventional tools that do not optimally support the activities of children's projects and exploration. This makes it difficult for teachers to design activities per the curriculum's principles, emphasizing children's activity and creativity. The limitations of learning resources also affect the ability of teachers to develop contextual learning. Teachers must innovate and look for alternative learning resources from the surrounding environment, but not all teachers can do it without supporting training or references. Support from outsiders, such as the Education Office and Community Partners, is needed to strengthen the availability of learning facilities and resources. Without it, implementing the independent curriculum will only run on paper and will be challenging to implement optimally in the classroom.

4. Availability of Training or Assistance

Training and socialization from the Education Office have been carried out, but their nature is still limited and has not been evenly distributed to all teachers. Most PAUD teachers have not received

intensive, in-depth training that equips them to implement the independent curriculum. The available training tends to be one-way, such as lectures or webinars, which do not provide enough space for teachers to ask questions and discuss. This training method is less effective in improving the practical competence of teachers in the field. The lack of assistance is also a problem. The teacher needs direct guidance from the resource person or expert facilitator who understands the context of early childhood learning. However, mentoring activities are often only done once or twice without sustainability. Without continuous assistance, the teacher has difficulty reflecting on the practice of learning. This makes changes in practice in the field run slowly and less consistently. Developing a sustainable and learning community-based model is necessary for the training to have a real impact. The teacher can share good practices and discuss regularly with the facilitator to strengthen the understanding and skills of curriculum implementation.

5. Institutional Readiness in Supporting Curriculum Changes

   Institutionally, many PAUD institutions do not yet have a management system that supports curriculum changes effectively. Principals and education personnel are still adapting to the Merdeka Curriculum approach based on projects and learning differentiation. Many PAUD heads do not fully understand how to manage curriculum changes, including annual program planning, supervision, and teacher performance appraisal. This confuses internal coordination in the education unit. This lack of understanding also causes weak institutional support for teachers in compiling teaching devices, designing learning activities, and conducting appropriate assessments. Teachers often work alone without constructive direction or evaluation from the leadership. Adaptation to the independent curriculum requires careful time and strategy. The institution needs to design the steps of change gradually and realistically, and involve all stakeholders in the decision-making process. A curriculum team needs to be formed at the PAUD level, which functions as a driving force for change. This team can help design internal policies, facilitate training, and become a place for teachers to consistently consult in implementing the free curriculum.

6. Support From Parents and The Community

   One of the significant challenges in implementing an independent curriculum in PAUD is the lack of parents' understanding of the essence of this curriculum. Many parents still adhere to the old paradigm, prioritizing memorization, academic outcomes, and formal learning activities. When children play or explore freely, they assume that children are not learning. This misconception causes negative views on the more flexible and fun free curriculum approach. Some parents even consider the teacher to "not teach seriously" because children are more often involved in playing, projects, or collaborative activities. Lack of intensive communication between the school and parents also strengthens this misunderstanding. The Head of PAUD acknowledged that the institution did not yet have an effective socialization program to explain the change in the learning paradigm carried by the independent curriculum. Community support is also not optimal, especially regarding direct involvement in project-based learning activities. In fact, the involvement of local communities is needed to strengthen cultural values, local wisdom, and learning contextualization. For this curriculum change to be successful, PAUD needs to develop effective communication strategies, such as routine meetings with parents, strengthening the role of the school committee, and community involvement in learning activities. Sustainable education will help build a stronger understanding and support for the surrounding environment.

7. Administrative and Reporting Constraints

   The Head of PAUD said that the teacher's administrative burden is still relatively high, often hampering their learning focus. One of the main complaints is the complexity of the reporting system, which has not been fully integrated between the Merdeka Teaching Platform (PMM) and the Internal

System. The teacher feels that their time is taken up making reports, filling in data, and managing administrative documents, so the time for learning, reflection, and innovation is limited. This administrative burden also aggravates the teacher when preparing a deep and meaningful assessment. Lack of training related to the use of digital platforms, including PMM, worsens the situation. Some teachers still have difficulty accessing or operating the platform, especially in areas with limited network or devices. The absence of uniform reporting standards also causes confusion among teachers. There is a difference in expectations between institutions and the education office, which causes teachers to make multiple reports or adjust repeatedly. Simplifying the administrative system and increasing technical support are needed to facilitate teachers in the reporting process. In addition, digital literacy training and the use of learning platforms should be an important part of the independent curriculum assistance.

8. Teacher's Understanding of The Merdeka Curriculum

This aspect reiterated that the teacher's understanding of the independent curriculum remains a significant challenge. This repetition shows the consistency of problems the school and teacher feel, showing that the problem is not incidental, but systemic. Teachers feel awkward and insecure when applying a new curriculum because they are still accustomed to a rigid and linear approach. Difficulties in understanding the terms, curriculum structure, and changes in learning philosophy slow down the adaptation process. The Head of PAUD also sees that this lack of understanding has implications for the low quality of learning interactions. The teacher has not been able to design an exploratory, fun, and meaningful learning experience according to the main principles of the independent curriculum. Although the teacher has received socialization, the approach is too theoretical and does not touch on the practice in class. Teachers need training based on case study, direct practice, and simulation of real learning situations. Strengthening teachers' understanding must be a priority, primarily through developing learning communities, school-based coaching, and preparing relevant and contextual training modules.

9. Teacher Readiness in Compiling Teaching Tools

Repetition of this aspect shows that the teacher's readiness to compile teaching devices is a crucial problem. The teacher is still not accustomed to compiling a teaching module that is in harmony with the principles of project-based learning, differentiation, and learning achievements that are not uniform. They find it difficult to determine the learning objectives per the stage of child development and design flexible but still structured activities. The preparation of formative and reflective assessments is also a big challenge. Lack of technical training and examples of applicable teaching devices causes teachers to prefer to use finished devices or download from the internet, which are not necessarily in accordance with the students' local context. High administrative burden also reduces the time it takes for teachers to design quality teaching devices. This makes teaching devices more administrative than pedagogical, so it does not significantly impact improving the quality of learning. There needs to be a systematic intervention to support teachers in compiling teaching devices through workshops, assistance, and collaboration. The provision of contextual teaching module templates or banks will significantly help speed up the teacher's adaptation process to the independent curriculum.

V.   Conclusion

Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum through the Merdeka Teaching Platform (PMM) at the West Sumbawa Regency PAUD shows positive progress, with most teachers beginning to understand and apply curriculum principles in learning that are more contextual and fun. PMM is proven to help in learning planning through features such as teaching and learning video modules. However, the implementation still faces

various challenges, including the limitations of ICT infrastructure, low digital literacy, high administrative burden, and the lack of relevant technical training. In addition, the support of parents and the community is still weak, and the head of the PAUD unit does not yet have a strong institutional strategy to support curriculum transitions. Therefore, the success of implementing the Merdeka curriculum requires integrated efforts through increasing teacher capacity, providing digital facilities, sustainable training, and strengthening cross-stakeholder collaboration.

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