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Teacher Agency with Teacher Resilience in Facing Challenges in the Times *Independent Curriculum* Implementation

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ABSTRAK

Penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka, kurikulum baru di Indonesia, telah menyoroti pentingnya agensi dan ketahanan guru. Perubahan kurikulum dan perbedaannya yang signifikan dengan kurikulum sebelumnya menghadirkan tantangan bagi para guru Indonesia, sehingga membutuhkan peran penting agensi dan ketahanan para guru dalam mengidentifikasi dan mengatasi masalah secara efektif. Tujuan penelitian ini untuk melihat korelasi agensi guru dan resiliensi mereka ketika menghadapi kesulitan terkait implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka. Penelitian ini menggunakan strategi metode kuantitatif. 41 pendidik yang telah menggunakan Kurikulum Merdeka menjadi subjek penelitian. Para peserta diberikan kuesioner tertutup dan terbuka untuk diisi guna mengumpulkan data. Wawancara semi-terstruktur dilakukan untuk mendukung hasil dari kuesioner. Untuk hasil kuesioner, para peneliti melakukan analisis statistik deskriptif dengan SPSS 26, dan untuk hasil interview, pendekatan inkuiri naratif digunakan. Studi ini menemukan bahwa para guru menunjukkan tingkat agensi dan ketahanan yang tinggi dalam mengimplementasikan Kurikulum Merdeka, dengan menggunakan metode dan sumber daya pengajaran yang beragam. Terdapat hubungan positif yang kuat antara agensi dan ketahanan guru, yang berarti bahwa agensi yang lebih tinggi akan meningkatkan ketahanan. Namun, para guru menghadapi tantangan seperti pola pikir yang kaku, kurangnya persiapan, sumber daya yang terbatas, dan kesulitan teknologi.

ABSTRACT

The implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka, a new curriculum in Indonesia, has highlighted the importance of teacher agency and resilience. Curriculum changes and significant differences from the previous curriculum present challenges for Indonesian teachers, requiring the important role of teacher agency and resilience in identifying and solving problems effectively. The aim of this research is to see the correlation between teacher agency and their resilience when facing difficulties related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This research uses a quantitative method strategy. 41 educators who have used the Merdeka Curriculum became research subjects. Participants were given closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires to complete to collect data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to support the results of the questionnaire. For the questionnaire results, the researchers conducted descriptive statistical analysis with SPSS 26, and for the interview results, a narrative inquiry approach was used. This study found that teachers demonstrated a high level of agency and resilience in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, using a variety of teaching methods and resources. There is a strong positive relationship between agency and teacher resilience, meaning that higher agency will increase resilience. However, teachers face challenges such as rigid mindsets, lack of preparation, limited resources, and technological difficulties.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the field of educational research, teacher agency has received increasing attention in recent years (Abubakar et al., 2022; Septiana & Hanafi, 2020). This agency is critical for teachers in providing professional development, educational resources, guidance, and the latest information, thereby enabling teachers to improve the quality of their teaching and stay up to date with the latest educational developments. Claim that agency is an important aspect of teacher professionalism. A Teacher genes are teachers' abilities to develop and implement pedagogical changes as well as implement and modify their actions in educational contexts. This means that teacher institutes also facilitate professional networks and

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provide access to educational innovation, helping teachers improve their teaching practices (Beijaard et al., 2019; Rustini et al., 2018; Su, 2024; Sutrisno & Yulia, 2022). Therefore, this section discusses four areas of concern, namely studies of teacher agency and resilience, implementation and teacher problems. *Independent Curriculum* in the Indonesian context, research gaps, and research urgency.

Teachers with high agency tend to have greater resilience, as their sense of empowerment helps them overcome challenges and increase independence in the face of stress. Meanwhile, agency can be understood as the ability to make decisions based on choices, making deliberate actions to improve conditions and act wisely to resolve identified problems, resilience means the ability to consistently concentrate on something positive amidst difficult circumstances (Denzin & Lincoln, 2019; Priestley, Biesta, et al., 2020; Rutter, 2020; Werner, 2020). Previous research states that teacher agency and resilience have been theorized from various perspectives, with the social-ecological perspective as one of the main theoretical frameworks (Abulhul, 2019; Pertiwi & Pusparini, 2020; Rizki & Fahkrunisa, 2021; Sihombing et al., 2022). Other research is in line adding that agency and resilience are two things that often contribute to forming and reconstructing teacher identity together (Lee & Paul, 2023; Pertiwi & Pusparini, 2020). Moreover, other research the notion that resilience, like agency, is influenced by context and role and requires teacher dedication and agency in the real world (Anggraini et al., 2018; Ardianti & Amalia, 2020; Edwards, 2019; Nurvrita, 2020).

In Indonesia, teacher agency and resilience face challenges due to curriculum changes over the years. Indonesia has changed its curriculum several times (Angga & Iskandar, 2020; Bhardwaj et al., 2020; Biesta, 2022; Fitriyah & Wardani, 2018). The last curriculum introduced by the Ministry of Education is *Independent Curriculum* in 2022. *Independent Curriculum* often called Merdeka Belajar (Free Curriculum or Independent Learning Curriculum). This new curriculum was developed based on the results of previous curriculum evaluations in Indonesia (Aisyah et al., 2018; Aseery, 2024; Firman et al., 2024; Ghamoushi et al., 2020). The purpose of *Independent Curriculum* is to equip students with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the 21st century and adapt to a rapidly changing global environment. This also aims to foster meaningful and effective learning that increases faith, devotion to God Almighty, and noble morals while fostering students' creativity, taste and spirit as lifelong learners based on the values of Pancasila.

Curriculum can be defined as a comprehensive collection of how an educational system operates. The curriculum is a comprehensive document that includes objectives, plans, content, experience, assessment, and effectiveness that leads to appropriate revisions as the curriculum is implemented. In line with the meaning of the curriculum, *Independent Curriculum* also has aims and objectives. It is designed to help teachers identify student abilities to help them create and create relevant learning that suits students (Apple & Apple, 2022; Connelly & Clandinin, 2024; Eisner, 2022; Garcia & Gomez, 2023). This curriculum is very different from previous curricula because it allows teachers and schools to create and select their materials and resources. Previous research indicates that this curriculum seeks to provide freedom for educational institutions, teachers and students to innovate, develop, be creative and learn independently. Schools have the authority and responsibility to support educational plans based on the needs and environment of each school (Biesta & Tedder, 2024; Damşa et al., 2022; Ekawati, 2022; Gulo, 2024). In accordance with the new learning paradigm in *Independent Curriculum*, teachers are also completely free to organize special learning and evaluation activities according to the needs and characteristics of the students they teach (Cendra & Mbato, 2020; Greene et al., 2023; Hafeez, 2020). Not only does it provide flexibility and freedom to schools and teachers, but it also gives students the freedom to follow their interests through various learning opportunities, including community service, project-based learning, and internships, as well as being free to choose their learning path.

Other research states that the national implementation of this curriculum will only be completed in 2024. In 2024, the government will evaluate the community education system and provide an evaluation during the learning recovery period (Bobek, 2022; Faiz et al., 2019; Gu & Day, 2020). Training units can begin to open in 2022–2024 by selecting this educational program as an additional option. Other research too states that a curriculum is said to have been implemented effectively if the results are a consequence of proper planning involving people (curriculum designers and implementers, teachers), programs and implementation processes.

During implementation *Independent Curriculum*, there has been research conducted by Indonesian researchers. Some of this was done to find out the challenges of key players in implementation such as teachers and students (Bristow & Healy, 2020; Creswell, 2009; Day, 2023). Both teachers and students play an important role in taking part in implementing the curriculum. Teachers are full participants in curriculum implementation. They have an important role as curricular (Daga, 2022; Li, 2023; Mead et al., 2020). Meanwhile, students are active participants in curriculum implementation because they are the targets of the curriculum (Hökkä et al., 2020; Mane, 2020; Wuest & Subramaniam, 2020). Therefore,

researchers can find out what they feel and the challenges they face to provide future evaluation for the government and curriculum designers.

Previous research states that the results of their study show that Indonesia's human resources have big challenges in implementing the curriculum in schools, even though the government has succeeded in establishing the curriculum (May & Ali, 2022; Su, 2024; Yunaini et al., 2023). PTeacher preparation presents major problems and challenges during implementation *Independent Curriculum*. It was found that as a result of inadequate pre-service preparation of teachers, some of the methods used by instructors to instill values in students at the elementary level were ineffective, as NCERT English textbooks contained most of the values relevant to students at this grade level. Another challenge is that there are not enough teachers who act as innovators, creators and role models for other teachers in each school unit. The difficulty lies in the actual implementation. Other studies have found challenges in implementation *Independent Curriculum* where not all teachers are familiar with this *Freedom to Learn* idea. The research results also showed that the implementation of the one-page RPP (1 Sheet RPP) did not go as expected *Freedom to Learn* hope (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2023; Wahyudin et al., 2024; Werner & Smith, 2022).

Based on several previous studies Previous researchers have largely focused on the challenges teachers face. However, these studies do not discuss teacher agency and resilience in facing challenges when implementing this *Independent Curriculum*. Teacher agency plays an important role because it relates to how teachers recognize problems and are willing to solve them (Lubis et al., 2022; Molla & Nolan, 2024). In addition, teacher resilience is very important in overcoming problems that may arise during implementation *Independent Curriculum*. In facing the implementation of a *Independent Curriculum*, teachers need to have agency to be actively involved in decision making and curriculum adjustments according to student needs, while resilience is needed to respond to changes that may arise with resistance to pressures and challenges that arise during the adaptation process. Therefore, it is urgent to conduct research that uses a combination of agency and resilience because this can help teachers not only play an active role in developing innovative curricula but also face the dynamics of change positively. More specifically, it is important for teachers and policymakers to understand the challenges of teacher agency and resilience during implementation *Independent Curriculum*, as well as exploring the correlation between teacher agency and teacher resilience in implementing this *Independent Curriculum*.

The novelty of this research lies in the focus of the study which links the concept of teacher agency with teacher resilience in facing the challenges of implementing the *Independent Curriculum*, a topic that is rarely explored in depth in the context of education in Indonesia. This research offers a new perspective by viewing teachers not only as implementers of the curriculum, but as active agents who have a strategic role in determining the direction and quality of learning amidst changes in educational policy. This approach provides a fuller understanding of how dimensions of agency—such as reflective capacity, autonomy in decision making, and the ability to innovate—contribute to teacher resilience in the face of complex challenges. Thus, this research provides significant theoretical and practical contributions in the development of educational science, especially in the framework of strengthening the role of teachers in the *Independent Curriculum* era. The aim of this research is to determine and analyze the relationship between teacher agency and teacher resilience in facing challenges during the implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum*. This research aims to determine the level of teacher agency and resilience in facing challenges during implementation *Independent Curriculum*, as well as investigating the correlation between teacher agency and teacher resilience in the face of challenges during implementation *Independent Curriculum* through quantitative methods.

2. METHOD

Using quantitative methods, this research involves an organized method of collecting measurable and numerical data, followed by the application of statistical analysis to identify the results. PQuantitative research aims to measure variables, investigate correlations, and generalize results from a sample to a wider population based primarily on numerical data and using statistical analysis (Creswell, 2009; Priestley, Edwards, et al., 2020).

Potential respondents were selected through a survey to screen those who had implemented the *Independent Curriculum* and were willing to take part in the research. Considering their role as key players in implementing the curriculum, the responsibility for teaching and integrating the material discussed is the main consideration why teachers were chosen to be the main participants in this research. With an emphasis on teacher agency, this research examines how resilient educators handle their roles *Independent Curriculum* implementation. Through teacher participation, this research aims to gain personal knowledge about the dynamics involved in implementing this curriculum as well as the variables that influence teacher resilience and agency in adapting to changes in the curriculum. Next, interviews with four selected

participants were conducted to find out more in-depth information about their resilience and agency in facing challenges in implementation *Independent Curriculum*. The interviewees were selected based on the results of a questionnaire about their resilience and agency in facing challenges *Independent Curriculum* implementation. Researchers selected two participants with more than 10 years of teaching experience and two with 5 to 8 years of teaching experience. The survey resulted in 41 participants whose demographic description is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Research Participants

Demographic Items	Detail	Quantity	Percentage (%)
Gender	Man	3	7%
	Woman	38	93%
Level	TK	18	44%
	Elementary school	5	12%
	First Middle School	7	17%
	Senior High School	9	22%
	Vocational School	2	5%

The first stage of research data collection was carried out by distributing closed questionnaires. The collection uses an online Likert scale survey distribution using Google Form. To make data collection easier, the researcher decided to distribute the questionnaire online. There are three parts to the questionnaire. The first part is about consent information. Be informed that the information collected in the questionnaire will be kept confidential. If participants are willing to participate in the research, they can fill out a questionnaire. The second section consists of 10 closed-ended statements (A1 – A10) and two open-ended questions (A11 – A12) about agency. The statement was adapted designed and developed the questionnaire which focuses on ecological bodies (Pinar et al., 2023; Priestley, Priestley, et al., 2020). This statement is based on the iteration dimension (A1 – A4), practical-evaluative dimension (A5 – A8), and projective dimension (A9 – A10). The teacher agency questionnaire was run through Cronbach alpha, exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis using SPSS to determine its reliability and construct validity. The third part of the questionnaire includes ten statements with closed questions (R1 – R10) and 2 open questions (R11 – R12) about teacher resilience. This questionnaire was adapted from (Pratikno et al., 2022; Priantini et al., 2018). These statements are about independence (R1 – R2), positive outlook (R3), determination (R4 – R7), and equanimity (R8 – R10). The internal consistency of the teacher resilience questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. On the other hand, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using principal axis factoring and direct noble rotation was used to verify the validity of the concept. To support the data, researchers conducted semi-structured interviews using a sampling method with four selected participants. A semi-structured interview is when a respondent is faced with a series of predetermined questions with a limited number of answer options. (Sang, 2020; Setiawan, 2024). Interviews were conducted to collect in-depth qualitative data that corroborates the primary data from the first stage and expands our understanding of the topic (Schwandt, 2020; Stephen et al., 2019).

To analyze the data, descriptive statistical analysis was used by researchers to assess the results of quantitative data collected from closed questions in the questionnaire. Statistical data collected from closed questionnaires were analyzed using Likert scale range tables (Sözen & Güven, 2020; Werner & Smith, 2022). Researchers used SPSS 26 (Statistical Program for the Social Sciences version 26) to obtain meaningful results. Pearson Product Moment was also used to calculate the correlation between teacher resilience and teacher agency. Additionally, the researcher discussed interview findings for qualitative data using narrative inquiry techniques, which allowed participants to share their teachers' resilience and agency. The results of the interviews were coded and transcriptions of the recordings were made by the researcher to identify emerging themes that were used in the analysis and interpretation of the data. The Likert Scale range is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Likert Scale Range

Category	Mark	Reach
Strongly Agree	5	4.21 – 5.00
Agree	4	3.41 – 4.20
Neutral	3	2.61 – 3.40
Don't Agree	2	1.81 – 2.60
Strongly Disagree	1	1.00 – 1.80

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This section discusses the research findings. This research aims to determine the level of teacher agency, teacher resilience, and the correlation between teacher resilience and teacher agency in facing challenges during times of crisis. *Independent Curriculum* implementation. 41 teachers who have implemented *Independent Curriculum*, involved in this research. Data collection was carried out in two ways, namely questionnaires and interviews with selected participants. The results of the questionnaire are calculated using descriptive statistics. The results of the questionnaire are in the form of an average score and are presented in Table 3. Average Value of Teacher Responses to Resilience in Implementation *Independent Curriculum* in Table 4. The Relationship between Teacher Agency and Teacher Resilience in Facing Implementation Challenges *Independent Curriculum* in Table 5.

Table 3. Average Score of Teacher Responses to Agency in its Implementation *Independent Curriculum*

Code	Statement	Mean Score
A1	Leverages previous teaching experience to overcome daily teaching challenges in implementation <i>Independent Curriculum</i> .	4,3
A2	The influence of professional knowledge and skills on teaching actions in implementation <i>Independent Curriculum</i> .	4,3
A3	Utilize daily teaching experiences to make changes in teaching practice <i>Independent Curriculum</i> implementation.	4,2
A4	Strategic responses to challenging situations based on personal beliefs and experiences <i>Independent Curriculum</i> implementation.	4
A5	Critical reflection to find solutions to problems in <i>Independent Curriculum</i> implementation.	4,1
A6	The impact of social relationships on teachers' decisions and actions.	4,3
A7	Improving the quality of teaching practice through the availability of teaching materials and resources in <i>Independent Curriculum</i> implementation.	4,4
A8	Use of different teaching methodologies to keep students interested and engaged <i>Independent Curriculum</i> implementation.	4,4
A9	Setting goals to improve student learning outcomes <i>Independent Curriculum</i> implementation.	4,3
A10	Introducing new forms of pedagogy to improve the quality of education <i>Independent Curriculum</i> implementation.	4,2

Table 4. Average Value of Teacher Responses to Resilience in Implementation *Independent Curriculum*

Code	Statement	Mean Score
R1	Optimism and independence in overcoming work difficulties are related to <i>Independent Curriculum</i> .	4
R2	Self-efficacy in overcoming problems in implementation <i>Independent Curriculum</i> .	4
R3	Viewing difficulties as something temporary in the hope of overcoming them.	4,3
R4	Creativity in solving problems during implementation <i>Independent Curriculum</i> .	4,3
R5	Actively pursue professional development opportunities to increase understanding of <i>Independent Curriculum</i> .	4,2
R6	Participation in specialized training or professional development to gain knowledge in the field <i>Independent Curriculum</i> .	4,2
R7	Management and follow-up of teaching plans based on <i>Independent Curriculum</i> .	4,2
R8	Calm yourself and focus on taking useful actions during difficult situations <i>Independent Curriculum</i> implementation.	4,1
R9	The capacity to bounce back quickly and regain control after experiencing setbacks in implementation <i>Independent Curriculum</i> .	3,9
R10	Ease in handling stressful situations while maintaining control as a teacher.	4,1

Table 5. The Relationship between Teacher Agency and Teacher Resilience in Facing Implementation Challenges *Independent Curriculum*

Teacher Body	Teacher Resilience	
	Pearson Correlation	0.786**
	signature. (2-tail)	0.000
	N	41

Discussion

The research aims to determine the level of teacher agency, teacher resilience, and the correlation between teacher resilience and teacher agency in its implementation *Independent Curriculum*. Based on the results of a questionnaire regarding teacher agency, teachers have a high level of agency in facing challenges so far *Independent Curriculum* implementation. Statement A7 regarding sources and implementation support *Independent Curriculum* and statement A8 is related to the teacher's efforts to use different teaching methodologies to maintain student engagement during learning *Independent Curriculum* implementation received the highest score among the other statements. Both statements A7 and A8 fall under the practical-evaluative theme in ecology-based institutions (Gu & Day, 2020; Hafeez, 2020). This shows that the majority of teachers have implemented it *Independent Curriculum* strongly agree about the importance of access to various learning and teaching resources to improve the quality of teaching in implementing this *Independent Curriculum*. They also agreed that using a variety of teaching methodologies can increase the engagement of students' interests (Abulhul, 2019; Gulo, 2024). *Independent Curriculum* providing flexibility and autonomy to teachers in choosing teaching methodologies or learning styles. This statement is in line with the statement made previous research that said *Independent Curriculum* provide greater flexibility and autonomy to educational units, teachers and students. That *Independent Curriculum* provide freedom and autonomy for teachers with their professional judgment to analyze and then determine whether to use or develop learning approaches, learning strategies, learning methods, learning models, as well as learning designs, learning media, learning resources and certain learning environments (Gu & Day, 2020; Hökkä et al., 2020). As long as it can support the achievement of learning objectives, teachers have the right to develop and use it in their learning independently. It is important to make efforts to build teacher professionalism in assessing, analyzing and making didactic-pedagogical decisions, at least so that teachers have what experts often call teacher agency (Pertiwi & Pusparini, 2020; Priantini et al., 2018). This is in line with the idea of agency which is often linked to the idea of autonomy as a form of freedom from constraints (Priestley, Biesta, et al., 2020; Werner, 2020). By providing and fostering autonomy for teachers, it highlights how *Independent Curriculum* can empower and enhance teachers to use their agency in designing dynamic and effective learning environments that resonate with students.

On the other hand, the teacher's response to statement A4 received the lowest score. Despite receiving the lowest score among the statements, statement A4 speaks to teachers' strategic adaptability by using their own experiences and beliefs to effectively navigate and manage obstacles during implementation. *Independent Curriculum* still indicated as "Agree" based on (Poulton, 2023; Yunaini et al., 2023). With a mean score of 4.0, it can be concluded that teachers proactively adapt to use their knowledge, beliefs and experiences to deal with change and support their students to learn under existing conditions. *Independent Curriculum*. From the interviews with the four teachers, t results were obtained Yes *Independent Curriculum* also encourage their adaptability by being flexible in their methods, applying basic educational principles to guide their actions, and using their previous knowledge and insight to solve new obstacles that arise during the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This adaptability is essential to maintaining high standards in education and achieving educational goals *Independent Curriculum* (Pinar et al., 2023; Su, 2024). As the specified adaptation is required in *Independent Curriculum* implementation to encourage and support innovative learning processes (Suttriso & Yulia, 2022; Yunaini et al., 2023).

The next result is regarding the level of teacher resilience. Teacher resilience means teachers' ability to overcome difficulties and face new situations during their professional life (Connelly & Clandinin, 2024; Sang, 2020). Based on these results, teachers have a high level of resilience in facing challenges during their education *Independent Curriculum* implementation. The highest score was obtained by statement R3 regarding teachers' self-confidence and optimism in responding to challenges and statement R4 regarding innovation in implementation. *Independent Curriculum*. Both statements received an average score of 4.3. Based on the table the Likert scale range is based on (Anggraini et al., 2018; Cendra & Mbato, 2020). The average score result is categorized as "Strongly Agree". Statement R3 is based on the theme "positive outlook" in the designed questionnaire (Garcia & Gomez, 2023; Septiana & Hanafi, 2020). What is meant by a positive outlook is that the teacher has positive thoughts about whatever situation he faces. They are confident and optimistic that behind any situation there must be something good that accompanies it. Based

on interviews, all teachers interviewed said that they faced difficulties in implementing it *Independent Curriculum*. The obstacles vary, starting from lack of preparation and lack of understanding in implementing it. Teachers 1 and 3 mentioned that *Independent Curriculum* different from the previous curriculum. At the start of implementation *Curriculum 13* (previous curriculum), the government provides a complete syllabus (Lubis et al., 2022; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2023). Meanwhile, *Independent Curriculum* provide freedom and flexibility to schools and teachers to design syllabi and materials based on the needs and interests of their students (Pertiwi & Pusparini, 2020; Priantini et al., 2018). The teacher's fixed mindset is a challenge in itself *Independent Curriculum*. Teachers are expected to be creative and innovative (Rizki & Fahkrunisa, 2021; Werner & Smith, 2022).

This process of transition and change is very challenging for teachers because they are usually provided with a complete syllabus. Still, in this case *Independent Curriculum*, they should think about designing it according to students' needs. All teachers interviewed stated that they had felt overwhelmed but remained optimistic that there was always a way to overcome difficulties like this. To resolve this situation, everyone said the same solution. They are members of a Community of Practice (CoP), in this case, "Learning Community". *Learning Community* is a place teachers can use to share good practice and learning resources, and discuss with other teachers. By joining *Learning Community*, they are optimistic that by working together, they can design a syllabus and determine topics for students. In this case, As stated in his research, CoP can help teachers become resilient and adaptive amidst changing circumstances in the curriculum. This is in tune with what (Bobek, 2022; Sang, 2020). They mentioned that Involvement in CoPs contributes to increased teacher resilience. Furthermore, we can see the optimism of the teachers amidst the difficulties they have faced so far *Merdeka's Curriculum* implementation. This is in line with the statement from which states that resilient people maintain their optimism despite challenges (Mead et al., 2020; Su, 2024).

Statement R4 is part of the theme of determination. This means that teachers indicate that they have determination when facing challenges in implementing this *Independent Curriculum*. In implementation, the teachers stated that they had to be creative in choosing teaching methodologies and instruments. Previous research argue that based on the goals of formative assessment, the principles of deep learning *Independent Curriculum* highlights the importance of developing learning strategies according to the level of student learning outcomes (also called teaching at the right level). This learning is carried out by providing learning materials and teaching methodologies that vary according to students' needs, interests and level of understanding. The purpose of differentiation is so that each student can achieve the expected competencies and the basis for determining learning material is formative assessment. Moreover, Previous research madd that Learning is expected to be an interesting and independent activity and education is free to choose what is considered appropriate in meeting students' educational needs (Ekawati, 2022; Nurvrita, 2020).

From the results of the interview with Teacher 3, it was discovered that he experienced difficulties related to teaching instruments. He admitted that he had not used various teaching methodologies and instruments in the previous teaching and learning process. Due to his age (late 40s), he did not increase his knowledge regarding learning styles, teaching methodology, and technology. Demand from *Independent Curriculum* about how teachers should equip students with various methodologies and learning styles based on student differentiation has become a challenge for him. Because he felt obliged, he finally decided to improve his knowledge by taking part in various trainings and seeking help from his colleagues. Training and intervention can foster and develop resilience. GTeachers need to have resilience because of the tough challenges associated with being a teacher (Abulhul, 2019; Priantini et al., 2018). Teacher 3's actions show his sense of responsibility in facing challenges and his determination in facing challenges *Merdeka's Curriculum* implementation. This shows his toughness. On the other hand, statement R9 is about the teacher's ability to bounce back quickly and remain calm in the face of difficulties during this time *Independent Curriculum* implementation got the lowest score compared to other statements. The R9 statement is part of the theme of equanimity. Even though it got the lowest score, statement R9 which got an average score of 3.9 is still rated in the "Agree" trend. This means that most teachers can face obstacles during the implementation of the *Independent Curriculum* and still be able to achieve and focus on learning objectives. The interview results show the teacher's flexibility in adapting his teaching approach according to student needs and changing situations. shows that teachers are tough and flexible in their implementation *Independent Curriculum*. They show determination and optimism to overcome the challenges they face, and they are willing to adapt and learn about teaching methodologies and technologies.

The third research question was to explore the correlation between teacher agency and teacher resilience in facing challenges during times of crisis *Independent Curriculum* implementation. Based on these findings, the correlation coefficient between teacher agency and resilience is 0.786. This shows that there is a positive relationship between the two variables, teacher agency and resilience. This means that

teacher resilience is influenced and affected by teacher agency. Higher agency will increase resilience. Therefore, researchers can conclude that teacher agency influences teacher resilience in implementing the policy *Independent Curriculum*. Teacher agency is important for resilience because it shapes their sense of being professionals, their emotional health, and their capacity to deal with external change (Apple & Apple, 2022; May & Ali, 2022). External changes in this case are changes to the curriculum from the previous curriculum, *Curriculum 13*, the *Independent Curriculum*.

Based on previous findings and discussions regarding the level of teacher agency and the level of teacher resilience, it was found that implementation *Independent Curriculum* promote and foster teacher agency and resilience. Findings suggest that having access to a variety of teaching resources, tools, support, and autonomy to choose appropriate teaching methodologies can increase teachers' self-confidence and abilities. These results show an increase in teacher resilience. Teachers' strategic adaptability based on their beliefs and experiences also fosters their resilience. This also allows them to manage and navigate obstacles that arise along the way *Independent Curriculum* implementation effectively. The way teachers use various teaching methodologies also fosters an engaging learning environment. This not only benefits students but also increases teacher resilience by enabling them to conduct teaching and learning processes and manage classroom dynamics effectively. Additionally, to further enhance teachers' capacity to adapt and innovate, involvement in Communities of Practice (CoPs) such as "Learning Communities" offers collaborative assistance and shared learning opportunities.

The implications of this research show the importance of empowering teachers as agents of change in the world of education. The results of this research suggest that the higher the level of agency that teachers have—which includes reflective capacity, independent decision making, and adaptive abilities—the greater their resilience in facing the dynamics and demands of the *Independent Curriculum*. Therefore, educational institutions and policy makers need to design training programs that not only focus on the technical aspects of the curriculum, but also on strengthening teacher professional identity and autonomy. Providing space for teachers to innovate, collaborate and reflect on their practice on an ongoing basis will be a strategic step in creating an educational ecosystem that is resilient and responsive to change. Apart from that, the results of this research can also be a basis for developing policies that are more in favor of strengthening the role of teachers as the main subject in educational transformation, not merely as policy implementers.

Despite providing positive results, this study has several limitations to consider. Data were collected from a relatively small sample of 41 teachers. This may limit the generality of the findings to the wider population implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. In addition, this study relies on self-reported data through questionnaires and interviews. This approach may introduce bias because teachers may inadvertently overestimate their sense of agency and resilience. Furthermore, the research only focused on the *Independent Curriculum* without comparing it with other curricula. This limits the ability to determine whether the observed impacts on teacher agency and resilience are unique to this particular curriculum.

Future research could further investigate the impact of the Merdeka Curriculum on teacher agency and resilience on a larger scale and with more diverse samples. Additionally, it would be beneficial to explore specific types of resources and support systems that better assist teachers in adapting to the new curriculum. School leaders and policy makers can support teachers to develop a growth mindset in implementing the *Independent Curriculum*. They can also play a role in fostering teacher agency and resilience by creating a supportive school culture and providing training and ongoing professional development opportunities including the use of diverse instructional media, resources, technologies, and methodologies. This can help teachers understand the scaffolding needed to effectively implement the Merdeka Curriculum so they don't feel overwhelmed.

4. CONCLUSION

These findings highlight the positive correlation between teacher agency and resilience during the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. When teachers have autonomy in choosing teaching methods and have access to various resources, their abilities and self-confidence will grow. This increased sense of agency ultimately empowers teacher resilience by enabling them to manage and navigate the classroom more effectively. The impact of this positive correlation can be understood in how the implementation of the *Independent Curriculum* empowers and increases teacher resilience in adapting to the new curriculum. This gives teachers the freedom and autonomy to design learning experiences for their students. This means that teachers have more choices in choosing teaching methodologies, learning materials, and tools. This sense of agency, combined with access to a variety of teaching resources, empowers teachers and increases their self-confidence. This research further underscores the resilience and flexibility that teachers

demonstrated during the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This shows their determination and optimism in facing challenges, such as adapting to new educational technology and teaching methodologies.

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