

The Affecting Factors of School Readiness for Implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* Policy

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi kesiapan sekolah mengimplementasikan kebijakan merdeka belajar. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan pendekatan mix methode. Penarikan sampel dilakukan secara proporsional dari 30 SMP Negeri dan Swasta Kota Padang, Indonesia. Sehingga partisipan dalam penelitian ini terdiri dari 30 kepala sekolah, 207 guru, dan 63 staff. Analisis data dilakukan dengan SEM smart PLS. Analisis hubungan antar variabel ditentukan dengan mengacu pada nilai sampel asli dan keluaran T-statistik dari Smart PLS. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi kesiapan sekolah mengimplementasikan kebijakan merdeka belajar; pertama, dimensi pengetahuan terdiri dari pengetahuan untuk berubah, inisiatif untuk berubah, tanggung jawab untuk berubah, dan kreativitas untuk berubah dengan t-statistik 34,012. Kedua, dimensi sikap terdiri dari kebutuhan untuk berubah, komitmen terhadap perubahan, dan keyakinan untuk berubah dengan t-statistik 42,680. Ketiga, dimensi institusional terdiri dari peran untuk melakukan perubahan, keterlibatan pribadi, perubahan ide/program, sumber daya pendukung, dan kolaborasi dengan t-statistik 38,454. Disimpulkan pemahaman dan sikap yang positif terhadap perubahan, serta dukungan institusional yang kuat, merupakan faktor kunci dalam meningkatkan kesiapan sekolah dalam mengimplementasikan kebijakan merdeka belajar. Implikasi dari penelitian ini adalah pentingnya pengembangan program pelatihan dan pendidikan yang fokus pada peningkatan pengetahuan, sikap, dan dukungan institusional untuk memfasilitasi implementasi kebijakan merdeka belajar di sekolah-sekolah.

ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the factors influencing schools' readiness to implement the independent learning policy. This research was conducted using a mixed-method approach. Sampling was conducted proportionally from 30 public and private junior high schools in Padang City, Indonesia. So, the participants in this research consisted of 30 school principals, 207 teachers, and 63 staff. Data analysis was carried out using SEM intelligent PLS. The relationship between variables is analyzed by referring to the original sample values and T-statistic output from Smart PLS. The research results show the factors that influence schools' readiness to implement the independent learning policy; first, the knowledge dimension consists of knowledge to change, initiative to change, responsibility to change, and creativity to change with a t-statistic of 34.012. Second, the attitude dimension consists of the need to change, commitment to change, and belief in change, with a t-statistic of 42.680. Third, the institutional dimension consists of making changes, personal involvement, changing ideas/programs, supporting resources, and collaboration with a t-statistic of 38.454. It is concluded that understanding, a positive attitude toward change, and solid institutional support are critical factors in increasing school readiness in implementing the independent learning policy. The implication of this research is the importance of developing training and education programs that focus on increasing knowledge, attitudes, and institutional support to facilitate the implementation of independent learning policies in schools.

1. INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions are a part that gets the influence of the massive development of the times. The state of educational institutions reflects the face of a nation; which with the development of the system

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will become a reference in building human resources that are engaged and distributed in all sectors of life, nation and state. This requires that every educational institution needs to be adaptive by always making changes in the context of innovation. The management of educational institutions, from the policy level to technical management, needs to be adapted to the demands of current and future needs, making changes means innovating (Kumari et al., 2019; Pol & Castrechini, 2013). Innovation is not only the key to surviving and maintaining existence but also the wisest choice for schools to improve education quality, resilience and competitiveness (Carayannis et al., 2014; Kadi & Awwaliyah, 2017). Innovation in education can also be interpreted as a way as well as a product of school adaptation to disruption or change. Innovations can be made for every aspect of school governance. Responding to this educational disruption challenge, the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia (Kemdikbud RI) has prepared and implemented innovative programs for schools and tertiary institutions. One of the most recent programs and being implemented in almost every school in Indonesia is the *Merdeka Belajar* program. *Merdeka Belajar* is an educational development concept in which all stakeholders are expected to become agents of change. These stakeholders include families, teachers, educational institutions, industry, and society. There are three indicators of the success of the Merdeka Learning program initiated by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, namely (1) student participation in Indonesian education that is evenly distributed; (2) effective learning; and (3) there are no students left behind (Azmi & Iswanto, 2021; Mawarni et al., 2023).

The concept of Freedom to Learn is a breakthrough policy launched by the Minister of Education, Nadiem Makarim, which aims to return education management authority to schools and local governments. At the implementation level, *Merdeka Belajar* is no different from the concept of *Merdeka Belajar*, where each student is considered to have authority over himself. Education management authority is realized by providing flexibility to schools and local governments in planning, implementing and evaluating educational programs implemented in schools. Of course, these things refer to the principles of the Freedom to Learn policy set by the central government in an effort to achieve the national goals of education. Freedom to learn initiated by the Minister of Education and Culture is also in line with other thoughts of Ki Hadjar Dewantara regarding education that should be held in Indonesia. The essence of independent self-study, namely freedom of thought aimed at students and teachers, thus encouraging the formation of an independent spirit character. In its implementation, the *Merdeka Belajar* policy focuses on four aspects, namely change and innovation, leadership and school culture, developing the quality of learning, and the quality of student learning outcomes.

The success of an organization in implementing a change program cannot be separated from the readiness of the organization both in terms of individual readiness and institutional readiness. Organizational readiness in carrying out changes is a determinant of the effectiveness of implementing intervention efforts by schools. Various literacies show almost the same concept that organizational readiness for change is measured from two dimensions or levels: organization and individual (Benzer et al., 2017; Hannon et al., 2017; Mladenova, 2022). Readiness refers to the collective determination of organizational members to implement change with collective confidence and ability (Schultz et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2023). Organizational readiness for change varies as a function of how many members of the organization appreciate change and how well their abilities are at the implementation level, which is related to: task demands, resource availability, and situational factors (Heim & Sardar-Drenda, 2021; Thakur & Srivastava, 2018). When organizational readiness for change is high, organizational members are more likely to initiate change, exert greater effort, show greater persistence, and display more cooperative behavior (Bush, 2018; Mladenova, 2022; Oppi et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023). The result is a more effective implementation.

The results of independent learning research conducted by previous research show that teachers' understanding of the implementation of the independent learning curriculum is in the sufficient category and still needs development and understanding (Fitri et al., 2024; Puspitasari & Utami, 2023). Then the results of similar research show that the implementation of independent learning in driving schools has been carried out optimally, although there are still obstacles and shortcomings in its implementation because the key to successful implementation of this curriculum lies in the school principals and teachers who must have the will to make changes (Angga et al., 2022; Suryani et al., 2023). School readiness to see changes in the curriculum must pay close attention to two fundamental aspects, namely reliable teachers and adequate facilities and infrastructure (Subandi, 2017; Uce, 2016).

This research departs from the assumption that as an innovation in learning management in schools; The implementation of the Independent Learning policy needs to be prepared before it disrupts normal school activities. This is made clear by the previous learning method which gave rise to several problems that required a reorientation of education, as follows: (1) learning orientation focused on achieving minimum standards which overrode the learning process as a whole; (2) the role of students as

educational objects; (3) the relevance of the material and PBM to the demands of academics, society and the world of work. This research tries to analyze the factors that influence school readiness to implement the *Merdeka Belajar* policy in Padang City, West Sumatera Province. It is hoped that the results of the identification and analysis of these factors can be used as recommendations for other schools to implement a more effective of *Merdeka Belajar* policy.

2. METHOD

This research uses mix methods with a research approach that combines or associates qualitative and quantitative forms. This approach involves philosophical assumptions, the application of qualitative and quantitative approaches and the mixing of both approaches in one research. This approach is more complex than simply collecting and analyzing two types of data. This also involves the function of the two research approaches collectively so that the overall strength of this research is greater than qualitative and quantitative research. Research data consists of qualitative data and quantitative data. Qualitative data is data obtained from interviews with participants regarding factors that are predictors that determine a school's readiness to implement the Independent Learning policy. Meanwhile, quantitative data is data on respondents' responses to filling out questionnaires related to school readiness factors and their relationship with the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* policy. This method is intended to investigate and analyze the factors suspected to be the cause of the incident.

Research is grouped into two activities. First, qualitative research was conducted in three junior high schools in Padang, Indonesia, involving 3 principals, 15 teachers and 9 school employees as participants using interview techniques to explore the opinions of research participants regarding the factors that determine the success of their schools in implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* policy. Second, quantitative research with a population of school principals, teachers and staff in 30 junior high schools in Padang City, West Sumatera Province. Sampling resulted in 300 participants consisting of 30 school principals, 207 teachers and 63 staff. Data analysis was carried out qualitatively and quantitatively. Qualitative data analysis was carried out in a narrative manner which leads to the generalization of the factors determining school readiness in implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* policy. The results of qualitative research are used as the basis for developing instruments in further research. Meanwhile, quantitative data analysis was carried out using smart PLS SEM. Analysis of the relationship between variables is determined by referring to the original sample values and T-statistic output from Smart PLS. The path significance value was determined using testing criteria with a significance value (α) of 5% and a standard T-statistic <1.96.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Interviews with respondents were conducted openly. Respondents described aspects that they felt the school owned and prepared for; intentionally or not which is a determining factor in their success in implementing *Merdeka Belajar* policies in schools. Information from 27 respondents consisting of 3 school principals, 15 teachers, and 9 school employees who were interviewed was analyzed descriptively and generalized referring to general statements that are used as aspects of school readiness. The results of research on the determinants of school readiness to implement *Merdeka Belajar* policies are grouped into three dimensions, namely: knowledge, attitudes, and school support systems. Each of these dimensions is explained by factors or indicators as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Dimensions and Factors School Readiness to Implementation *Merdeka Belajar* Policy

	Dimension	Factors/Indicators
School Readiness for Implementing <i>Merdeka Belajar</i> Policy	1) Knowledge	Knowledge to change
		Initiative to change
		Responsibility to change
	2) Attitude	Creativity to fight change
		Need for change
		Commitment to change
	3) School Support system	Confidence to change
		Roles to act change
		Personal involvement
		Change ideas/programs
		Support resources
		Collaboration to change

The data in Table 1 show several factors indicating three dimensions of school readiness to implement the *Merdeka Belajar* policy. School readiness in this case relates to the concept of change; at the individual and organizational level to implement an innovation or change to a new habit, structure, or work system. Table 1 shows that the knowledge and attitude dimensions are the level of school readiness at the individual level. Meanwhile, the dimension of the school support system is the readiness to implement innovation or change at the organizational level. Knowledge and attitudes towards the demands of an innovation or change build individual readiness to implement it (Connor, 2015; Hubbart, 2023; Stouten et al., 2018). The better the knowledge and attitudes possessed by individuals in the organization, the more effective an innovation is implemented (Erlyani et al., 2024; Khedhiri, 2018). Conversely, the low support for knowledge and individual attitudes towards innovation or change, the higher the resistance that occurs as long as the innovation is implemented. In Table 1 there are factors that indicate readiness at the individual level in implementing innovation; *Merdeka Belajar* policy. The knowledge dimension is shown by knowledge to change, initiative to change, responsibility to change, and creativity to change. And the attitude dimension is shown by the need to change, commitment to change, and confidence to change.

This is in line with the results of previous research which stated that the readiness of madrasas in implementing the independent curriculum for studies at MAN 2 Serang City is within the sufficient criteria, with an average questionnaire score of 61.33 (Apriatni et al., 2023; Muntatsiroh & Hendriyani, 2023). Teacher readiness in implementing the independent curriculum is at sufficient criteria. The composition of the number of teachers who are in the ready criteria is 14.3%, as many as 35.7% of teachers are in sufficient readiness, this number is balanced with many teachers who are less prepared, namely 37.5%. Meanwhile, 14.3% of teachers are in the very poor criteria. However, overall, the readiness of teachers at MAN 2 Serang City is in the category of being quite ready to implement the independent curriculum in madrasas.

This is supported by the statement of the madrasa head who stated that he would prepare madrasa elements in implementing the independent curriculum in the next academic year, namely 2023/2024. These results are supported by the components of knowledge readiness, self-development efforts, infrastructure and attitudes of teachers, madrasa heads and deputy heads of curriculum which are reflected in three aspects, namely (1) readiness in learning planning; (2) readiness for the learning process; and (3) readiness for the assessment process. As the results of previous research discussed teachers' readiness to face the *Merdeka Belajar* program in three domains of the learning process, namely: planning; application; and learning evaluation (Novita et al., 2021; Nurjanah, 2021).

The school support system is the level of readiness at the institutional level, which describes the factors that have been owned: planned, set up, and held at the institutional level to implement an innovation or change. Table 1 presents several factors which are stated as determinants of school readiness at the institutional level to implement innovations in learning and school governance, namely the *Merdeka Belajar* policy. The school readiness factor at the institutional level is indicated by roles to act change, personal involvement, change ideas/programs, support resources, and collaboration. All of these are factor that schools need to prepare in a planned manner to support the readiness to implement innovation at the individual level. Institutional readiness for innovation becomes very important when the level of individual maturity in the organization tends to be low (Mangundjaya, 2015; Wulandari et al., 2015). Initiatives for change and innovation may emerge from individuals who are responsive and creative; who realize that the current situation is no longer relevant to exist and be competitive in the future. However, in complex organizations, an effective change and innovation needs to be managed in a planned and structured manner at the institutional level. Because innovation is related to the involvement and interests of each individual in the organization (Gemünden et al., 2018; Wendelken et al., 2014). The school readiness at the institutional level by managing these aspects: roles to act change, personal involvement, change ideas/programs, support resources, and collaboration contribute to the successful implementation of innovations which in this research is the *Merdeka Belajar* policy.

Table 2. Descriptive Data on School Readiness Variables

Factors	Abbreviation	No.	Missing	Mean	Median	Min	Max	Standard Deviation	Excess Kurtosis	Skewness
Knowledge to change	KtC	1	0.000	3.930	4.000	1.000	5.000	0.752	0.709	-0.499
Initiative to change	ItC	2	0.000	4.120	4.000	2.000	5.000	0.673	-0.306	-0.279
Responsibility to change	RtC	3	0.000	3.913	4.000	2.000	5.000	0.765	-0.303	-0.300
Creativity to fight change	CtC	4	0.000	3.677	4.000	1.000	5.000	0.836	-0.149	-0.227

Factors	Abbreviation	No.	Missing	Mean	Median	Min	Max	Standard Deviation	Excess Kurtosis	Skewness
Need for change	NfC	5	0.000	4.033	4.000	2.000	5.000	0.730	-0.506	-0.259
Commitment to change	CmC	6	0.000	4.220	4.000	2.000	5.000	0.667	-0.495	-0.353
Confidence to change	CfC	7	0.000	4.027	4.000	2.000	5.000	0.707	-0.650	-0.152
Roles to act change	RAC	8	0.000	4.157	4.000	2.000	5.000	0.702	-0.741	-0.287
Personal involvement	PI	9	0.000	3.970	4.000	1.000	5.000	0.802	-0.137	-0.414
Change ideas/programs	CI	10	0.000	3.930	4.000	1.000	5.000	0.807	0.406	-0.559
Support resources	SR	11	0.000	3.883	4.000	1.000	5.000	0.834	-0.210	-0.400
Collaboration to change	CLC	12	0.000	4.077	4.000	1.000	5.000	0.798	0.594	-0.692

The research was continued by statistically testing each factor of school readiness. Table 2 shows the descriptive data of identified school readiness variables. The results of the descriptive statistical test in Table 2 show that the mean value tends to be relatively close to the maximum value with a dense distribution of data (standard deviation). This proves that each factor has a good ability to measure school readiness in implementing innovation: the *Merdeka Belajar* policy. The results of data analysis using Smart pls in Table 3 show that all factors/indicators of the school readiness variable have met a good convergent validity value. The standard for determining the value of outer loading is ≥ 0.50 according to opinion (Hair, 2014). The standard outer loading value that meets the high criteria in smart pls is ≥ 0.70 , so it can be seen in Table 3 that all factors/indicators have exceeded the threshold value. The highest outer loadings value is in the Roles to act change factor, and the lowest value is in the Confidence to change factor.

Table 3. Outer Loadings

Factor	Abbreviation	Outer Loadings
Knowledge to change	CI	0.790
Initiative to change	CLC	0.770
Responsibility to change	CfC	0.790
Creativity to fight change	CmC	0.780
Need for change	CtC	0.732
Commitment to change	ItC	0.748
Confidence to change	KtC	0.727
Roles to act change	NfC	0.806
Personal involvement	PI	0.784
Change ideas/programs	RAC	0.768
Support resources	RtC	0.741
Collaboration to change	SR	0.768

Furthermore, testing the validity and reliability of the constructs is presented in Table 4. The results of the analysis prove that the Cronbach's alpha value for all variables is ≥ 0.70 , so that all variables in this study have high construct validity. Furthermore, when viewed from the composite reliability value it also shows that all dimensions already have high reliability with a value of ≥ 0.70 . The highest score is in the dimension of the school support system, and the lowest score is in the knowledge dimension. Based on the data in Table 3 and Table 4 it can be concluded that internal consistency; convergent validity and construct reliability of each factor/indicator (school readiness dimension) in the study has met the criteria so that it can be declared valid and reliable/very good. The results of this test also interpret that each factor/indicator is able to measure school readiness variables (in implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* policy) very well.

Table 4. Construct Validity and Reliability

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Attitude	0.870	0.871	0.921	0.794
Knowledge_	0.832	0.832	0.888	0.665
School Readiness	0.933	0.934	0.942	0.577
School Support System	0.889	0.891	0.920	0.698

Next, look at the relationship between dimensions and factors on school readiness variables (implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* policy). A significant relationship is determined by a statistical T value ≥ 1.96 . Based on data analysis showed that the T statistical values of all dimensions and factors have exceeded the minimum T statistic ≥ 1.96 and with a P value of 0.000. In general, information can be drawn regarding the factors that influence school readiness to implement the *Merdeka Belajar* policy: (1) the knowledge dimension consists of knowledge to change, initiative to change, responsibility to change, and creativity to change with a t-statistic of 34.012. (2) the attitude dimension consists of need to change, commitment to change, and confidence to change with a t-statistic of 42.680. (3) the institutional dimension consists of roles to act change, personal involvement, change ideas/programs, support resources, and collaboration with t-statistic 38.454. And independently each factor in the three dimensions is also proven to have a direct significant relationship with the school readiness variable (implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* policy).

Discussion

A school's readiness to make changes is a critical factor that influences the success of implementing these changes. The research results have proven the dimensions of variability that influence schools' readiness to make changes in the context of the Independent Learning Policy. The knowledge dimension of change is each school member's understanding of the reasons why change needs to be made, their knowledge of the substance of the change and how the change is carried out. Teachers, school staff, and leaders must have a deep understanding of the reasons behind proposed changes and what results of the changes are expected (Hsu & Lamb, 2020; Reese, 2020). This includes an understanding of educational trends, student needs, or changes in Education policy (Bryk, 2015; Swaffield, 2016). In this case, every school member needs to take responsibility to act as a subject of initiation and implementation of effective change.

This research highlights the importance of knowledge in organizations and how sharing knowledge can improve organizational performance. This is relevant in the context of organizational change where knowledge sharing can accelerate adaptation to change. educational leaders who have in-depth knowledge of teaching and learning are more effective in leading changes that impact student learning outcomes (Ahmad & Karim, 2019; Fayda-Kinik, 2022; Nguyen & Duong, 2022). Knowledge of pedagogical principles can help design more effective change. Furthermore, teachers' professional knowledge is the main capital that can increase organizational capacity to respond to change and continuous improvement. The results of this research highlight that knowledge is not only important for designing change, but also for ensuring that the change can be implemented effectively and sustainably. An understanding of context, theories of change, learning principles, and student and staff needs is key in establishing successful change policies and practices (Ahmad & Karim, 2019; Day et al., 2016).

The research results have also proven factors in the attitude dimension that influence school readiness in implementing change in the context of the *Merdeka Belajar* Policy. Factors that are confirmed to predict the attitude dimensions in readiness to make changes are need, for change, commitment to change, confidence to change. In general, this research shows that teacher attitudes play a significant role in the successful implementation of change in the educational environment. Positive attitudes, belief in change, participation, and collective support can make important contributions to the success of change (Christens & Inzeo, 2015; Weaver, 2016). This is supported by research results that positive attitudes and teacher support are key factors in the successful implementation of change in schools. Positive teacher attitudes toward change can help overcome resistance and encourage collaboration (Angelle & Teague, 2014; Weaver, 2016). Implementation of changes depends on how the changes affect teaching effectiveness and how teachers assess the impact of the changes on student learning outcomes. Furthermore, the formation of a professional community among teachers can increase positive attitudes towards change and encourage collaboration that supports successful implementation (Caena & Redecker, 2019; Christens & Inzeo, 2015).

The school support system is the next dimension that influences readiness to implement change, namely the *Merdeka Belajar* Policy. Setting Roles to act change, personal involvement, change

ideas/programs, support resources, and collaboration to change are factors that indicate readiness for change from the school support system dimension. The unique school context may influence how these factors interact. Therefore, research in specific contexts or the development of intervention programs designed to increase readiness for change can provide deeper insights (Oppi et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023). In the context of preparing for change in schools, the school support system can include various elements to support readiness and successful implementation of change (Fitri et al., 2024; Thakur & Srivastava, 2018).

Strong and supportive leadership is essential in guiding schools through change. School principals and other leaders must be able to provide direction, inspire and motivate school members. Ensure the availability of financial, physical and technological resources needed to support change implementation (Hughes, 2021; Mikalef et al., 2019). This may include allocating additional funds, updating technology, or procuring new teaching materials. Encourage collaboration and exchange of ideas among teachers and staff. Shared understanding and cooperation can increase readiness for change. Building a reward and recognition system that can provide additional encouragement for those who actively participate in change and achieve desired results (Kondakci et al., 2017; Mei Kin et al., 2018). Establish a continuous monitoring and evaluation system to track change implementation progress, identify obstacles, and take corrective action. By bringing all of these elements together, schools can create a robust support system to plan, manage, and support change effectively. This creates a strong foundation for increasing readiness and increasing the success of implementing change in the school environment.

The implication of these findings for the development of the scientific field under study is the emphasis on the importance of a strong school support system in facing educational change. By understanding the factors that influence school readiness, this research can provide guidance for the development of more effective policies and practices in implementing educational innovations. However, a limitation of this study may lie in the generalizability of the findings due to its focus on a specific context. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct further research involving various school contexts to expand understanding of school readiness in facing educational change.

4. CONCLUSION

The results of the study concluded that there are three dimensions of school readiness to implement the Merdeka Belajar policy, namely: knowledge, attitudes, and school support systems. First, the knowledge dimension consists of knowledge to change, initiative to change, responsibility to change, and creativity to change. Second, the attitude dimension consists of need to change, commitment to change, and confidence to change. Third, the institutional dimension consists of roles to act change, personal involvement, change ideas/programs, support resources, and collaboration. It can be concluded that independently each factor in the three dimensions is proven to have a significant relationship and is directly able to measure school readiness variables (implementing the Merdeka Belajar policy).

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