Perceptions of Elementary School Teachers on the Independent Training Feature on the Merdeka Mengajar Platform

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Abstract

This study aims to describe teachers' perceptions of the independent training feature on the Merdeka Belajar (PMM) Platform as an effort to strengthen teacher competence in the context of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. This research is important to find out the extent to which independent training can support the development of teacher competencies, especially in facing the challenges of curriculum changes based on independence and flexibility. The method used in this research is a descriptive approach with data collection techniques through interviews with teachers in several schools. The data collected was analysed qualitatively to obtain in-depth findings regarding teachers' perceptions of the self-training feature. The results showed that the majority of teachers have a positive perception of the self-training feature in PMM, considering it as a good tool to strengthen professional competencies, especially in technology-based teaching and a more flexible curriculum. However, there are some challenges such as limited time, resources, and access to technology that need to be considered. The conclusion of this study is that the self-training feature in PMM has great potential to support the development of teachers' competencies, but further support is needed from the school and government to make it more effective to overcome the existing obstacles, so that the use of this feature can be optimized in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Keywords *: Teacher, Self-Training, Merdeka Mengajar Platform.*

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1. Introduction

In an effort to strengthen the quality of education, the Indonesian government has developed various technology-based policies and initiatives, one of which is the Independent Teaching Platform (PMM). This platform was introduced as part of the Merdeka Belajar program which aims to support teachers' independence in developing their digitally free competencies. According to Wahyuni (2024), PMM provides a variety of menus, such as self-development, inspiration, and teaching, which can be accessed by teachers at any time. These menus aim to help teachers develop their competencies flexibly and sustainably, according to their respective needs and abilities, so that they can support the implementation of the Independent Curriculum (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022; Aulia et al., 2023). This PMM also provides an interactive and responsive learning alternative to technological developments, which has been proven in several studies to support teacher performance and motivation (Silvhiany, 2022; Irawati, 2021).

The study underlines the importance of digital platforms in education as a means of developing teacher competence. Several studies have shown that the use of technology in teacher training can expand access to information, overcome geographical limitations, and enable independent competency improvement (Ezell, 2017; Chikileva, 2018). According to Kormakova (2021), digital platforms serve as a medium for teachers to interact with relevant and contemporary materials, thus allowing them to follow the development of pedagogy and educational technology more effectively. On the other hand, self-paced training facilitated through digital platforms has been proven to provide space for teachers to learn contextually and according to specific needs, which in turn can improve the quality of teaching in the classroom (Bullock, 2013). In Indonesia itself, PMM through the self-training feature is an important innovation in an effort to overcome the limitations of face-to-face training which is often hampered by cost and accessibility factors.

The self-training feature in PMM is designed to support the development of teachers' competencies flexibly and continuously, according to their professional needs. This feature allows teachers to choose and take part in training modules that are relevant to classroom conditions and learning objectives, both in terms of pedagogy, curriculum, and educational technology (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022). Through the self-training feature, teachers can access various resources packaged in the form of videos, interactive modules, and quizzes, which aim to strengthen understanding of concepts and practical application in the classroom (Aulia et al., 2023). This feature is also equipped with a self-evaluation function, where teachers can evaluate their understanding and competence after completing each module. A study by Bullock (2013) shows that technology-based training like this can encourage independence and increase teacher motivation in learning, given that teachers have full control over the time and training materials studied.

On the other hand, the self-paced training feature also provides an interactive element that allows teachers to collaborate with peers through discussion forums or peer assessments. According to Irawati (2021), interaction in discussion forums helps teachers develop useful professional networks to share best practices and get constructive feedback from colleagues. This ability to learn independently and collaboratively is in line with research results that show that digital-based training can increase the effectiveness of professional development, especially in terms of improving technical and pedagogical skills (Chikileva, 2018). With these various features, self-paced training at PMM is expected to not only expand teachers' access to relevant training but also strengthen the role of teachers as agents of change in the learning process.

The importance of the self-training feature in PMM lies in its ability to support the development of teacher competencies that are more autonomous and sustainable, in line with the needs and challenges faced in the world of education today. In the midst of technological developments and curriculum demands, teachers are required to have adaptive, creative, and responsive

abilities in applying relevant teaching methods (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022). With the self-training feature, teachers can explore various topics as needed without being tied to a formal training schedule, thus supporting lifelong learning (Silvhiany, 2022; Aulia et al., 2023). A study by Chikileva (2018) shows that digital-based self-paced training allows teachers to learn new material and update skills more efficiently, given that access to materials is flexible and accessible at any time.

In Indonesia, the self-training feature in PMM plays an important role in overcoming the limitations of formal training which is often difficult for teachers in remote areas to reach (Bullock, 2013). The feature gives teachers in all corners access to regularly updated skills and knowledge without having to leave the job site. According to research by Irawati (2021), this kind of self-paced training can increase teachers' confidence and motivation, because teachers are given the opportunity to learn according to their own needs and obtain real achievements in professional development. Thus, the self-training feature not only supports the strengthening of individual teacher competencies but also contributes to improving the quality of education as a whole, especially in the context of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Indonesia.

Several studies on teachers' perceptions of the self-training feature in PMM show that most teachers view this feature as a useful innovation in supporting competency development. For example, a study by Irawati (2021) found that most teachers in primary schools in Indonesia welcome the self-training feature in PMM because of the flexibility and accessibility offered, making it possible to learn anytime and anywhere. Teachers also feel an increase in confidence in implementing technology-based learning processes, in accordance with the demands of a curriculum that is adaptive and responsive to student needs. The results of a similar study by Aulia et al. (2023) stated that digital-based training that is independent not only expands teachers' access to relevant training materials, but also reduces the limitations of formal training that is often difficult to reach in remote areas.

Other research also supports these findings, as reported by Bullock (2013) in his study on digital training platforms for teachers. Bullock stated that technology-based self-training helps reduce teachers' reliance on formal training that is limited in time and location. In addition, training that allows teachers to learn according to individual needs increases their satisfaction and motivation towards professional development. Even so, there are still some reported challenges, especially in terms of technical support and adequate availability of tools, especially for teachers in rural areas (Chikileva, 2018). The results of these studies underline the importance of a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' perceptions of the self-training features in PMM, so that they can provide input for more effective and efficient improvements in supporting the needs of teacher competency development in Indonesia.

Based on the above background, the purpose of this study is to describe teachers' perception of the independent training feature in PMM as an effort to strengthen competence in the context of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. This research is important because it can contribute to the limited literature related to teachers' perceptions of the self-training feature in PMM. A more in-depth study can provide policy recommendations for the government and PMM developers in creating self-training features that suit the needs of teachers, as well as helping teachers to be more independent in improving their competencies (Chikileva, 2018).

2. Method

This study uses a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a research approach that aims to understand complex phenomena through an in-depth exploration of the experiences, views, and meanings generated by specific individuals or groups (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the context of this research, the researcher wants to understand the phenomenon of the existence of independent training features on the Merdeka Learning platform so that it can gain meaning through in-depth exploration.

The data sources in this study are divided into two, primary and secondary data sources. The primary data source is teachers, while the secondary data source is school principals, practitioners, and relevant scientific books and articles. The research was carried out at SD Muhammadiyah 1 Bangkalan.

The data collection techniques used were observation, interviews and documentation. Observation is a data collection technique in which researchers directly observe behaviors, interactions, or events in a specific environment to understand the phenomena that occur (Pope & Allen, 2020). The observation in this study was carried out to observe the use of self-training features on the Merdeka Learning platform using observation sheet instruments that are compiled based on aspects (indicators) for you, topics, and real actions. Interviews are data collection techniques that involve verbal interaction between researchers and participants to explore information that is subjective, such as views, experiences, or perceptions (Nathan et al., 2019). The interviews in this study were conducted to explore information about teachers' perceptions of the self-training feature on the Merdeka Learning platform using interview sheet instruments developed based on aspects (indicators) for you, topics and real actions. Interviews were also conducted with school principals and practitioners to complete the sources so that the data obtained was comprehensive. Documentation techniques are data collection through analysis of written documents, images, videos, or other forms of archives relevant to research (Morgan, 2022). The documentation in this study is in the form of photos during the use of the self-training feature on the Merdeka Learning platform, as well as other relevant documents.

Data analysis in qualitative research is a systematic process of organizing, understanding, and interpreting complex qualitative data in order to produce meaningful findings. Miles & Huberman (1994) stated that qualitative data analysis involves three main steps, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion/verification.

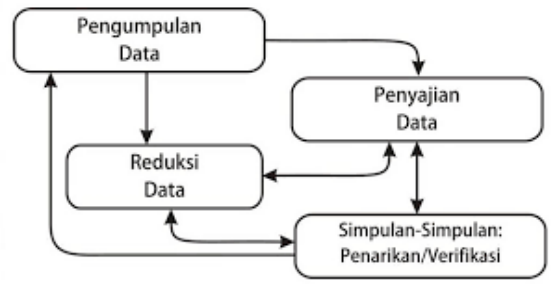


Figure 1. Stages of Qualitative Research Data Analysis

The following is an explanation of each stage in the image above, namely (1) Data reduction is the process of selecting, simplifying, and organizing raw data obtained during research. This step aims to highlight important aspects of the data that are relevant to the research objectives, thus facilitating the process of further analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data reduction can be done through techniques such as coding, grouping, or abstraction. This process is carried out continuously throughout the study, allowing researchers to focus on significant information; (2) Data presentation involves organizing data into a more structured and easy-to-understand form, such as tables, matrices, graphs, or narratives. This presentation aims to help researchers see patterns, relationships, or trends that emerge from the data (Miles et al., 2014). Through clear presentation, researchers can identify important findings and develop interpretations based on available data; and (3) The last stage is the drawing of conclusions, in which the researcher tries to understand the meaning of the data that has been analyzed. The conclusions drawn must be verified to ensure their validity and reliability. Verification is done by referring to raw data, triangulation of sources, or discussions with peers. Miles & Huberman (1994) emphasize that conclusions are not final until the data actually support the interpretation.

Furthermore, Miles & Huberman argue that in qualitative data analysis emphasizes iterative and interrelated processes between these three steps. This process allows researchers to understand the phenomenon in depth, while maintaining the transparency and credibility of the research.

3. Result and Discussion

Observation Results

Based on the results of the observation of aspects for you (Independent Training) on the "Learning recommendations" indicator, this feature is designed to provide recommendations for training materials that suit the needs of each teacher based on the results of the analysis of the education report card of the school where they work. As for the "Topic Progress" indicator, this feature provides clear visual information about the percentage of progress of each training topic that has been accessed and worked on by the user. Meanwhile, in the "Webinar" indicator, this feature provides teachers with access to see webinar schedules specifically designed to explore Independent Training topics with experts and education practitioners from all over Indonesia. Webinar activities are conducted online through the Zoom platform, which allows for broad participation without geographical boundaries.

Based on the results of the observation of topic aspects in the indicator "Various Independent Training topics are available", this feature is designed to provide flexibility to teachers in choosing training materials according to their needs and interests in professional development. The diversity of topics available includes various themes relevant to 21st century learning, such as creative teaching strategies, classroom management, the use of technology in education, and strengthening literacy and numeracy competencies.

Based on the results of the observation of real action aspects in the indicator "Practice understanding on the topic", this feature functions as a medium for the implementation of knowledge gained during training. Teachers are given the opportunity to apply their understanding to the material learned through practical tasks that are applicative, such as making lesson plans, developing learning media, or simulating classroom management based on the theory that has been learned.

Teacher Interview Results

Based on interviews conducted with teachers, the findings obtained showed that most teachers had a positive perception of the "For You" feature in self-training on the Merdeka Teaching Platform. This feature provides learning recommendations based on educational report cards, which according to teachers can help to plan competency development in a more targeted manner and according to their personal needs. Some teachers revealed that the recommendations given were very useful because they specifically directed at topics relevant to the competency assessment that had been recorded in their education reports. For example, teachers who have strengths in pedagogic teaching but lack in the aspect of educational technology, will receive training recommendations that focus on improving their digital skills. This, according to teachers, makes it very easy to prioritize training materials that need to be mastered to overcome existing competency shortcomings.

Based on the results of interviews with eight teachers, the findings obtained showed that seven out of eight (87.5%) teachers had a positive view on the existence of topic progress features in independent training on the Independent Teaching Platform. This feature is considered very helpful for teachers in monitoring and managing the progress of the training undergone. Teachers expressed feeling more organized and structured in participating in the training, because the topic progress feature provides clear information about the extent to which the teacher has completed the training material provided. The teachers interviewed revealed that the topic progress feature is very useful in monitoring the progress of the training. This feature makes it possible to know exactly what stage or levels the teacher has reached in the ongoing training. Some teachers state that the existence of this feature helps in planning more efficient learning, given that teachers can know which parts of the training need more attention or time to understand more deeply.

The results of interviews with teachers showed that they gave positive responses to the webinar feature available on the Merdeka Teaching Platform.

This feature is considered very useful because it makes it easier for teachers to access information about webinar schedules that are relevant to training needs. The majority of teachers feel that the existence of the webinar feature provides an opportunity to delve deeper into certain topics through more interactive learning, delivered by expert speakers, both from education practitioners and academics. The teachers interviewed revealed that the webinar feature was very helpful in knowing the training schedule that suits their interests and needs. Teachers find it easier to keep up with the progress of the training by getting organized information about the topics to be discussed, as well as webinar times that can be adjusted to their personal schedules.

The results of interviews with a number of teachers showed that the majority of respondents gave positive responses to the variety of topics available in the self-training feature on the Merdeka Teaching Platform. The teachers revealed that the variety of topics provided is very relevant to the needs of developing their competencies as educators, especially in this digital era. Various topics that cover various aspects, ranging from learning strategies, educational technology, to improving the quality of students' character, are considered very useful to improve their professional skills. The teachers also revealed that the choice of topics provided by this platform is in accordance with the needs of teachers in improving the quality of teaching. Some teachers feel that the topics discussed in self-paced training are closely connected to the challenges faced in the classroom, for example in terms of the use of technology in learning, classroom management techniques, and the development of innovative and inclusive learning models.

Based on the results of interviews with several teachers, most of the respondents stated that they had successfully practiced the understanding gained from independent training on the Merdeka Teaching Platform in classroom learning activities. Teachers report being able to implement various concepts and strategies learned, such as the use of technology in learning, more effective classroom management techniques, and more creative and interactive learning

methods. Most teachers feel that the steps taken after self-training have a positive impact on teaching effectiveness. Teachers reported an increase in interaction with students, which had an impact on increased motivation and student engagement in learning. The application of more innovative learning methods and in accordance with the needs of students makes the learning process more relevant and fun.

Teachers' Perception of Self-Training Features in PMM

The results of the study revealed that teachers' perceptions of the self-training feature on the Independent Teaching Platform (PMM) include three main components, namely "For You", topics, and real actions. These three components play an important role in supporting the development of teacher competencies independently and relevant to individual needs and learning challenges in the classroom. The following discussion details the findings, integrated with a review of the relevant literature.

The "For You" component offers personalized training materials based on the teacher's profile and needs. The findings of the study show that this feature gives teachers flexibility in choosing training that suits their professional needs. Teachers feel this feature helps them focus on the material that is most relevant to the teaching experience, such as differentiated learning strategies for new teachers or the use of technology for more experienced teachers. Teachers mentioned that the personalization feature improves the efficiency of learning time because they don't have to search for topics manually. This is in line with the research of Mufdalifah (2017) which found that personalized learning is able to increase motivation because the training materials are in accordance with individual needs. However, there are inputs related to this feature's recommendation algorithm, which are considered not yet fully accurate to reflect the specific needs of each teacher. In addition, flexible access without an unlimited time provides an advantage for teachers who have high busyness. As stated by Haryanto (2022), flexible digital learning platforms tend to be more

accepted by educators than traditional training methods that require a certain time and place.

The topics provided in PMM include various important aspects in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, such as differentiated learning, formative assessment, classroom management, and project-based learning. Teachers view these topics as relevant to their needs to address learning challenges in the classroom. However, some teachers underscore the need for additional topics, such as learning strategies for students with special needs (inclusion) and the integration of digital literacy into project-based learning. The results of this study are in line with the findings of Julifan (2015) who stated that new curriculum-based training increases teachers' readiness in designing learning. Topics such as project-based learning (PjBL) are in high demand because they can develop 21st century skills in students. However, some teachers find it difficult to understand certain topics, especially if they are presented in a theoretical format without concrete examples. The use of videos, interactive modules, and examples of good practices from other teachers throughout Indonesia is considered to help teachers understand the topic better. Rahmadani & Kamaluddin (2023) also show that a multimedia-based learning approach in teacher training is able to increase trainee involvement and deeper understanding of the material.

The "Real Action" feature encourages teachers to practice the material learned in hands-on classroom training. The teacher assessed that this feature provided an opportunity to integrate theory with practice. Some examples of concrete actions that have been successfully implemented are differentiated learning and formative assessments, which help teachers improve learning effectiveness according to the needs of students. However, some teachers revealed technical obstacles in documenting real actions, such as time constraints and lack of technical expertise in creating digital reports. Research by Sugiarto et al (2023) highlights that real-action based training requires further mentoring so that teachers can document good practices in an easy and effective way. In

addition, teachers feel that collaboration between educators in the community feature in PMM can be an important support in sharing experiences related to the implementation of real actions. This supports the view of Vygotsky (1978) that social interaction in a professional environment can enhance collective learning and problem-solving.

The findings of this study have broad implications for the development of PMM features in the future. To develop the platform to be effective, in the self-training menu, it is necessary to develop a more accurate algorithm for the "For You" feature, an expansion of topics that support inclusive learning, and technical assistance in documenting real actions. In addition, further integration of community-based collaborative approaches can provide inspiration for teacher learning.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the research that has been conducted, it can be concluded that the independent training feature on the Independent Teaching Platform (PMM) has a positive influence on the development of teacher competencies in the context of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Overall, the teachers who were respondents in this study showed a positive perception of the existence and use of self-training features.

First, most teachers find the self-training feature in PMM very useful to improve their professional competence. Teachers feel that this training provides material that is relevant to the demands of the Independent Curriculum, especially in terms of strengthening pedagogic skills and the use of technology in learning. Features such as study recommendations based on educational report cards, topic progress, and interactive webinars are considered to help teachers in planning and managing the learning process more effectively and in accordance with curriculum principles that are more flexible and based on student needs. Nevertheless, although many teachers feel that this training has made a positive contribution to improving their competence, some obstacles still arise. Some

teachers report limited time and resources to consistently participate in self-training, especially amid busy teaching schedules. In addition, challenges related to limited technological capabilities and uneven internet access are also obstacles in optimizing the use of this training feature. In terms of implementation in the classroom, teachers show a positive change in the way they manage learning, by applying more innovative and technology-based approaches. The use of more interactive and student-centered methods, such as those taught in training, has been shown to increase student engagement so that students are more active in the teaching process.

Thus, it can be concluded that the independent training feature at PMM makes a good contribution in strengthening teacher competence, especially in supporting the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. To achieve appropriateness, further efforts are needed from schools and the government to provide adequate technical support and resources, so that teachers can access and utilize these training features optimally.

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