

# Challenges Faced by Teachers in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum for Catholic Religious Education

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## ABSTRACT

The Merdeka curriculum was introduced to enhance the quality of Indonesian education and bridge the gap with other countries. Student learning achievement, assessed through standardized evaluations, serves as a key measure of this improvement. This study aims to identify the difficulties faced by teachers in adapting their teaching methods, the challenges in developing instructional modules, and the issues encountered in assessing Catholic religious education. This qualitative study employed observations, interviews, and document analysis to collect data from Catholic Religious Education teachers. Data were analyzed using data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Findings indicate that teachers have implemented the Merdeka curriculum. However, they face significant challenges in transitioning from traditional teaching methods, designing effective teaching modules, and conducting assessments in accordance with the new system. These difficulties highlight the need for additional support and training. The study reveals that inadequate dissemination and technical guidance hinder effective curriculum implementation. Teachers require structured training and resources to successfully integrate the Merdeka curriculum into their teaching practices. While the Merdeka curriculum has been adopted, challenges remain in its execution. To ensure effective implementation, comprehensive training and equitable distribution of curriculum resources are necessary. Further research is recommended to explore long-term solutions for improving teacher adaptation.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Merdeka Curriculum was first introduced in 2019 as a transformative approach to improve the quality of education in Indonesia and remains in effect today. This curriculum is fully

supported by the Government of Indonesia, particularly through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (MoECRT), which has conducted various socialization programs, workshops, and technical training sessions to facilitate its implementation (MoECRT, 2021). The primary objective of these efforts is to ensure that educators and educational institutions thoroughly understand both the theoretical framework and practical applications of the Merdeka Curriculum. Furthermore, the Government collaborates with universities and other stakeholders to enhance the curriculum's implementation, fostering a holistic and inclusive approach to educational reform (Rohmah, 2022).

The introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum has significantly altered the learning system in Indonesia. Students are now empowered to access educational materials and topics aligned with their interests and learning needs. In contrast, teachers are responsible for facilitating curriculum adjustments, ensuring that instructional methods, teaching materials, and evaluation processes align with the Merdeka Curriculum's objectives (Wibawa & Suryadi, 2022). As part of this shift, teachers are expected to develop innovative teaching strategies and incorporate learning media to make lessons more engaging (Octavia, 2020).

The ability to adapt teaching methods is crucial for teachers in responding to curricular changes. They are required not only to deliver subject content but also to motivate students effectively. Research suggests that student motivation plays a vital role in enhancing educational outcomes, making it imperative for teachers to develop skills such as communication, public speaking, and interactive engagement (Jobirovna, 2023; Slimming & Laguda, 2023). Additionally, teachers must utilize appropriate learning media to create an engaging and interactive classroom environment that fosters student motivation (Pramesworo et al., 2023).

Teachers play a crucial role in developing teaching modules as part of the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation plan (Hendriani, Rifmasari, Gistituati, & Bentri, 2024). Teaching modules serve as instructional tools that outline structured learning activities, beginning with assessments, instructional materials, and evaluation processes (Farihah, Tanjung, Ampera, Sitompul, & Jahidin, 2023). Among the many competencies teachers must possess, the ability to design effective teaching modules is essential in meeting the demands of the Merdeka Curriculum. The development of teaching modules requires teachers to apply innovative strategies, ensuring that their instructional approaches remain pedagogically sound, effective, and aligned with the designated learning objectives (Stephanie, Erita, Safiana Putri, & Sendrini, 2022).

A well-structured learning module differs slightly from a lesson plan, as it incorporates various elements beyond instructional design. While both contain learning activities, learning modules provide more contextualized approaches by considering classroom environments, student conditions, and various assessment methods (Fitri, Mahdum, & Indrawati, 2023). The ability to design such modules is part of a teacher's pedagogical competence, enabling them to enhance learning efficiency and maintain alignment with achievement indicators.

Beyond instructional planning, teachers must also conduct effective learning assessments. Assessment is the process of collecting and analyzing information to determine student learning needs, progress, and outcomes (Pusparini, Kurniasih, Lestari, & Safitri, 2023). According to Ramadan (2023), assessment in education consists of formative and summative evaluations. Formative assessments focus on monitoring, measuring, and improving learning processes while also evaluating the achievement of learning objectives. In contrast, summative assessments determine the overall achievement of learning goals and competency standards, serving as a basis for grading and graduation decisions. In the Merdeka Curriculum, assessments are designed to provide flexibility in choosing techniques and timing, ensuring that evaluations effectively support the learning process (Samin, 2019).

Despite efforts to implement the Merdeka Curriculum in Catholic Religious Education (CRE), challenges persist in changing teaching methods, developing teaching modules, and conducting learning assessments. Studies indicate that these aspects remain suboptimal, affecting

the overall quality of instruction (Coratole, Ainny, & Adiyono, 2023; Rahimah, Susanta, Susanto, & Utari, 2024). Research has also shown that many teachers lack the necessary competencies to effectively adapt their pedagogical approaches, instructional materials, and evaluation techniques within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum (İlknur Reisoglu, 2020). Given the crucial role of teachers in curriculum implementation, addressing these challenges is essential for enhancing student learning outcomes and fostering globally competitive graduates.

This study seeks to explore the various difficulties faced by Catholic Religious Education teachers in adapting their teaching methods to the Merdeka Curriculum. It investigates the challenges they encounter in developing teaching modules that align with the curriculum's framework and examines the obstacles that hinder the learning assessment process in Catholic Religious Education. Understanding these difficulties will provide a clearer picture of the issues that teachers face in implementing effective instructional strategies and assessment techniques in line with curriculum expectations.

The primary aim of this research is to identify the difficulties teachers encounter when transitioning from traditional teaching methods to the student-centered approach advocated by the Merdeka Curriculum. It further seeks to examine the challenges teachers face in designing and implementing teaching modules, as well as investigate problems related to learning assessment. By providing insights into these aspects, the study aims to contribute to the improvement of teaching practices, curriculum development, and assessment methods in Catholic Religious Education.

This research is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the understanding of curriculum implementation in Catholic Religious Education. The findings will provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers in addressing the difficulties teachers face in adopting the Merdeka Curriculum. Additionally, the study aims to offer recommendations for teacher training programs, curriculum adjustments, and policy improvements, ensuring the effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in religious education settings. By identifying practical solutions, this research supports the broader goal of enhancing the quality and competitiveness of Indonesian education in the global era.

## 2. METHOD

The research method used in this study is qualitative. A qualitative approach is used because this research seeks to express the experience of a person or group naturally (Creswell, 2016). This research involved Catholic teachers under the auspices of the Subject Teacher Conference (MGMP) in Kabanjahe. The teachers have been teaching for more than six years and all have a background in Catholic Religious Education. The teachers teach in grades II and IV. The data collection process is carried out through observation, interviews and documentation studies. Of all the teachers who were members of the MGMP, ten different Catholic Religious Education teachers were used as respondents for observation and interviews. The teachers were selected using the purposive sampling technique with several criteria, including: 1) having taught for more than 6 years; 2) is a member of the Catholic MGMP. During the observation, the researcher enters the classroom during the learning process. The focus of observation is the implementation of the curriculum and self-assessment.

The research employed a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis to explore the challenges faced by Catholic Religious Education teachers in implementing and assessing the Merdeka Curriculum. The interviews were conducted with teachers to obtain in-depth information about their experiences, the implementation process, and the obstacles encountered. Through these interviews, researchers gained insights into how teachers adapted their teaching methods, designed instructional modules, and conducted learning assessments within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum.

In addition to interviews, document analysis was carried out using syllabuses and lesson plans utilized by the teachers. These documents provided valuable information regarding learning objectives, structured activities, assignments, and other instructional approaches used in Catholic Religious Education. By analyzing these materials, the researchers were able to assess how the curriculum was planned and executed, as well as identify discrepancies between the intended goals and actual classroom practices.

The data analysis process followed the framework proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which involved data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was performed by filtering relevant information obtained from interviews and documents, while data presentation involved organizing findings into meaningful themes related to curriculum implementation and assessment. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on identified patterns and emerging insights from the research. To ensure the validity of the findings, triangulation was employed, comparing data from interviews, observations, and document analysis to verify consistency and accuracy in identifying the challenges teachers face.

This study acknowledges certain limitations, particularly regarding the scope of curriculum implementation in Catholic Religious Education. The focus of the study is limited to two main aspects: the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in subject matter and the challenges teachers face in executing and assessing the curriculum. These limitations suggest that further research could explore a broader range of subjects or examine the effectiveness of specific teacher training programs aimed at improving curriculum implementation.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Referring to the objectives of the research, which include teachers' difficulties in changing teaching methods, teachers' difficulties in developing teaching modules, and teachers' difficulties in conducting assessments, interview and observation data are presented as follows:

#### 3.1 Teachers' Difficulties in Changing Teaching Methods

Curriculum changes are a challenge in the world of education. The curriculum is designed to always be relevant and adaptive to the development of the times and the needs of society. Therefore, curriculum changes require changes in all aspects of learning implementation. Starting from learning planning, learning methods, teaching materials, to learning evaluation.

Teachers, as learning implementers, have an obligation to follow curriculum changes in various ways provided by the government. The government has provided various trainings, workshops, and technical guidance to facilitate teachers in understanding and implementing the new curriculum. Teachers can also take advantage of a variety of learning resources, including guidebooks, modules, and digital platforms, to improve their competencies and skills.

The transition to the Merdeka Curriculum posed significant challenges for Catholic Religious Education teachers at Kabanjahe Elementary School, particularly in adapting their teaching methods. Many educators found it difficult to break away from their comfort zone, as they had long been accustomed to the structure and approach of the previous curriculum. The shift required a fundamental change in pedagogy, demanding more interactive and student-centered learning approaches.

One of the Catholic Religious Education teachers shared their experience during an interview:

*"In the past, we mostly followed structured lesson plans, relying on textbooks and lectures. But with the Merdeka Curriculum, we have to be more creative and ensure that students actively engage in the learning process. Initially, this was challenging because we were used to traditional methods. Now, we need to design lessons that encourage students to think critically, discuss, and even express their own interpretations of religious teachings."*

This insight highlights the pedagogical shift required by the new curriculum. Unlike the previous approach, which emphasized rote learning and teacher-centered instruction, the Merdeka Curriculum mandates that teachers demonstrate their understanding of learning by designing lessons that engage students actively in religious education. This involves incorporating discussion-based learning, real-world applications, and reflective activities that allow students to deepen their understanding of Catholic teachings in a meaningful way.

Another teacher further emphasized the difficulty in adapting to these changes:

*"We are encouraged to create an interactive learning environment, but many of us were not trained in these methods before. We have to rethink our lesson plans, integrate multimedia, and even allow students to share their own perspectives. This is a big shift, and while we see the benefits, it takes time to adjust."*

These challenges indicate that while the Merdeka Curriculum aims to foster independent and critical thinking, the success of its implementation depends largely on teacher readiness and professional development. Without adequate support and training, educators may struggle to fully integrate the new methodologies into their teaching practices.

### **3.2 Teachers' Difficulties in Developing Learning Modules**

The self-paced learning curriculum replaces lesson plans with teaching modules. The components of the teaching module as lesson plans in the previous curriculum are different from the Merdeka learning curriculum. The components of the teaching module in the self-study curriculum consist of general information, core components, and appendices.

The core component is the heart of the curriculum. It contains important elements that guide the implementation of learning. First, learning objectives that guide the expected outcomes of the learning process. Second, meaningful understanding that encourages students to build knowledge Merdekaly and contextually. Third, it triggers questions that serve to spark curiosity and explore the topic further. Fourth, learning activities designed to facilitate the achievement of meaningful goals and understanding. Fifth, assessment is used to measure student achievement. Sixth, enrichment and improvement to accommodate individual differences in abilities. Finally, reflection of teachers and students to evaluate and improve the learning process.

In addition to the core components, the curriculum also includes general information and appendices. General information contains school identity, initial competencies of students, Pancasila student profiles as a reference for character, supporting facilities and infrastructure, student achievement targets, and learning models to be used. This information provides a comprehensive overview of the context and learning.

The core components consist of learning objectives, meaningful understanding, trigger questions, learning activities, assessment, enrichment and improvement, and teacher and student reflection. General information contains school identity, initial competencies, Pancasila student profiles, facilities and infrastructure, target students, and learning models used. Then, the attachments contain student worksheets, teacher and student reading materials, glossaries and bibliographies.

Teachers responsible for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum must design and prepare various instructional components to ensure that lesson plans are engaging and tailored to students' needs. This preparation process aims to facilitate teaching by enabling educators to create structured and interactive learning experiences. However, many subject teachers struggle with developing teaching modules due to the complexity of the required components and the novelty of the curriculum's approach.

One of the most significant challenges identified was the preparation of teaching modules, which serve as lesson plans under the new curriculum. Unlike the previous system, where lesson

plans followed a familiar structure, the Merdeka Curriculum introduces new formats and expectations, requiring teachers to rethink their instructional design. The introduction of new terminology and conceptual frameworks related to teaching modules has further complicated this transition, making it difficult for educators to fully grasp the curriculum's intent and implementation.

A teacher shared their frustration during an interview:

*"In the past, we had a clear format for lesson plans, and we followed it step by step. Now, with the Merdeka Curriculum, we have to prepare teaching modules that include various components, and some of the terminology is completely new to us. It's not just about writing lesson plans anymore; we have to think about student projects, learning independence, and interactive activities, which require a different mindset. It feels overwhelming."*

This statement highlights the adjustment difficulties that teachers face in transitioning to a more flexible yet demanding instructional model. The challenge is not only in understanding the theoretical aspects of the new curriculum but also in applying these concepts effectively in lesson planning.

Another teacher further expressed concerns about the workload and preparation time required:

*"Creating a teaching module takes a lot more time than what we were used to. We have to align it with the learning objectives, create engaging activities, and make sure it encourages student participation. For teachers who have been following a structured system for years, this is a big shift, and we need more guidance and support."*

These findings suggest that while the Merdeka Curriculum aims to enhance student engagement and autonomy, successful implementation depends heavily on teacher preparedness and adequate professional development. Without clear training and support, teachers may struggle to effectively design and execute the required instructional modules, potentially affecting the quality of education delivered in classrooms.

### **3.3 Teachers' Difficulties in Conducting Assessments**

Teachers experience difficulties in assessment due to the ineffectiveness of the assessment process. This happens because the socialization of the Merdeka curriculum as a whole is included in terms of assessments that are not absorbed by teachers in the regions. This is a homework for all of us, including the government as a policy holder so that it can be more structured and systematic in socializing the Merdeka curriculum comprehensively.

In the Merdeka learning curriculum, assessments receive special attention with the application of four forms of assessment that complement each other. First, diagnostic assessments aim to identify learners' strengths and weaknesses before starting learning. The results of this diagnostic assessment are a reference for teachers to design learning strategies that suit the individual needs of students. Second, authentic assessments are carried out during the learning process. This assessment assesses learners' ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-life contexts or everyday situations.

Furthermore, formative assessments are carried out periodically during the learning process to monitor student learning progress. Formative assessments provide feedback to teachers and learners on aspects that need to be improved. Finally, summative assessments are carried out at the end of the learning program to measure the achievement of overall learning objectives. Summative assessments are usually in the form of final exams or projects that incorporate all aspects of learning. These four forms of assessment are interrelated and provide comprehensive information about student learning progress. By implementing various forms of assessment, the

Merdeka learning curriculum provides opportunities for teachers to monitor and evaluate the learning process holistically, so that they can provide the right support for students.

The findings in this study reveal that teachers face significant obstacles in implementing assessments, especially authentic assessments. These difficulties stem from teachers' unpreparedness to prepare adequate assessment instruments, structured assessment procedures, and a clear understanding of the objectives of assessment. The assessment instruments provided by teachers are often incomplete and less comprehensive, so they cannot accurately measure student learning achievement in real situations. In addition, the assessment procedures implemented tend to be ad hoc and less structured, so the assessment process is not systematic and ineffective. In addition, the lack of understanding of the assessment objectives that must be achieved is also an obstacle for teachers in designing and implementing targeted assessments.

In this study, teachers experienced difficulties in conducting assessments, especially authentic assessments. Difficulties occur due to the teacher's unpreparedness in the instruments and procedures as well as the purpose of the assessment. The assessment instruments provided by teachers are incomplete coupled with emergency assessment procedures and are not structured so that learning objectives cannot be achieved properly.

The impact felt by students on the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum includes:

- 1) Increasing student learning motivation
- 2) Increasing student learning outcomes
- 3) students can explore their talents and abilities
- 4) students can develop character according to their potential
- 5) Students can hone their critical reasoning skills
- 6) Students experience a positive and enjoyable learning ecosystem

### **3.2 Discussion**

The findings of this study highlight several key challenges faced by Catholic Religious Education teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The transition to this new curriculum demands significant changes in teaching methods, instructional planning, and assessment strategies. However, many teachers struggle to adapt, particularly in shifting away from traditional pedagogical approaches. Despite the government's efforts to provide training and technical guidance, teachers still experience difficulties in integrating the new methodologies effectively into their teaching practices. The challenge is further compounded by teachers' hesitancy to step out of their comfort zones, particularly in adopting more interactive and student-centered learning approaches. The shift requires them to not only present engaging lessons but also facilitate a learning environment where students actively participate in their education.

A significant challenge in curriculum implementation is the development of teaching modules, which replace traditional lesson plans. The structure of these modules is vastly different from previous instructional frameworks, requiring teachers to familiarize themselves with new components such as learning objectives, meaningful understanding, trigger questions, and reflection activities. Many teachers find this transition overwhelming, as they must design materials that align with the core principles of the Merdeka Curriculum while ensuring relevance to student needs. The unfamiliarity with new terminology and the additional workload of module preparation further contribute to the difficulties experienced by teachers. These challenges suggest the need for more comprehensive training and continuous mentoring to help educators fully grasp the concept and implementation of teaching modules.

In addition to teaching methods and module development, assessment practices also present a major hurdle for teachers. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes a holistic approach to evaluation, incorporating diagnostic, authentic, formative, and summative assessments. However, findings indicate that many teachers are not adequately prepared to implement these assessments

effectively. The lack of structured assessment instruments, unclear assessment procedures, and limited understanding of assessment objectives hinder their ability to evaluate student learning accurately. Authentic assessments, in particular, pose difficulties, as teachers struggle to design tasks that measure students' ability to apply knowledge in real-world contexts. Without a clear framework and systematic guidance, teachers often conduct assessments in an unstructured and ineffective manner, leading to gaps in evaluating student progress.

Despite these challenges, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has had a positive impact on students. The findings reveal that students demonstrate increased motivation, improved learning outcomes, and greater opportunities for self-exploration. The curriculum allows them to develop their character, hone critical thinking skills, and experience a more dynamic and enjoyable learning environment. These benefits underscore the importance of supporting teachers in overcoming curriculum implementation challenges, as their ability to adapt directly influences student success. By addressing the difficulties in teaching methods, module development, and assessment, the Merdeka Curriculum can be more effectively implemented, leading to meaningful improvements in Catholic Religious Education and broader educational outcomes.

Solutions to the various challenges teachers face in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum can be addressed through several key approaches. One essential strategy is conducting ongoing training programs that provide comprehensive guidance on curriculum implementation, ensuring that teachers are well-equipped to adapt to the new system. Additionally, teachers should actively enhance their pedagogical competencies by engaging in professional development activities, such as participating in scientific discussions and collaborative learning with fellow educators. These interactions can foster the exchange of ideas, best practices, and innovative teaching strategies, helping teachers navigate curriculum changes more effectively. Furthermore, the government must take a structured and systematic approach in socializing the Merdeka Curriculum across all regions, ensuring that every educational institution receives clear and consistent information about its objectives, implementation strategies, and assessment methods. By integrating these solutions, teachers can overcome the obstacles in curriculum implementation, leading to more effective teaching practices and improved student learning outcomes.

Curriculum changes require various changes in teachers as curriculum implementers who will teach learning to students (Kilag et al., 2024). The changes demanded and must be made by teachers are teaching methods that are in accordance with the demands of the Merdeka learning curriculum (Supriatna et al., 2023). The change is urgent because otherwise, the expected curriculum change goals will be difficult to achieve in learning (Korhonen et al., 2023).

The Merdeka learning curriculum was born as an effort to overcome the learning crisis to improve the quality of education. Improving the quality of education requires the cooperation of all elements of the school, namely the principal and teachers as learning implementers (Korhonen et al., 2023). The implementation of the Merdeka learning curriculum requires teachers to be creative, innovative, in learning methods, media and techniques as well as teachers' mindsets need to change in the implementation of learning (Coratole Ainny & Adiyono, 2023).

Teachers, as the cornerstone of implementing the Merdeka Learning Curriculum, must be creative, innovative, and adaptable to evolving educational demands. They should actively seek to enhance their knowledge of media and teaching methods aligned with the curriculum's requirements to facilitate effective learning (Dwiputra, Azzahra, & Heryanto, 2023; Fauzan, Ansori, Dannur, Pratama, & Hairit, 2023). Moreover, educators must possess a solid understanding and practical skills in applying the Merdeka Learning Curriculum to ensure that lesson planning, instructional strategies, and assessments align with its principles and objectives (Pramesworo, Fathurrochman, Sembing, Bangkara, & Sudrajat, 2023).

The primary challenge faced by Catholic Religious Education teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is the difficulty in transitioning from the teaching methods of the previous curriculum (Aliyyah, Rasmitadila, Gunadi, Sutisnawati, & Febriantina, 2023). According to

research findings, many teachers struggle to adapt their instructional approaches to align with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum (Coratole Ainny & Adiyono, 2023). This resistance is largely due to their comfort and familiarity with previous teaching methods, making it challenging to adopt new pedagogical strategies as required by the curriculum (Pramesworo et al., 2023). Consequently, educators often continue using traditional approaches despite the necessity for transformation (Sa'imah, Fitria, & Kristiawan, 2023).

In the context of elementary school Catholic Religious Education teachers in Kabanjahe, the main difficulty in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is shifting both teaching methods and mindsets from the previous curriculum (Pelangi, Subeki, & Acimpong, 2024). This resistance to change is exacerbated by teachers' lack of experience and limited mastery of technology, which makes adopting new learning strategies more challenging. These findings align with prior research highlighting similar issues (Rasyidi & Idrus, 2024). Apart from human resource limitations, insufficient learning support facilities further hinder the effective implementation of the curriculum in classroom settings, as confirmed by additional studies (Rasyidi & Idrus, 2024).

Another significant challenge faced by Catholic Religious Education teachers is the difficulty in designing teaching modules. Teaching modules serve as structured learning designs that align with the Merdeka Curriculum to achieve government-mandated competency standards (Pratama Benny Herlandy, Neng Sholihat, Pahmi, & Mohamed Nor Azhari Azman, 2024). These modules contain key components such as general information, core content, and appendices, including details on class level, time allocation, learning phases, content structure, Pancasila student profile, learning outcomes, student targets, available resources, learning models, instructional activities, assessment criteria, and student worksheets (Pratama Benny Herlandy et al., 2024).

Further emphasizing the importance of teaching modules, Rasmi argues that modules should be designed in accordance with students' needs and school conditions before being implemented in the classroom (Photo, Hendry, & Azriyanti, 2023). Ashurov also stresses that teachers must complete the module preparation process by following well-defined preparatory steps (Ashurov Jasur Djurayevich, 2023). The structured process of teaching module development involves analyzing students, conducting diagnostic assessments, identifying learning objectives, determining Pancasila student projects, designing and structuring teaching modules, selecting appropriate assessment techniques, and ensuring that all essential components are incorporated (Nisa et al., 2022).

Thus, the teaching module plays a crucial role as a learning implementation tool in the Merdeka Curriculum, helping teachers effectively deliver lessons. Modules are structured based on learning materials, teaching methodologies, and student evaluation processes, ensuring that the curriculum is executed in alignment with its intended goals.

The teaching module serves as both a plan and instructional design within the Merdeka Learning Curriculum, carefully developed by teachers to align with students' characteristics and supplemented with examples and illustrations relevant to the learning topics (Marsha R. Valencia, 2020). To ensure effective teaching, these modules must be engaging and tailored to students' needs, enabling them to fully grasp the subject matter (Setiyani, Putri, Ferdianto, & Fauji, 2020). Each module consists of learning objectives, instructional steps, teaching media, and assessments that align with the learning objectives flow within the curriculum (Marsha R. Valencia, 2020). Additionally, teaching modules play a crucial role in reducing teachers' workload, allowing them to dedicate more time to guiding students through the learning process (Widarti et al., 2023).

The responsibility of preparing teaching modules falls on subject teachers implementing the Merdeka Learning Curriculum in grades 1 and 4, requiring them to cultivate innovation and adaptability. The ability to design effective teaching modules is a key pedagogical competency that must be developed in accordance with curriculum guidelines. Properly structured modules enable teachers to conduct lessons effectively and efficiently, ensuring that instruction aligns with specific learning objectives (Purwinda Anggrella, Raudina Izzati, & Sudrajat, 2023). Without well-prepared

modules, lessons may lack coherence, become teacher-dominated, and fail to engage students, ultimately making the learning experience less enjoyable (Purwinda Anggrella et al., 2023). Moreover, poor planning impairs teachers' ability to enhance learning effectiveness, as they struggle to tailor instruction to students' needs in the absence of a structured teaching module (Alonzo, Bejano, & Labad, 2023).

One of the major challenges teachers face in compiling teaching modules is the lack of expertise in structuring and developing modules based on students' circumstances (Alonzo et al., 2023). These findings reinforce previous studies indicating that teachers often remain the sole active participants in the learning process, while students find lessons unengaging due to the absence of properly developed modules (Purwinda Anggrella et al., 2023).

Another significant issue encountered by Catholic Religious Education teachers is difficulty in designing assessments and mapping students' competencies (Khaswani, 2022). Assessments are essential for measuring students' understanding and evaluating the effectiveness of instruction (Ramadan, 2023). As an instrument for evaluating learning outcomes, assessments help determine whether students have successfully acquired the intended knowledge and skills (Adom, Mensah, & Dake, 2020; Ramadan, 2023).

Within the Merdeka Learning Curriculum, assessments are categorized into three types:

1. Diagnostic Assessment – Conducted before learning begins to evaluate students' prior knowledge and identify gaps in understanding (Ayu Ana Fitri Retnowati & Triyanto, 2024).
2. Formative Assessment – Administered during the learning process to monitor student progress and make necessary adjustments (Ayu Ana Fitri Retnowati & Triyanto, 2024).
3. Summative Assessment – Implemented at the end of a learning period to measure overall learning outcomes and effectiveness (Ayu Ana Fitri Retnowati & Triyanto, 2024).

For effective implementation, teachers must fully understand the characteristics of formative and summative assessments. Formative assessments are integrated into the learning process, involve student participation, and focus on continuous improvement. In contrast, summative assessments are conducted after instruction, are more formal, serve as school accountability measures, and focus on overall learning evaluation (Canggung Darong, Niman, Fatwamati, & Nendi, 2022). The primary goal of assessment is to monitor students' learning progress and identify areas where additional support is needed (Canggung Darong et al., 2022).

Teachers' assessments are essential for helping students determine which learning activities will enable them to achieve their academic goals (Ramadan, 2023). Schools typically follow government-issued assessment guidelines to ensure standardized student evaluations (Ayu Ana Fitri Retnowati & Triyanto, 2024).

Despite these guidelines, Catholic Religious Education teachers in grades 1 and 4 in Kabanjahe continue to struggle with student assessments, particularly in authentic assessment (Ayu Ana Fitri Retnowati & Triyanto, 2024). This difficulty leads teachers to rely on pre-existing rubrics from textbooks, which often lack the depth needed for comprehensive student evaluation (Ayu Ana Fitri Retnowati & Triyanto, 2024). The root cause of this challenge is teachers' insufficient understanding of authentic assessment methodologies, making it difficult to effectively implement student evaluations (Ayu Ana Fitri Retnowati & Triyanto, 2024).

The findings of this study highlight the ongoing challenges faced by Catholic Religious Education teachers in implementing the Merdeka Learning Curriculum. The difficulty in preparing structured teaching modules hinders instructional effectiveness, while challenges in student assessment impact the accuracy of evaluating learning outcomes. Addressing these issues requires targeted professional development to enhance teachers' skills in module design and student assessment, ensuring that lessons are engaging, well-structured, and aligned with curriculum objectives.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum aims to improve the quality of education in Indonesia, aligning it with global standards. However, findings from this research indicate that its implementation in schools, particularly in Catholic Religious Education (CRE), faces significant challenges. Teachers in the Subject Teacher Conference and Teacher Working Group in Kabanjahe struggle with adapting their teaching methods, as they are accustomed to the traditional curriculum and find it difficult to embrace the creative, innovative, and student-centered approaches required by the Merdeka Curriculum. Additionally, many teachers experience difficulties in preparing teaching modules, which replace conventional lesson plans. This results in less engaging learning experiences, where teachers dominate the lesson while students remain passive. Another major challenge is assessment implementation, as the curriculum mandates authentic, formative, and summative assessments, yet teachers often rely solely on government-provided rubrics rather than developing comprehensive assessment strategies.

These findings highlight the need for structured and systematic government efforts to socialize and support curriculum implementation across all regions. The study implies that enhancing teacher training programs, promoting collaboration among educators, and increasing access to pedagogical resources are crucial for improving curriculum execution. However, this research has certain limitations, as it focuses only on Catholic Religious Education teachers in Kabanjahe, limiting the generalizability of findings to broader educational contexts. Future research should expand its scope by examining the experiences of teachers across different subjects, educational levels, and regions, as well as exploring the effectiveness of professional development programs designed to facilitate curriculum adoption. By addressing these challenges, the Merdeka Curriculum can be implemented more effectively, leading to improved teaching quality and enhanced student learning outcomes.

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