



Navigating curriculum reform: Self-efficacy of Islamic religious education teachers in Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum implementation

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Abstract

The Merdeka Curriculum represents a educational policy reform currently being implemented across Indonesia. Its successful execution hinges significantly on teachers' capacity to adapt, who play a pivotal role in character development. This study aims to examine the level of self-efficacy among Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, identify their strengths and challenges, and propose actionable solutions. A quantitative descriptive survey design was employed, involving 78 PAI teachers enrolled in the Professional Teacher Education Program (PPG) at UIN Siber Syekh Nurjati Cirebon who completed a self-assessment questionnaire measuring multiple dimensions of self-efficacy based on Bandura's theoretical framework. Results indicate a high level of self-efficacy among PAI teachers in understanding the conceptual foundations of the Merdeka Curriculum (mean > 4.0). However, self-efficacy scores were moderately lower regarding practical application skills (mean > 3.8), with most teachers reporting an overall "Good" level of confidence. The study affirms the relevance of Bandura's self-efficacy theory in educational reform contexts, highlighting mastery experiences as a key contributor to teacher confidence. It concludes that fostering teacher self-efficacy should be embedded within curriculum reform strategies, emphasizing professional development programs that move beyond knowledge transmission to include authentic and experiential learning opportunities.

Keywords: Islamic religious education teachers, Merdeka Curriculum, self-efficacy

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's education system continues to evolve in response to global educational trends and the transformative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has underscored the need for a more flexible, adaptive, and resilient curriculum framework capable of accommodating dynamic shifts in teaching and learning environments (Prahastina et al., 2024; Rabaglietti et al., 2021). In response to these challenges, the Indonesian government launched the Merdeka Curriculum in 2022 as a comprehensive reform initiative aimed at revitalizing the national education system. This policy seeks to foster a more agile and student-centered approach to

learning, aligning with contemporary educational demands and post-pandemic recovery efforts (Saa, 2024).

The Merdeka Curriculum is grounded in three core principles: flexibility, emphasis on essential competencies, and the holistic development of students' 21st-century skills and character. Central to this curriculum is a pedagogical shift toward personalized learning, which encourages students to explore their individual interests and talents (Astuti et al., 2024). This learner-centered model is designed to cultivate intrinsic motivation by enabling students to engage with content they are passionate about, rather than passively receiving standardized instruction (Tomasouw et al., 2024). Far from being a mere technical adjustment, the Merdeka Curriculum represents a fundamental paradigm shift—from rigid, content-heavy, and rote-based learning to a more meaningful, contextually relevant, and experiential approach (Prahastina et al., 2024; Rabaglietti et al., 2021). The successful implementation of this transformative curriculum, therefore, requires teachers not only to acquire new knowledge and skills but also to undergo a profound shift in mindset and instructional practice (Syofyan, et al., 2024; Alkandari, 2023).

Teachers serve as the primary agents of change in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. They are directly responsible for designing, delivering, and assessing innovative and creative learning experiences that align with the curriculum's student-centered philosophy (Tomasouw et al., 2024; Boudouaia et al., 2024). Their ability to adapt pedagogical strategies and embrace curricular flexibility is critical to achieving the intended educational outcomes. Research indicates that teacher competence, readiness, and confidence are pivotal determinants of successful curriculum reform, emphasizing the importance of professional capacity-building in sustaining educational innovation (Syofyan, et al., 2024; Wijayanti et al., 2024).

Within this context, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers occupy a particularly strategic role. The PAI subject extends beyond the transmission of religious knowledge to encompass character development, moral reasoning, and spiritual growth—dimensions that are central to the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on holistic student development (Jasiah et al., 2024; Astuti et al., 2024; Tomasouw et al., 2024). As such, PAI teachers are uniquely positioned to contribute to the cultivation of ethical and responsible citizens. However, this dual responsibility also presents distinctive challenges: integrating the affective and spiritual goals of PAI within a flexible, inquiry-based pedagogical framework requires significant pedagogical adaptation (Jasiah et al., 2024; Randa & Arsyam, 2023). This complexity may place higher demands on teachers' self-efficacy, particularly in navigating both content and methodological changes. Moreover, broader implementation challenges—such as classroom management difficulties and limited parental support (Prahastina et al., 2024; Thomson et al., 2022)—may be amplified for PAI teachers due to the deeply personal and values-laden nature of their subject matter (Jasiah et al., 2024; Randa & Arsyam, 2023).

Self-efficacy, as conceptualized by Bandura (1986), refers to an individual's belief in their capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to achieve specific goals (Abdullah, 2019; Rusyda, et al., 2019). As a context-specific construct, self-efficacy varies across tasks and situations (Bandura, 1986; Narkun, 2019). In the teaching profession, self-efficacy plays a critical role in shaping motivational orientations, goal commitment, effort persistence, and resilience in the face of adversity (Pajares, 1996; Schwab, 2019). Teachers

with high self-efficacy are more likely to adopt innovative practices, demonstrate adaptability, and maintain commitment when confronted with challenges.

In the context of large-scale curriculum reform such as the Merdeka Curriculum, teacher self-efficacy emerges as a key predictor of successful innovation adoption. Teachers with strong self-efficacy are more inclined to experiment with new pedagogical strategies, persist through implementation barriers, and view challenges as opportunities for growth (Ramakrishnan & Salleh, 2019). Conversely, low self-efficacy can hinder engagement with reform efforts, even when adequate training and resources are available. When teachers doubt their ability to implement new requirements (Pajares, 1996; Schwab, 2019), they are less likely to initiate changes such as designing project-based learning modules or facilitating student-driven inquiry. Existing literature identifies persistent challenges such as skill gaps, resistance to change, and difficulties in adapting teaching habits (Prahastina et al., 2024; Schwab, 2019; Ramakrishnan & Salleh, 2019)—all of which may reflect underlying deficits in self-efficacy. Thus, self-efficacy functions as a psychological bridge between policy intent and classroom practice (Prahastina et al., 2024; Schwab, 2019; Ramakrishnan & Salleh, 2019).

Despite the ongoing rollout of the Merdeka Curriculum and growing recognition of implementation challenges, there remains a significant gap in empirical research specifically examining the self-efficacy levels of PAI teachers within this new educational framework. To address this gap, this study aims to (1) assess the level of self-efficacy among PAI teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, (2) identify their perceived strengths and challenges based on empirical data, and (3) propose evidence-based implications and solutions to support effective curriculum enactment.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative approach with a descriptive survey design (Amiruddin et al., 2025). This design was selected to systematically describe the characteristics of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers' self-efficacy in the context of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum (Pintrich & Schunk, 1995). The descriptive survey method enables the collection of data from a relatively large sample, facilitating the identification of patterns and trends in teachers' self-efficacy perceptions. By quantifying these perceptions, the study provides a structured overview of teachers' confidence levels across key dimensions of curriculum implementation.

This descriptive approach enables a nuanced understanding of PAI teachers' self-efficacy, identifying specific domains of strength (high confidence) and areas of lower confidence (potential weaknesses). By moving beyond generalizations, the analysis provides granular insights into teachers' perceived capabilities—such as strong conceptual understanding of curriculum components versus lower confidence in designing performance-based assessments. These detailed findings form a robust empirical foundation for the discussion and allow for the development of targeted, context-specific recommendations to support teacher development and curriculum implementation.

Population and Sample

The target population comprises all PAI teachers participating in the Merdeka Curriculum management program. The sample consists of 78 PAI teachers selected randomly from a pool of 450 Islamic religious education teachers enrolled in the Professional Teacher Education Program (PPG) at UIN Siber Syekh Nurjati Cirebon in 2024. Participants were drawn from diverse educational levels and subject specializations within PAI, including primary school PAI, Fiqh at MTs (Islamic junior secondary level), Akidah Akhlak at MI (Islamic primary level), SKI (Sejarah Kebudayaan Islam) at MA/MTs (Islamic senior and junior secondary levels), and PAI at SMA/SMK (general and vocational senior secondary levels). The sample also encompassed various participant categories, reflecting heterogeneity in professional backgrounds and institutional affiliations (Muslihudin, 2024). While detailed demographic information in the original source is somewhat limited, the reported distribution of respondents across educational levels and subject areas offers valuable contextual insight for interpreting the study's findings. For instance, if the majority of respondents are primary school PAI teachers, the resulting self-efficacy data would be more representative of that particular teaching context, thereby supporting more targeted and relevant recommendations for this subgroup.

These participants completed a self-administered questionnaire made available during the training (Muslihudin, 2024). While self-assessment data may be subject to social desirability or personal bias, the consistency of responses across a substantial number of participants enhances the reliability of the findings as an indicator of collective perception. It is important to note that the study measures perceived self-efficacy—teachers' beliefs in their own capabilities—rather than objective performance (Bandura, 1986; Narkun, 2019). According to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy is inherently a subjective construct rooted in personal belief; thus, self-reported data are both appropriate and theoretically justified in this context. Nevertheless, the interpretive limitations of self-report measures are acknowledged and considered in the analysis (Bandura, 1986; Narkun, 2019).

Research Instrument

The primary data collection instrument was a structured self-assessment questionnaire adapted from existing frameworks (Muslihudin, 2024). The questionnaire was designed to measure multiple dimensions of PAI teachers' self-efficacy related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree/incapable to 5 = strongly agree/very capable). The instrument assessed the following 13 indicators: (1) Understanding the components of the Merdeka Curriculum (Learning Outcomes [CP], Learning Objectives [TP], Learning Objectives Flow [ATP] for Islamic Education and Madrasah); (2) Ability to analyze the alignment between CP, TP, and ATP and integrate them into a teaching module; (3) Competence in formulating Learning Objectives (TP) based on CP analysis; (4) Skills in developing the flow of Learning Objectives (ATP); (5) Understanding of constructing TP using the ABCD components (Audience, Behavior, Condition, Degree); (6) Awareness of the relevance between TP and learning materials; (7) Recognition of the importance of aligning ATP with appropriate teaching methods; (8) Understanding that each learning objective should guide the selection of media, methods, and resources in PAI instruction; (9) Ability to design assessment grids and instruments based on Achievement Indicators (IKTP); (10) Skills in developing instruments for assessing attitudes; (11) Skills in developing knowledge assessment

instruments; (12) Skills in creating performance-based assessment tools for students; and (13) Competence in designing Learner Worksheets (LKPD) (BSKAP Kemendikbud, 2022).

In addition, three overarching self-efficacy items were included, assessed on a qualitative scale (Fair, Good, Excellent), to evaluate the ability to design innovative and creative teaching modules; the capacity to develop comprehensive assessment instruments for attitudes, knowledge, and skills; and the proficiency in demonstrating best practices in classroom implementation aligned with the prepared teaching module.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through the voluntary and anonymous completion of the self-assessment questionnaire by participants. The survey was distributed during the PPG program, and respondents filled out the instrument independently to ensure that their responses reflected personal beliefs and perceptions without external influence. Completed questionnaires were compiled using a standardized data entry format (Muslihudin, 2024), ensuring consistency and accuracy in data recording.

Data Analysis Technique

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods to summarize the distribution and central tendencies of responses for each self-efficacy indicator. The analysis included: (1) calculation of mean scores and standard deviations for each Likert-scale item; (2) frequency and percentage distributions for each response category (1–5) across all Likert-scale items; and (3) frequency and percentage distributions for the qualitative self-assessment categories (Fair, Good, Excellent).

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Findings

PAI Teachers' Self-Efficacy in Understanding the Merdeka Curriculum Concept

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics—including means, standard deviations, and percentage distributions—for each item assessing PAI teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum. These quantitative data provide a clear overview of teachers' self-efficacy levels, particularly in relation to conceptual comprehension and curriculum analysis skills. The results serve as a foundational measure of teachers' perceived competence in engaging with the core principles and structural components of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Table 1. PAI Teachers' Self-Efficacy in Understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum

Self-efficacy Indicator (Understanding)	Avg	StDev	% Respondents (1-2) (Low)	% Respondents (3) (Medium)	% Respondents (4-5) (High)
Understanding the terms CP, Element, TP, ATP	4.15	0.72	5%	15%	80%
Ability to analyze the relevance of CP-ATP to the Teaching Module	3.98	0.85	8%	20%	72%
Understanding how to set TP from CP	4.05	0.79	6%	18%	76%

Self-efficacy Indicator (Understanding)	Avg	StDev	% Respondents (1-2) (Low)	% Respondents (3) (Medium)	% Respondents (4-5) (High)
Skill in formulating ATP	4.01	0.81	7%	19%	74%
Understanding of formulating TP (ABCD)	3.95	0.88	9%	22%	69%
Understanding the relevance of TP to the material	4.10	0.75	5%	17%	78%
Understanding the relevance of TP/KKTP to the Method	4.08	0.77	6%	16%	78%
Understanding of TP as the center for selecting media, methods, resources	4.09	0.76	6%	17%	77%

The results presented in the table indicate that the majority of PAI teachers demonstrate a high level of self-efficacy (mean scores exceeding 3.95) in understanding the fundamental components of the Merdeka Curriculum—such as the Merdeka Curriculum’s Learning Outcomes (CP), Learning Objectives (TP), Learning Objectives Flow (ATP)—as well as in analyzing their relevance and translating them into instructional modules. For most of these indicators, more than 70% of respondents self-rated in the "High" category (Likert scale 4–5). This suggests that PAI teachers are generally confident in their conceptual knowledge and comprehension of the Merdeka Curriculum framework

PAI Teachers’ Self-Efficacy in Learning Design and Assessment Skills

Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics—including mean scores, standard deviations, and percentage distributions—for items assessing PAI teachers’ practical competencies in lesson design and assessment. These data are critical for evaluating teachers’ self-efficacy in applying curriculum principles to instructional practice, particularly in the development of teaching materials and assessment instruments. The results provide insight into the extent to which teachers feel confident in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum effectively in the classroom.

Table 2. PAI Teachers’ Self-Efficacy in Learning Design and Assessment Skills

Indicators of Self-Efficacy (Practical Skills)	Avg	StDev	% Respondents (1-2) (Low)	% Respondents (3) (Medium)	% Respondents (4-5) (High)
Skill in developing Grids & Assessment Instruments from IKTP	3.90	0.89	10%	25%	65%
Skill in developing attitude assessment instruments	3.85	0.92	12%	28%	60%
Skills in developing knowledge assessment instruments	3.88	0.90	11%	26%	63%

Indicators of Self-Efficacy (Practical Skills)	Avg	StDev	% Respondents (1-2) (Low)	% Respondents (3) (Medium)	% Respondents (4-5) (High)
Skill in developing student performance assessment instruments	3.80	0.95	13%	30%	57%
LKPD design skills	3.92	0.87	9%	23%	68%

The results presented in Table 2 indicate that PAI teachers' self-efficacy in lesson design and assessment skills, while still falling within the "High" range on average (mean > 3.80), is somewhat lower compared to their self-efficacy in conceptual understanding. The proportion of respondents who rated themselves in the "High" category (Likert scale 4–5) ranged from 57% to 68%, with a notably higher percentage falling into the "Medium" category (scale 3) than observed in Table 1. This suggests that teachers may feel less confident in applying curriculum principles to practical instructional tasks, particularly in developing assessment instruments for student performance and attitudes, highlighting a potential area for professional development and targeted support.

PAI Teachers' Self-Assessment of Key Competencies in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

Table 3 complements the quantitative data obtained from the Likert-scale items by offering a qualitative overview of PAI teachers' perceived confidence in key competencies required for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. This self-assessment provides deeper insight into teachers' reflective evaluations of their readiness and capacity to enact curriculum reforms in practice, highlighting areas of strength as well as potential challenges in professional implementation.

Table 3. PAI Teachers' Key Competencies in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

Self-Assessment Ability	% Respondents (D - Deficient)	% Respondents (C - Fair)	% Respondents (B - Good)	% Respondents (A - Excellent)
Design innovative & creative Teaching Modules	1%	15%	70%	14%
Designing assessment instruments for attitude, knowledge, skills	1%	18%	68%	13%
Demonstrate best practices in learning implementation	1%	15%	65%	19%

The overall self-assessment results indicate that a majority of PAI teachers (over 65%) rated their ability to design innovative teaching modules, develop assessment instruments, and demonstrate best practices as "Good." A smaller but notable proportion (13–19%) assessed their performance as "Excellent," while approximately 15–18% rated themselves as "Fair." Only a minimal percentage (1%) classified their competence as "Deficient." These findings suggest a generally high level of self-perceived competence among PAI teachers in key areas essential for the effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Discussion

PAI Teachers' Self-Efficacy Levels

The data presented in Table 1 reveal a high level of self-efficacy among PAI (Pendidikan Agama Islam) teachers in their conceptual understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum. With mean scores exceeding 3.95 and over 70% of respondents rating their competence in the "High" category (Likert scale 4–5), teachers demonstrate strong confidence in comprehending core curriculum components such as Learning Outcomes (CP), Learning Objectives (TP), Learning Objectives Flow (ATP), as well as in analyzing their relevance and integrating them into instructional modules. This suggests that initial socialization and professional development programs have been effective in conveying theoretical knowledge about the curriculum framework. These findings partially counter prevailing concerns in the literature regarding limited teacher preparedness, at least in terms of conceptual mastery.

However, a slight decline in self-efficacy is observed in practical application skills, as shown in Table 2. While average scores remain in the "High" range (above 3.80), the proportion of teachers reporting "High" confidence in designing assessment instruments—particularly for student performance and attitudes—drops to between 57% and 68%. Concurrently, a larger percentage (compared to Table 1) self-rates in the "Moderate" category (scale 3). This pattern suggests a disparity between understanding what needs to be done and feeling confident in how to implement it effectively. For instance, while teachers may grasp the ABCD framework for formulating learning objectives, they appear less assured in translating these into concrete tools such as student worksheets (LKPD) or authentic assessment instruments.

This trend is further corroborated by the self-assessment data in Table 3, where the majority of teachers rated their abilities in designing teaching modules, assessments, and demonstrating best practices as "Good," but only a minority (13–19%) classified themselves as "Excellent." A small yet notable proportion (15–18%) indicated "Fair" competence, and merely 1% perceived their skills as "Deficient." Collectively, these results point to a generally positive but not exceptional level of self-efficacy, particularly in applied domains. The relative strength in conceptual knowledge compared to practical skills implies that current training initiatives may successfully transmit theoretical content but fall short in fostering mastery experiences—a critical source of self-efficacy according to Bandura (1986).

Alignment with Bandura's Theory of Self-Efficacy

The findings can be meaningfully interpreted through Bandura's (1997) four sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states (Larsen & James, 2022; Kim, 2022; Jones et al., 2023).

Mastery Experience

The lower self-efficacy in practical skills suggests that many PAI teachers lack sufficient hands-on experience in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Mastery experiences—gained through repeated, successful engagement in a task—are the most influential source of self-efficacy. If teachers have not had structured opportunities to design, pilot, and refine innovative learning and assessment models, their confidence in these competencies remains constrained. This highlights a potential gap in training programs, which may emphasize theoretical instruction over experiential learning, thereby limiting the development of robust self-efficacy in practical domains (Larsen & James, 2022; Kim, 2022; Jones et al., 2023).

Vicarious Experience

Teachers' confidence can be strengthened by observing peers who successfully implement curriculum innovations. However, the absence of visible, contextually relevant role models may hinder vicarious learning. When teachers lack exposure to effective implementations within their own schools or communities, they may struggle to envision themselves succeeding in similar tasks, particularly in complex areas such as student-centered assessment (Larsen & James, 2022; Kim, 2022; Jones et al., 2023).

Social Persuasion

Encouragement and constructive feedback from school leaders, colleagues, parents, and students play a vital role in shaping teacher self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Positive reinforcement and recognition of effort can bolster confidence, especially during periods of transition. Conversely, a lack of supportive feedback or institutional validation may undermine teachers' belief in their capabilities, particularly when navigating unfamiliar curriculum demands (Larsen & James, 2022; Kim, 2022; Jones et al., 2023).

Physiological and Emotional States

The emotional and psychological demands of curriculum reform—such as managing student engagement, adapting to flexible learning models, or coping with classroom disruptions (Prahastina et al., 2024; Larsen & James, 2022)—can induce stress or anxiety. Teachers who interpret these states negatively may perceive themselves as less capable, thereby diminishing self-efficacy. Emotional resilience and a supportive work environment are thus essential for sustaining confidence during change (Larsen & James, 2022; Kim, 2022; Jones et al., 2023).

Importantly, self-efficacy is not solely an individual trait but is shaped by reciprocal interactions between personal, behavioral, and environmental factors, as posited in Bandura's concept of reciprocal determinism (Pajares, 1996; Larsen & James, 2022). Systemic challenges—such as inadequate training, limited access to technology, absence of mentoring, and insufficient parental involvement (Tomasouw et al., 2024; Larsen & James, 2022)—directly impact all four sources of self-efficacy. For example, theoretical training without practice undermines mastery experiences, while lack of parental support weakens social persuasion. These inter-dependencies underscore a complex, dynamic relationship in which external conditions shape internal beliefs, which in turn influence teaching behavior and curriculum implementation (Prahastina et al., 2024; Sormin et al., 2023; Hidayah et al., 2022).

Implications of the Merdeka Curriculum Policy for PAI Teachers

The Merdeka Curriculum is designed to grant teachers and schools greater autonomy in curriculum design, aiming to foster more contextualized, engaging, and student-centered learning (Prahastina et al., 2024; Sormin et al., 2023; Hidayah et al., 2022). This shift positions teachers not merely as implementers but as proactive innovators and pedagogical leaders (Tomasouw et al., 2024; Sormin et al., 2023; Hidayah et al., 2022). However, this increased autonomy demands higher levels of initiative, creativity, and adaptability—qualities that require both competence and confidence.

This policy thus presents a double-edged sword. For teachers with high self-efficacy, autonomy serves as an empowering opportunity to experiment, innovate, and personalize instruction. These educators are more likely to seek professional growth and embrace change (Bandura, 1997). In contrast, teachers with lower self-efficacy or resistance to change may

perceive autonomy as a source of uncertainty, stress, or even helplessness. Without adequate support, policy-driven empowerment risks exacerbating existing disparities, particularly among underprepared teachers. This underscores the necessity of aligning policy roll-out with targeted capacity-building and psychological support to ensure equitable implementation.

Challenges in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

Synthesizing the literature and supported by survey findings, several key challenges emerge in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, namely: 1) Limited Experience and Resources: Many PAI teachers lack prior exposure to student-centered pedagogies and may have limited access to exemplars of innovative module designs, constraining their ability to align instruction with the curriculum's philosophy; 2) Inadequate Training and Mentoring: Training programs that are theoretical, fragmented, or lacking in follow-up support fail to build practical competence. Sustainable improvement requires continuous, practice-based professional development and structured mentoring (Tomasouw et al., 2024; Sormin et al., 2023; Hidayah et al., 2022), 3) Resistance to Pedagogical Change: Long-standing habits rooted in teacher-centered, rote-learning traditions pose significant barriers to adopting the flexible, inquiry-based approaches promoted by the Merdeka Curriculum. Shifting these deeply ingrained practices demands both cognitive and emotional investment; 4) Digital Literacy and Technology Access: Limited digital skills and unequal access to technological tools hinder the integration of modern learning media and digital resources, restricting teachers' ability to create 21st-century learning environments (Tomasouw et al., 2024;); 5) Lack of Parental Support: When parents do not understand or endorse the curriculum's goals, they may resist changes in homework expectations or assessment formats, indirectly undermining student motivation and teacher morale (Tomasouw et al., 2024; Sormin et al., 2023; Hidayah et al., 2022); 6) Classroom Management and Student Engagement: Practical challenges such as student inattention or disruptive behaviors can erode teacher confidence, particularly when attempting new, less structured teaching methods (Prahastina et al., 2024; Sormin et al., 2023; Hidayah et al., 2022).

These challenges are not isolated; they interact synergistically to form a negative feedback loop. For instance, insufficient training limits mastery experiences, which lowers self-efficacy, leading to reluctance in trying new methods—further reducing opportunities for mastery. This cyclical dynamic highlights a systemic issue: isolated interventions are unlikely to yield lasting change without addressing the interplay between personal, social, and structural factors.

Strategies to Enhance Teacher Self-Efficacy in Curriculum Implementation

Drawing on Bandura's (1997) framework and the identified challenges, a multidimensional approach is essential to strengthen teacher self-efficacy

Enhancing Mastery Experiences

This strategy includes (1) delivering hands-on, practice-oriented training that enables teachers to plan, implement, and evaluate Merdeka Curriculum-aligned activities in a supported environment; (2) strengthening professional learning communities (e.g., KKG/MGMP) to facilitate collaborative problem-solving, peer feedback, and collective celebration of small successes; (3) providing platforms for teachers to lead peer workshops or share lesson demonstrations, reinforcing their sense of competence and ownership.

Strengthening Vicarious Experiences

This approach includes (1) establishing structured peer observation programs, pairing experienced and novice teachers to model effective practices; (2) developing a centralized repository of video demonstrations and exemplary lesson plans tailored to PAI instruction under the Merdeka Curriculum; (3) encouraging self-modeling through video recording and reflective analysis of one's own teaching to identify strengths and areas for growth.

Improving Social Persuasion

This strategy involves (1) fostering a school culture of constructive, affirming feedback from school leaders and colleagues. Specific, evidence-based praise can significantly boost confidence; (2) engaging parents through orientation sessions or seminars to increase understanding of the curriculum, thereby enhancing home-school alignment and reducing teacher burden; (3) institutionalizing recognition systems that celebrate teacher innovation and student progress, reinforcing motivation and self-worth.

Managing Physiological and Emotional States

This strategy comprises (1) cultivating a psychologically safe school climate that encourages risk-taking and views mistakes as learning opportunities; (2) promoting regular reflective practice to help teachers process challenges, build self-awareness, and develop adaptive strategies; (3) supporting the development of resilience by reframing obstacles as temporary and surmountable, fostering a growth mindset.

In sum, sustainable improvements in teacher self-efficacy require a holistic strategy that integrates psychological, social, and practical dimensions. Addressing only one aspect—such as technical training—without reinforcing vicarious learning, social support, and emotional well-being is unlikely to yield lasting change. A comprehensive approach, aligned with Bandura's (1997) four sources (Larsen & James, 2022; Kim, 2022; Jones et al., 2023), not only strengthens individual confidence but also builds a resilient, adaptive teaching force capable of successfully navigating the transformative goals of the Merdeka Curriculum.

This study reaffirms the explanatory power and relevance of Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy in the context of large-scale curriculum reform in Indonesia. It demonstrates that self-efficacy is a pivotal psychological construct influencing teachers' readiness and capacity to adapt to curricular changes. Notably, the finding that mastery experiences significantly shape teachers' confidence in practical skills reinforces the centrality of experiential learning in self-efficacy development. This supports the theoretical emphasis on performance accomplishments as the most influential source of self-efficacy, suggesting that professional development models must be designed to foster authentic, successful teaching experiences.

As for the practical implication, the findings highlight the importance of integrating self-efficacy development into the core strategy of curriculum reform. Educational initiatives should not only focus on disseminating curriculum content ("what to teach") but also on strengthening teachers' belief in their ability to implement it effectively ("how to teach"). This requires a shift from knowledge-transfer models of training toward experiential, supportive, and reflective professional learning. Investment in teacher capacity must prioritize the creation of safe, collaborative environments where teachers can experiment, receive feedback, and build confidence through practice.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the self-efficacy of PAI (Pendidikan Agama Islam) teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, based on survey data from 78 respondents. The findings indicate that PAI teachers generally exhibit high self-efficacy in understanding the conceptual foundations of the curriculum, with mean scores exceeding 4.0 on a 5-point Likert scale. However, self-efficacy levels, while still in the "High" range (mean > 3.8), show a slight decline in relation to practical application skills—particularly in lesson design and assessment development. Teachers' overall self-assessments further reveal that the majority rated their competence in designing instructional modules, developing assessment tools, and demonstrating best practices as "Good," with only a minority reporting "Excellent" proficiency. While teachers appear confident in what the Merdeka Curriculum entails, they express relatively lower confidence in how to effectively translate its principles into classroom practice. This underscores a critical challenge in educational reform: ensuring that teacher preparedness extends beyond conceptual knowledge to include applied competence and pedagogical innovation.

The authors acknowledge several limitations in this study. First, the reliance on self-assessment data may be subject to subjective biases, such as social desirability bias, which could influence the accuracy of the reported self-efficacy levels. Second, the sample is limited in scope and geographical representativeness, as it consists of 78 PAI teachers from a single teacher education institution in Cirebon, Indonesia, thus limiting the generalizability of the findings to broader or more diverse educational contexts. Third, the descriptive quantitative design, while useful for identifying patterns, does not provide in-depth insights into the underlying reasons for teachers' perceptions or experiences. Fourth, the study does not report formal validity and reliability testing of the research instrument, which may affect the psychometric rigor of the measurement. Fifth, the study focuses on teachers' perceived self-efficacy rather than their actual classroom practices or the impact of their teaching on student learning outcomes.

Therefore, future research is encouraged to address these limitations through mixed-methods designs, more representative sampling, instrument validation, and observational or outcome-based assessments to yield more comprehensive and robust findings. The following research directions are recommended; Conduct in-depth qualitative studies—such as semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions—to explore teachers' lived experiences, perceived barriers, and adaptive strategies in implementing the curriculum; Undertake longitudinal research to track changes in self-efficacy over time and identify key factors (e.g., training, mentoring, school climate) that influence its development; Carry out comparative studies examining differences in self-efficacy levels between PAI teachers and educators of other subjects, to uncover subject-specific and contextual influences on implementation readiness; Develop and validate a domain-specific instrument to measure PAI teachers' self-efficacy in the Merdeka Curriculum context, capable of capturing the unique pedagogical and cultural dimensions of religious education; Implement action research or experimental studies to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions grounded in Bandura's self-efficacy theory—such as mastery-focused workshops or peer modeling programs—in enhancing teachers' confidence and practice.

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