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The Implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum: Impacts of Pedagogical, Professional, and Social Competencies

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Abstract

This research examines the influence of physical education teachers' pedagogical, professional, and social competence on the *Merdeka* Curriculum in State Middle Schools throughout Agam Regency. This research used a quantitative approach with a comparative causal design and involved 30 physical education teachers as respondents. Data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, normality tests, linearity tests, and path analysis. The research results show that pedagogical competence directly and significantly influences the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Likewise, professional and social competence are affected. Additionally, there is a significant indirect influence, where pedagogical and professional competencies have an impact through social competencies. This research concludes that physical education teachers' pedagogical, professional, and social competencies have a crucial role in supporting the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Physical education teachers need to continue to improve their competence, especially in the pedagogical aspect, to ensure the successful implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum at the middle school level.

Keywords
Merdeka curriculum, pedagogical competence, professional competence, social competence

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Introduction

Education plays a crucial role in shaping a person's future, so they have the essential capital to face the world of work. Physical education subjects are integral to the national education system. Physical education teaches physical activity, shaping character and positive values in everyday life (Khofiatun et al., 2016). Physical education subjects at school also utilize body movements to achieve positive changes physically and mentally (Pangrazi & Beighle, 2019). Physical education at school is not only about physical aspects but also the development of physical skills, fitness, and understanding the principles of movement (Kanca, 2018). Therefore, it aims to shape character, train discipline, sportsmanship, and cooperation, creating a miniature life with values such as honesty and social (Arifin, 2017).

According to Sulfemi (2019), teachers have four competencies that must be fulfilled in teaching, namely pedagogical, professional, social, and personality competencies. It includes physical education teachers who must have in-depth pedagogical competence, develop learning methods according to the material, understand how students think, and conduct evaluations (Rakhman & Brata, 2018). In addition, physical education teachers need to deliver material effectively and interestingly, using various media, teaching aids, and interesting and varied learning strategies so that students are motivated in the learning process (Firdaus et al., 2022). In pedagogical competence, a physical education teacher needs to have an in-depth students' understanding, plan and implement learning, evaluate learning outcomes, and develop students (Habibullah, 2012). Therefore, it helps students understand intelligence, creativity, cognitive, and psychomotor development. Physical education teachers also need to create conditions that support the development of student creativity and understand cognitive development, not just psychomotor (Akbar, 2021). Physical education teachers must also be able to plan learning programs by implementing appropriate teaching methods while improving their knowledge and competencies (Ahdan et al., 2021; Zein, 2016). Then, the social competence of physical education teachers includes the ability to communicate and interact with various parties in the educational environment (Ashsiddiqi, 2012), so teachers must create an environment that supports cooperation and collaboration between students, teachers, and the community.

The curriculum is a structured plan to achieve educational goals and becomes a guideline in the teaching and learning process (Novianti, 2020). It also aims to improve the quality of education by providing autonomy to schools and increasing healthy competition between educational units (Astuti et al., 2024). National education uses the *Merdeka* Curriculum, introduced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, focusing on character development and mastery of essential competencies. The *Merdeka* Curriculum is an innovative program that creates an active learning atmosphere and improves the quality of education (Manalu, 2022; Prihatini et al., 2022). With an emphasis on learning freedom, this curriculum is expected to create a fun learning environment and support student development (Nasution, 2021). The fundamental difference between the *Merdeka* and 2013 curricula lies in the learning approach. The *Merdeka* Curriculum emphasizes independence and character development, while the 2013 Curriculum focuses more on achieving academic competence (Anwar et al., 2022).

The physical education learning strategy in the *Merdeka* Curriculum refers to an approach that creates a dynamic learning environment and supports the development of students' character (Prihatini et al., 2022). The role of physical education teachers in the *Merdeka* curriculum has also changed to become a learning facilitator who motivates students to explore their potential. Teachers deliver material and guide students in researching and applying knowledge in everyday life (Anwar et al., 2022). For this reason, physical education teachers have a central role in the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Supporting factors for implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum include teachers' understanding of changes, adequate training, and full support from the school and government (Ferry & Romar, 2020). Physical education teachers' pedagogical, professional, and social competencies are key to effective learning. The *Merdeka* Curriculum emphasizes character, essential material, and soft skill development, providing opportunities for physical education teachers to innovate and create a dynamic learning atmosphere. Therefore, in the *Merdeka* Curriculum learning process, teachers must be ready to continue learning and developing their knowledge to create an effective and efficient learning environment.

Literature Review

Recently introduced in Indonesia, the *Merdeka* Curriculum emphasizes a student-centered approach to education, particularly in physical education. This curriculum aims to foster creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration among students, with teachers playing a crucial role in its effective implementation. The pedagogical competencies of these educators are vital, as they enable the design of engaging lessons tailored to diverse learning styles. Research indicates that teachers who adopt active learning techniques see increased student motivation and participation. Effective assessment strategies, such as formative assessments, are essential for measuring student progress and promoting a growth mindset.

Professional competencies, including continuous professional development, are also critical for teachers. By participating in workshops and conferences, educators can stay abreast of the latest teaching methodologies and curricular changes, which enhances their ability to integrate new concepts into their lessons. Collaboration among peers further enriches the teaching experience, as professional learning communities foster the sharing of best practices and resources, creating a supportive environment for all educators.

Social competencies are equally important, as they involve building strong relationships with students, parents, and the community. Teachers who establish trust and rapport create a safe and inclusive classroom atmosphere, which is particularly vital in physical education, where teamwork is essential. Engaging with the community, such as collaborating with local sports organizations and health professionals, allows educators to provide students with real-world experiences that reinforce classroom learning.

Despite the opportunities presented by the *Merdeka* Curriculum, teachers face challenges, such as adapting to the new framework and encountering limited resources. However, educators can overcome these obstacles by developing their pedagogical, professional, and social competencies and significantly enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes. Ultimately, the success of the *Merdeka* Curriculum relies on teachers' ability to cultivate these competencies, paving the way for improved educational experiences in

physical education settings. Future research should explore specific strategies for competency development and their direct impact on student performance.

Methodology

This research used a quantitative approach with a comparative causal design. The independent variables involve pedagogical competence (X1), professional competence (X2), and social competence (X3), which are intervening variables. The implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum (Y) is the dependent variable. Path diagrams are used as structural models. The population comprised of physical education teachers in state middle schools throughout Agam Regency. In addition, the sample of this research consisted of 30 civil servants and honorary physical education teachers through total sampling technique. The research was carried out at SMP Negeri 4 Ampek Nagari. The data collection used a questionnaire with assessment instruments for each variable, while the data analysis involved test requirements (normality, linearity, regression significance) and path analysis. The overall hypothesis test and the direct influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable were carried out to assess the impact of the relationship between variables in the hypothesis model.

Results

Research variable data, namely pedagogical competence (X1), professional competence (X2), social competence (X3), and the implementation of *the Merdeka* Curriculum (Y), were processed using descriptive statistics. The average, standard deviation, highest, and lowest values are used to provide an overview of the state of each variable as independent variables (X1 and X2), intervening variables (X3), and dependent variables (Y). More details are in the following table.

Table 1. *Description of research data*

Variable	N	$\overline{X}$	Std.dev	Min	Max
Pedagogical competence	30	105.45	23.54	67	143
Professional competence	30	103.21	12.53	79	134
Social competence	30	113.11	15.51	86	139
The implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum	30	27.98	5.98	16	38

Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the research variables concerning physical education teachers' competencies and the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation. The research examined four key variables: pedagogical competence (X1), professional competence (X2), social competence (X3), and the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum (Y), with data collected from 30 respondents for each variable. Pedagogical competence (X1) had an average score of 105.45 and a standard deviation of 23.54, indicating moderate skill variability, with scores ranging from 67 to 143. Professional competence (X2) averaged 103.21, with a standard deviation of 12.53, reflecting a generally competent group. However, some teachers may require further development, as indicated by the minimum score of 79 and a maximum

of 134. Social competence (X3) showed an average of 113.11 and a standard deviation of 15.51, suggesting that teachers are relatively strong in their ability to communicate and collaborate, with scores ranging from 86 to 139. Lastly, the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum (Y) had an average score of 27.98 and a standard deviation of 5.98, indicating a moderate level of adherence to the curriculum, with scores varying from 16 to 38. Overall, these descriptive statistics provide a comprehensive overview of the competencies of physical education teachers and their implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, highlighting strengths and areas for potential improvement.

Normality test

Test the requirements for normality of research data using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test at a significance level of α=0.05 to determine the distribution of sample data, supporting or rejecting the existence of a normal distribution. Complete results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test can be seen in the following table:

Table 2. *Normality test results*

Variable	N	Lo	Alpha (α)	Information
Pedagogical competence	30	0.293	0.05	Normal
Professional competence	30	0.617		Normal
Social competence	30	0.645		Normal
Implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum	30	0.303		Normal

The results, summarized in Table 2, indicate that all variables—pedagogical competence (K-S statistic = 0.293), professional competence (K-S statistic = 0.617), social competence (K-S statistic = 0.645), and the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum (K-S statistic = 0.303)—were found to follow a normal distribution, as their K-S statistics were below the critical value for rejecting normality at the specified significance level. This finding supports the assumption of normality for each competence, allowing researchers to proceed with parametric statistical methods for further analyses, thereby enhancing the validity of the conclusions drawn from the data.

Linearity test

Linearity testing using the ANOVA technique at a significance level of α=0.05 aims to determine whether the pedagogical competence, professional competence, and social competence variables form a linear regression line on implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum. The test results show that if the significance value of F in deviation from linearity is greater than α=0.05, then the regression line is linear. Conversely, if the F significance value is smaller than 0.05, the regression line is considered non-linear. These findings strengthen the understanding of the linear relationship between pedagogical competence, professional competence, social competence, and the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in this research. For more details, see the tables below:

Table 3. *Results of linearity testing x1 against y*

Source	Sum of squares	Df	*Mean Square*	F	*P*
Deviation	144.423	10	14.442	0.619	0.788
In Group	887	38	23.342		
Total	1733.920	49			

Table 3 outlines the results of the linearity testing for the relationship between pedagogical competence, professional competence, and social competence concerning the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. The sum of squares for deviation is 144.423, indicating the variability in the data not explained by the linear model, while the in-group sum of squares is 887, reflecting the variability among observations within the same group. The total sum of squares is 1733.920, representing the overall variability in the dataset. The degrees of freedom for deviation are 10, for in-group are 38, and the total is 49. The mean square for deviation, calculated as 14.442, represents the average variability per group for the deviation from linearity. The F statistic is 0.619, which assesses the hypothesis regarding the linearity of the regression model by comparing the variance explained by the regression to that not explained. The significance value (P) is 0.788, which exceeds the significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, suggesting no significant deviation from linearity. Overall, these findings indicate a linear relationship between the competencies and the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, supporting the conclusion that pedagogical, professional, and social competencies construct a linear regression line in this context.

Table 4. *Linearity test results of x2 against y*

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	P
Deviation	5497.54	27	20.361	0.923	0.584
In Group	463.383	21	22.066		
Total	1733.920	49			

Table 4 presents the results of the linearity testing for the relationship between pedagogical competence, professional competence, and social competence in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum. The sum of squares for deviation is 144.423, while the in-group sum of squares is 887, reflecting variability among observations within the same group, resulting in a total sum of squares of 1733.920. The degrees of freedom for deviation are 10, for in-group are 38, and the total is 49. The mean square for deviation is calculated at 14.442, representing average variability per group. The F statistic is 0.619, which assesses the hypothesis of linearity by comparing explained and unexplained variance. With a significance value (P) of 0.788, which exceeds the $\alpha = 0.05$ threshold, the results indicate no significant deviation from linearity. Overall, these findings suggest a linear relationship between the competencies and the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, supporting the conclusion that these competencies form a linear regression line in this context.

Table 5. *Linearity test results of x3 against y*

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
Deviation	491	31	15.857	0.623	0.877
In Group	432.633	17	25.449		
Total	1733.920	49			

Table 5 presents the results of the linearity testing for the relationship between social competence (X3) and the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum (Y). The sum of squares for deviation is 491.569, indicating the variability in the data, while the in-group sum of squares is 432.633, reflecting the variability among observations within the categorized groups. The total sum of squares is 1733.920, representing the overall variability in the dataset. The degrees of freedom for deviation are 31, and for in-group, it is 17, with a total of 49 degrees of freedom. The mean square for deviation is 15.857, representing the average variability per group for the deviation from linearity related to social competence. The F statistic is 0.623, which is used to test the hypothesis of linearity by comparing explained and unexplained variance. With a significance value (P) of 0.877, which exceeds the $\alpha = 0.05$ threshold, the results indicate no significant deviation from linearity. Overall, these findings suggest a linear relationship between social competence and the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, reinforcing the conclusion that social competence positively correlates with effective curriculum implementation in this research context.

Hypothesis testing

Testing of this hypothesis will be carried out using a path analysis approach using the SPSS version 25.0 program; the results of the analysis of the variables pedagogical competence (X1), professional competence (X2), social competence (X3), and the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum (Y) will be presented as follows.

Figure 1. *Structure path coefficient*

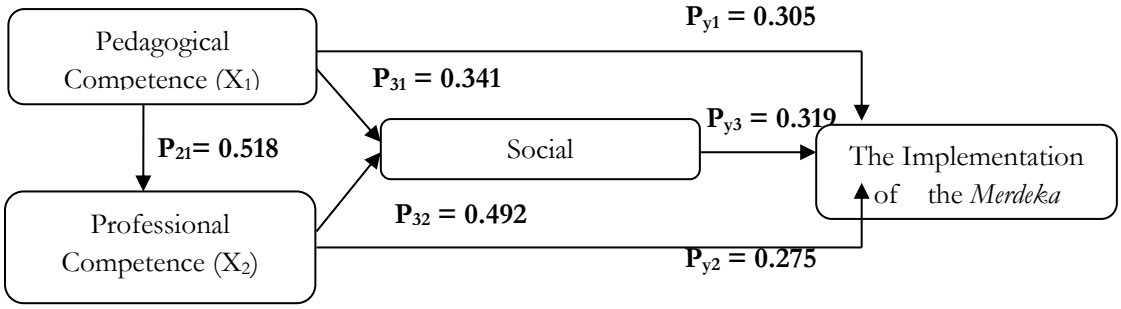

Figure 1 illustrates the structural path coefficients resulting from the path analysis of the variables associated with the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum (Y). It highlights three

key competencies: pedagogical competence (X1), professional competence (X2), and social competence (X3), along with their direct influences on curriculum implementation. The path coefficient from pedagogical to social competence is 0.341, indicating a positive relationship where enhanced pedagogical skills may improve social competencies. Furthermore, the coefficient from professional competence to social competence is 0.518, reflecting a strong positive influence that suggests social competence is likely to improve as professional competence increases. Lastly, the path coefficient from social competence to the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum is 0.492, indicating that greater social competence among teachers positively impacts the effectiveness of curriculum implementation. Overall, Figure 1 effectively summarizes the interconnected relationships among these competencies and their collective contribution to successful educational outcomes in the context of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Afterward, the results of sub-structural calculations are summarized and presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6. *Summary of path coefficient calculation results*

Path	Path coefficient	T-count	T-table
p_{y1}	0.305	2.518	1.697
p_{y2}	0.275	2.107	
p_{y3}	0.319	2.289	
p_{31}	0.341	2.953	
p_{32}	0.492	4.219	
p_{21}	0.518	4.209	

Furthermore, the results of the N-Gain test show that pedagogical competence (X1) directly and significantly influences the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum (Y) by 9.24%. Likewise, professional competence (X2) and social competence (X3) affect 7.5% and 10.11%, respectively. Apart from that, there is a significant indirect influence, where pedagogical and professional competencies have an impact through social competencies, with contributions of 17.09% and 21.17%, respectively. Meanwhile, the indirect influence of pedagogical competence through professional competence on curriculum implementation was also recorded at 19.9%. These results show the complexity of the interaction between the pedagogical, professional, and social competence variables in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum.

Table 7. *Summary of path coefficient calculation results*

Variable	N-gain
Pedagogical competence	9.24%
Professional competence	7.5%
Social competence	10.11%

Table 7 summarizes the N-Gain test results, highlighting the direct influence of different competencies on implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum. It shows that pedagogical competence has an N-Gain of 9.24%, indicating that this competency significantly contributes

to the curriculum's practical application. Professional competence follows with an N-gain of 7.5%, reflecting its direct impact on successful curriculum implementation. In comparison, social competence demonstrates the highest N-gain at 10.11%, underscoring the importance of social skills and effective interpersonal interactions in the educational context. These findings illustrate the varying degrees of influence that pedagogical, professional, and social competencies have on successfully implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum, emphasizing educators' essential skills to foster effective educational practices.

Discussions

This research provides significant results regarding the influence of pedagogical, professional, and social competence on implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum in state middle schools throughout Agam Regency. The following is a summary of the main findings from the research results:

- *Direct Influence of Pedagogical Competence on the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum*
  The research results show a direct and significant influence of pedagogical competence (X1) on the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum (Y). Pedagogical competence influences 9.24%, indicating that teachers' understanding of learning material and pedagogical skills play a key role in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum.
- *Direct Influence of Professional Competence on the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum*
  The findings show that professional competence (X2) directly and significantly influences the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum (Y). The magnitude of the influence of professional competence on curriculum implementation is 7.5%, emphasizing the importance of teachers' understanding of learning materials and scientific developments to improve the quality of learning.
- *Direct Influence of Social Competence on the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum*
  The research results show a direct and significant influence of social competence (X3) on the implementation of *the Merdeka* Curriculum (Y). Social competence influences 10.11%, emphasizing the importance of teachers' ability to interact with students and the community effectively.
- *Indirect Influence of Pedagogical Competence through Social Competence on the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum*
  There is an indirect influence of pedagogical competence (X1) on the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum (Y) through social competence (X3), with an influence of 17.09%. It shows that pedagogical competence can also influence curriculum implementation through teachers' social abilities.
- *Indirect Influence of Professional Competence through Social Competence on the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum*
  It was found that there was an indirect influence of professional competence (X2) on the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum (Y) through social competence (X3), with an influence of 21.17%. It emphasizes that developing teachers' professional competencies can strengthen their social abilities in supporting curriculum implementation.
- *Indirect Influence of Pedagogical Competence through Professional Competence on the Implementation of the*

Merdeka Curriculum

There is an indirect influence of pedagogical competence (X1) on the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum (Y) through professional competence (X2), with an influence of 19.9%. This shows that pedagogical competence can influence curriculum implementation through developing teacher professional competence.

The research limitations include questionnaires, which may not always reflect actual conditions, time constraints, and limited control over the health and seriousness of the respondents. Further research can be carried out to overcome these limitations and deepen understanding of the factors that influence the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in state middle school education throughout Agam Regency.

Conclusions

This research shows that physical education teachers need to increase their pedagogical competence to optimize the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Teacher professionalism is the primary key to facing the challenges of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, requiring adaptation and in-depth mastery of the material. Teachers' social abilities have also proven critical in establishing effective relationships with students and the community, supporting the *Merdeka* Curriculum's smooth implementation. Therefore, teachers are recommended to continue improving their competence to ensure the successful implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum.

In conclusion, the research provides valuable insights into the competencies required to effectively implement the *Merdeka* Curriculum, suggesting that educators must continuously develop their pedagogical, professional, and social skills. Addressing the limitations of the research, such as the reliance on self-reported questionnaires and time constraints, future studies should explore broader methodologies to gain a deeper understanding of the factors influencing the *Merdeka* Curriculum's implementation. Educators can better support student development and improve Indonesia's overall education quality by focusing on these competencies.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest.

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