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Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Shaping the Character of Teachers at SMAN 1 Namorambe and SMAN 1 Kutalimbaru

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Abstract

This study explores how the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum influences teacher character formation in two public senior high schools SMA Negeri 1 Namorambe and SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru through a multisite qualitative approach. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis to identify differences in understanding, practices, and contextual factors affecting curriculum application. The findings reveal that both schools share a fundamental understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum's core principles flexibility, differentiated learning, and strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile (P5) yet their implementations differ significantly. At SMA Negeri 1 Namorambe, the curriculum is primarily viewed as an administrative requirement, emphasizing discipline, responsibility, and individual independence. Conversely, SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru interprets it as a framework for creativity, collaboration, and contextual learning, fostering innovative, reflective, and socially aware teacher characteristics. Contextual factors such as leadership style, socio-cultural environment, and resource availability play a critical role in shaping these outcomes. The study concludes that participatory leadership and a culture of collaboration enhance curriculum effectiveness and teacher character growth, while administrative rigidity and limited resources constrain innovation. Overall, the Merdeka Curriculum demonstrates flexibility, enabling diverse pathways to professional and character development among teachers across different school settings.

Keywords

Implementation; Merdeka Curriculum; Teacher Character; Multisite; Character Education; Teacher Professionalism.

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Introduction

To achieve predetermined educational goals, the curriculum is essential. Without the right curriculum, students will not achieve the right learning goals. As the modern world develops, the curriculum must also vary and adapt to meet the demands of students at every level. Although the word “curriculum” has been used in the field of education for about a century, the term is relatively new in Indonesia, which began to gain popularity in the 1950s. Along with the development of educational theories and methods, the concept of the curriculum also developed. In his book “Curriculum and Teaching”, S. Nasution defines a curriculum as a set of plans designed to support the teaching and learning process. In the education unit, teachers and educational institutions are responsible for these plans. Because it was created as a teaching resource and learning experience, the curriculum is an educational program, not a teaching program.

In her book “Curriculum Development and Development in Schools,” **Nana Sudjana** defines curriculum as a set of goals and expectations formulated in educational programs that are then carried out and carried out by teachers in educational units. According to education professionals, there are various definitions of curriculum. Curriculum, on the other hand, is a set of rules and plans related to the objectives, content, and subject matter, as well as techniques used as guidelines for learning activities to achieve educational goals, according to Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, Article 1, Paragraph 19. Because the curriculum is an educational program, not a teaching program, the curriculum consists of learning experiences and teaching materials.

The curriculum is essential for educational units in formal education and serves as a guideline for teachers, who provide direction and advice in teaching. All student activities can be arranged according to the curriculum description, which is something that is prepared in education, so that it can achieve educational goals. Since everything is covered in the curriculum, albeit with many modifications and adaptations, it can be said that formal education will not be effective without the curriculum. The main foundation of teaching and learning activities in education is the curriculum (**Nurdiana, Iman & Mujahid, 2025**). According to some experts, the curriculum is the foundation of education and determines the success or failure of educational outcomes (**Asri, 2017**). The curriculum must always be the focal point and foundation for any successful implementation of education. This is because the curriculum is the starting point and the end result of all educational activities. Because the purpose of the curriculum is to produce competent graduates, the curriculum is very important for the educational process (**Baderiah, 2018**). This is due to the fact that the curriculum serves as the focal point or core of the learning process. According to him, the field that has the greatest direct impact on educational performance is the curriculum (**Muhammedi, 2016**).

Thus, a curriculum can be described as a set of guidelines that one must adhere to in order to achieve these goals and succeed academically. All aspects of student learning in the educational unit are covered in the curriculum definition, as explained earlier. Therefore, the curriculum has a crucial purpose. Depending on the field, there are several ways to interpret this function. According to Johar Alimuddin's research, “Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Elementary Schools,” the lack of teacher training, especially offline training, is another obstacle to teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum. Currently, most of the training is conducted online or through the Merdeka Teaching platform.

Using a multisite approach, these two schools were chosen on the grounds that, although both are public schools, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and the development of teachers' character can be influenced by a variety of social, cultural, and resource contexts. The

multisite methodology in this study allowed researchers to gain a more thorough and in-depth understanding of how the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented and how teachers develop their character in a variety of situations. This study aims to determine effective practices, obstacles faced, and contextual elements that affect the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in shaping the character of teachers by comparing the experiences and perspectives of educators in both schools.

Method

This research will use multi-site strategies and qualitative methodologies. Since this study aims to comprehensively and comprehensively understand how the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum affects the character development of teachers in their natural environment, a qualitative approach is used. Data analysis procedures that methodically collect information about the condition of objects are a component of qualitative research (Anwar, 1999). According to Sugiyono (2012), qualitative research views the object of study as something dynamic, the result of the formation of ideas and interpretations of observed events, and holistic because all its components work together to produce an inseparable unity.

Data Collection Techniques

In this study, the natural setting approach was used as a data collection method. In-depth interviews, document analysis, and observation are data collection methods that are considered appropriate (Bungin, 2011). The researcher will use a number of data collection approaches, as mentioned by Bogdan and Biklen (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998).

- 1. Participant Observation.** These observations put the researcher in close contact with the subject of the observation or serve as a data source for the research. Researchers use field records for field investigations in addition to observations. This technique is known as participant observation and is used to collect comprehensive and integrated data.
- 2. In-Depth Interviews.** To confirm the interview material and ensure the neutrality of the findings, in-depth interviews were conducted. The interviews reflect the information that needs to be collected and observed by the researcher, are unbiased, and are influenced by the ideas and judgments of each researcher. Resource persons and documents related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in pilot schools have been prepared in advance.
- 3. Document Analysis.** A written record of an incident that occurred at school is called a document. Inscriptions or artifacts from previous generations at the research site, as well as lesson plans (RPPs) or open modules, school activity reports, meeting minutes, school vision and mission, curriculum documents, archives, photographs, papers, or news from newspapers or websites, can all be included. These records will then be used to support the results achieved at the end of the study.

Data Analysis Techniques

After analyzing the data, the researchers concluded that SMA Negeri 1 Namorambe can use data on the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Shaping Teacher Character. There are three steps involved in analyzing qualitative data using the Miles and Huberman methodology.

- 1. Data Reduction.** Data reduction is a process that researchers use to categorize, focus, and eliminate irrelevant data. Each result of observations, interviews, and document studies conducted at both schools is validated and coded. The relevant data are then selected and adjusted to the research topic.
- 2. Data Presentation.** The presentation of data is intended so that researchers can quickly find patterns so that they can make inferences and/or take appropriate action. The results of

observations, interviews, and document studies conducted in the two elementary schools are presented narratively. Charts, graphs, networks, and matrix are also used to facilitate reading. Given that qualitative researchers often create narrative texts, researchers are now significantly involved in the presentation or display of data that has been previously collected and examined. Display is a format that provides information to the reader thematically. Two formats were introduced by [Miles and Huberman \(1984\)](#): matrix and context chart.

Findings

Research Findings

Understanding And Practice Of Implementing The Merdeka Curriculum Of SMA Negeri 1 Namorambe And SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru

1. SMA Negeri 1 Namorambe

The results of the research at SMA Negeri 1 Namorambe show that teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum has not been formed, although there are still some problems in its implementation, teachers in this school realize that the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), varied learning, and flexibility are all emphasized in the Merdeka Curriculum. Overall, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMA Negeri 1 Namorambe has brought positive changes although it is still limited. Planning tends to be administrative, the implementation of P5 is partial, evaluation is structural, and the character of teachers is formed more dominantly in responsibility and discipline.

2. SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru 1

The results of a multi-site study indicate both fundamental similarities and significant differences in the understanding and implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum between teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Namorambe and SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru. These differences are primarily influenced by the school's cultural context, the principal's leadership, and the teachers' readiness to internalize the new educational paradigm.

Table 1. Comparison of Understanding and Practice of Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

Aspects	SMA Negeri 1 Namorambe	SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru	Equation
Understanding	More administrative and technical understanding. Focus on fulfilling the format of teaching modules and assessments according to the guidelines.	Understanding is more applicable and contextual. Relate the material to the local culture and the real life of the students.	Understand the basic principles of the Merdeka Curriculum: differentiation, PBL, formative assessment, P5.
Planning	Individually compiled. The teaching modules tend to be formalistic, partly copied from official examples.	It is done collaboratively. Teaching modules are co-designed, integrative, and contextual.	Together they prepare teaching tools (modules, lesson plans, assessments).

Implementation	P5 is still partial, limited to a few subjects. The student-centered approach has not been consistent.	P5 is carried out across subjects, based on real projects (e.g. entrepreneurship). More consistent and participatory.	Together try to apply <i>project-based learning</i> and active methods.
Evaluation	More structural and formal. Formative assessments are carried out but often only formalities.	More reflective and collaborative. There are monthly evaluations covering academics and character.	Both implement continuous assessments according to the demands of the curriculum.
Teacher Character	Growing the value of responsibility, discipline, and independence. There is still resistance to change.	Growing the value of collaboration, openness, social concern, and the courage to innovate.	Both experienced a change in character towards teacher professionalism.

SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru views the Merdeka Curriculum as a platform for creativity, collaboration, and introspection, while SMA Negeri 1 Namorambe often positions it as a technical and administrative tool. Despite their differing philosophies, both schools demonstrate a dedication to using the Merdeka Curriculum to support more imaginative and interactive learning, focusing on student character development in accordance with the Pancasila Student Profile.

School Context (Socio-Cultural, Resources, Leadership)

1. SMA Negeri 1 Namorambe

All of these factors influence how the curriculum is implemented and help shape the character of teachers.

a. Socio-Cultural Context

The environment where SMA Negeri 1 Namorambe is located is diverse from various social and economic backgrounds. The low level of support for learning at home is due to the fact that most parents of children are highly mobile and work in the informal sector. The Principal of SMA Negeri 1 Namorambe revealed that many parents of students are busy making a living and still hold fast to the values of mutual cooperation and respect for their elders, therefore the school is responsible for maintaining values by being role models in the school environment and outside the school.

b. Resources

SMA Negeri 1 Namorambe has limited resources in terms of providing a technology-based learning environment. Project support facilities are still limited, internet connections are unstable, and computer labs lack adequate equipment. This has an impact on the implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) which is less than ideal. Often, teachers can only complete basic tasks in the classroom without integrating more extensive fieldwork. The principal revealed in an interview about the resources that support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The Vice Principal of the Finance Section also revealed in an interview about resources that support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

c. Leadership

Another important consideration is the leadership of the principal. The leadership style at SMA Negeri 1 Namorambe is generally instructional and structural, with a focus on administrative supervision. The principal actively participates in ensuring all teachers adhere to curriculum requirements, complete teaching materials, and create learning reports. "As a leader, my role is to provide direction and motivation to teachers to adapt to the Merdeka Curriculum. I ensure that every teacher gets the opportunity to participate in training, and encourage them to develop teaching tools according to the principle of differentiation." (KSN, May 12, 2025).

- d. Implications for the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and Teacher Character
The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMA Negeri 1 Namorambe is influenced by the three contextual factors mentioned earlier. In general, this curriculum emphasizes the importance of encouraging student behavior and fulfilling administrative responsibilities. P5 has been implemented partially and simply. Teachers are used to working their own projects. The Supervisor of SMA Negeri 1 Namorambe ensures that the implementation of the independent public curriculum runs in accordance with the provisions.

2. SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru

At this school, educational procedures are guided by three main dimensions: leadership, resources, and socio-cultural factors.

a. Cultural and Social Background

At SMA Negeri 1, the qualities of social awareness, unity, and mutual cooperation are still highly valued in the village where Kutalimbaru is located. These local customs are ingrained in the school culture, fostering a collaborative environment between educators and students. In addition to working individually, teachers are accustomed to fostering teamwork when developing lesson plans and implementing the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5). Due to this socio-cultural background, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum focuses more on teacher collaboration and student participation in learning decision-making.

b. Resources

SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru is able to utilize its surrounding environment as a learning laboratory, even though the school's facilities are not yet fully adequate. Teachers encourage students to learn from events relevant to their daily lives. In P5, the surrounding rivers, agricultural lands, and traditional markets serve as educational resources. To teach us about buying and selling and economics, a teacher once took us to the market, according to an 11th-grade student. We were able to practice directly instead of just listening to theory in class, which made it feel different.

c. Leadership

In Kutalimbaru, the principal practices democratic and participatory leadership. In addition to administrative supervision, the principal encourages creativity and group introspection. With the assurance that any mistakes will be used as a basis for assessment, rather than punishment, teachers are allowed to experiment with new approaches.

- d. Implications for the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and Teacher Character
The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru is influenced by the three factors mentioned above. The curriculum is implemented in a more contextual, collaborative, and integrative manner. P5 is based on students' real-world experiences and is used across all subjects. Reflective evaluation is frequently used, with teachers working together to evaluate students' character and academic development.

Table 2. Comparison of School Contexts

Aspects	SMA Negeri 1 Namorambe	SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru	Equation
Socio-Cultural	Heterogeneous society; the majority of parents work in the informal sector; The school emphasizes discipline and control. Teachers tend to emphasize assertiveness so that students are responsible.	The community upholds mutual cooperation and togetherness; This culture is carried over to schools, teachers are used to working collaboratively.	Both are influenced by the social values of the surrounding community in educational practices.
Resources	Limited technological facilities (computer labs, inadequate internet); P5 tends to be simple and is done in the classroom.	Utilizing local resources (markets, gardens, rivers) as learning laboratories; P5 is more contextual and applicative.	Both have limitations in modern facilities, but still try to implement the Merdeka Curriculum.
Leadership	The principal has a structural-instructional pattern, emphasizing administrative supervision; Teachers are disciplined but creativity is limited.	The principal is participatory-democratic, providing space for experimentation and reflection; teachers are more confident and innovative.	Both play an important role in directing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.
The Character of the Teacher Who Formed	Teachers tend to be disciplined, rule-abiding, and independent, but resistance to change still exists.	Teachers develop to be collaborative, open, socially caring, and innovative, better prepared to adapt.	Both experienced the process of forming positive character through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Cross-site comparisons indicate that the school context significantly influences the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and teacher character development. SMA Negeri 1 Namorambe is situated within a heterogeneous socio-cultural community with varying educational concerns, limited technological facilities, and a structurally driven principal. This context fosters teachers who are disciplined, compliant, and independent, but still tend to be administrative and less innovative. Meanwhile, SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru is situated within a community that upholds a culture of mutual cooperation, utilizes local resources as learning tools, and is led by a principal with a participatory-democratic style.

1. SMA Negeri 1 Namorambe

The school has implemented a number of measures to guarantee that teachers not only understand the curriculum administratively, but also integrate the principles of professionalism, independence, discipline, and responsibility into their daily work.

a. Administrative and Discipline Strategy

The school's initial approach is to prioritize the fulfillment of learning administration criteria. Every educator should create a lesson plan, evaluation resources, and frequent learning summaries. This tactic is considered important to familiarize educators to work organized, methodical, and rule-abiding. Since teachers must manage their time and tasks

efficiently, this technique fosters discipline. Since each teacher must be administratively accountable for their work, responsibility is also fostered.

b. Routine Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy

Direct supervision of the principal through monitoring is the second tactic. The principal checks classroom operations and learning materials regularly. Teachers are expected to always follow the plan.

c. Exemplary Strategies in Learning

The school applies role model techniques in addition to administration and supervision. Teachers are encouraged to be the ultimate role models for children, demonstrating accountability and discipline. Teachers who always arrive on time, prepare their lessons in advance, and act professionally show this. How can students be disciplined if their teachers don't? As a result, we behave more carefully. Teachers who use this tactic acknowledge that students pay attention to and imitate their behavior, which further strengthens their discipline, accountability, and integrity.

d. Responsibility Individualization Strategy

Teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Namorambe are directly responsible for preparing learning plans and learning activities. Each teacher works independently because there is no dedicated collaborative forum that emphasizes teamwork in the preparation of modules. Teachers collaborate with other teachers to make learning feel more alive. But inseparable from that, every teacher must have a nature of responsibility in duties and obligations, so that this method encourages independence. However, collaborative skills are still lacking, as a result.

e. Strategy to Affirm the Role of Teachers as Quality Assurance

In addition, the school emphasizes that teachers play a role as "quality guarantors" in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers in this position are expected to uphold teaching standards even if the available resources are inadequate. From the general strategy above, it is clear that SMA Negeri 1 Namorambe prioritizes character development tactics, such as discipline, accountability, independence, dedication, and honesty.

2. SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru

At SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru, the Merdeka Curriculum (Curriculum Merdeka) is implemented with two goals: improving student learning outcomes and developing teacher character in accordance with the new curriculum's values: collaboration, reflection, innovation, and a focus on meaningful learning. The Kutalimbaru community's sociocultural ethos, which emphasizes mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), along with the principal's democratic and participatory leadership, have significantly influenced the tactics implemented at this school.

a. Utilizing Collaboration in Learning Planning

Teacher collaboration forums are one such tactic. Teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru collaborate in frequent discussion forums, rather than working individually, to develop P5 plans, learning modules, or assessment tools. Teachers are encouraged to learn from each other, receive feedback, and be open to others' ideas in these discussions. The principal explained during an interview, "Teacher collaboration here is realized through cross-subject integration. Science, social studies, and Indonesian language teachers, for example, collaborate on the P5 project so students see the interdisciplinary connections." (KSK, June 19, 2025).

b. P5 Implementation Strategy in Learning

The Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), which is routinely implemented by the school. Teachers accompany students in activities such as social initiatives, environmental research, and entrepreneurship, which are directly related to community life. The science teacher explained during an interview how the school integrates the Pancasila Student Profile values into learning. “For example, when students work in groups, I emphasize the values of mutual cooperation and communication. When working on projects, I encourage independence and creativity. So, these values are not just theory, but are actually practiced in the students’ daily lives.” (GIK, June 19, 2025).

c. Collective Reflection Strategy

In addition, the school holds a monthly collective reflection, a forum where teachers analyze student progress, P5 achievement, and the overall learning experience. This forum provides a venue for exchanging experiences, identifying challenges, and developing collaborative solutions. The principal explained during an interview how teachers reflect on their teaching practices. Because teachers are accustomed to conducting ongoing self-evaluations, this approach helps them develop qualities of openness, humility, and a spirit of lifelong learning.

d. Using Participatory Leadership to Empower Teachers

At SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru, the principal uses a participatory leadership approach that provides flexibility to teachers. Teachers are encouraged to experiment without fear of consequences if failure occurs. Instead, every mistake becomes the basis for group assessment. A mathematics teacher explained during an interview, “The school doesn’t assign teaching modules as individual assignments, but rather as teamwork. We discuss them in the internal MGMP (Student Working Group), exchange references, and then adapt government-mandated teaching modules to suit the needs of our students.” (GMK, June 19, 2025).

e. Strategy for Utilizing Local Resources

Teachers in Kutalimbaru are able to innovate in their teaching. Although teachers are given flexibility in designing their lessons, the school still conducts reflection and evaluations. It is clear from the overall approach that SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru has produced teachers who are open, collaborative, creative, inventive, thoughtful, socially aware, and confident. The Merdeka Curriculum is used to create a dynamic, interactive, and contextual learning environment, in addition to administrative purposes.

Table 3. Comparison of Teacher Character Development Strategies

Strategy Aspects	SMA Negeri 1 Namorambe	SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru	Equation
Learning Planning	Teachers develop teaching modules and assessment tools independently ; individual responsibility is dominant.	Teachers develop teaching modules and assessment tools collaboratively in a joint forum.	Together they develop teaching tools as an implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.
Monitoring & Evaluation	Routine monitoring by the principal → foster administrative discipline and compliance .	Monthly collective reflection → foster openness, humility, and mutual evaluation .	Both emphasized evaluation as a means of improving learning.

P5 Implementation	It is carried out simply, generally in the classroom, in the form of group assignments.	It is carried out based on real projects across subjects by utilizing the surrounding environment.	Both carry out P5 as a mandate of the Merdeka Curriculum.
The Role of the Principal	Structural-instructional: emphasizing the fulfillment of administration and control.	Participatory-democratic: provide space for experimentation, support teacher innovation.	Both play a role in directing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.
The Character of the Teacher Who Formed	Disciplined, rules-abiding, independent, committed, but less collaborative and innovative.	Collaborative, open, innovative, reflective, socially caring, confident.	Both foster the responsibility of teachers' professionalism, even though the emphasis is different.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has proven flexible: it can produce different teacher characters according to the school's chosen strategy, whether emphasizing administrative discipline (Namorambe) or collaboration and innovation (Kutalimbaru).

Significant Differences in the Impact of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum on the Development of Teachers; Character:

At SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru, the most significant impact was the development of collaborative, innovative, reflective, open, confident, and socially conscious characteristics. Teachers were accustomed to working together in forums to develop teaching materials, cultivating mutual respect and collaboration. The implementation of project-based P5 fostered teacher creativity and innovation. Participatory leadership support fostered teachers' courage to experiment.

The following are some implications for teacher character development: At SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru, supporting factors have effectively encouraged the growth of open, confident, creative, reflective, cooperative, and socially sensitive teachers. The main driving forces behind this character development are reflection forums, participatory leadership, and a culture of mutual cooperation. However, there are still obstacles to overcome, such as inadequate facilities, additional workloads, and disparities in teacher preparedness. While these challenges do not diminish the overall benefits, they may hinder some teachers from developing creative and adaptive character. Therefore, the Principal works hard, synergizes, and collaborates to improve things that need to be improved so that the independence curriculum is more effective in shaping teacher character.

At SMA Negeri 1 Namorambe, the main supporting factors were the principal's firm leadership, strict curriculum administration regulations, and a deeply rooted culture of discipline. These factors successfully fostered teachers who were disciplined, responsible, independent, and consistent in carrying out their duties. Meanwhile, at SMA Negeri 1 Kutalimbaru, the supporting factors were more varied, including a culture of community mutual cooperation, participatory leadership from the principal, utilization of local resources, collective reflection forums, and community support. These factors fostered the development of collaborative, innovative, reflective, open, confident, and socially conscious teacher character.

Thus, it can be concluded that Namorambe emphasizes discipline and responsibility based on administrative compliance, while Kutalimbaru has been more successful in developing collaborative, innovative, and reflective character traits that are more contextual and aligned with

21st-century demands. These differences indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is heavily influenced by school contextual factors. Strong supporting factors can overcome limitations, while dominant inhibiting factors can limit the scope for teacher character development.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that organizational culture only has a direct influence of 4% on teachers' professional competence, while the remaining 96% is influenced by factors other than organizational culture. This figure is relatively small, indicating that although organizational culture in schools contributes to building teacher professionalism, its role is more supportive and not a major factor in determining their professional competence.

This finding is important to understand because in educational management literature, organizational culture is often described as the "spirit" of school life. Robbins & Judge (2019) refer to organizational culture as a system of values, norms, and beliefs shared by members of the organization. In the context of schools, this culture can take the form of collegiality, discipline, openness, or commitment to learning quality. However, research data shows that the direct contribution of organizational culture to teacher competence is still limited.

Hoy & Miskel (2013) explain that organizational culture works more indirectly through teacher motivation, job satisfaction, or commitment. School culture creates a supportive work climate, but improvements in teacher professionalism are more determined by technical factors such as teaching experience, formal education, and continuing education. This explains why the percentage of organizational culture's influence on professional competence in this study is so small.

Schein (2010) adds that organizational culture is a mechanism that shapes meaning and identity within an organization. In schools, cultural values may influence teachers' attitudes toward their duties, but to build professional competence that encompasses pedagogical, professional, social, and personal aspects, teachers need more concrete development strategies. Without a continuous professional development program, organizational culture is limited to a positive atmosphere without significant leverage on competence.

Research by Setiawan & Fitriani (2019) supports this finding by showing that school organizational culture has a greater influence on increasing teacher loyalty and work ethic than on directly improving professional skills. Meanwhile, research by Murtiningsih (2019) confirms that religious culture in schools can foster discipline and responsibility, but increased professionalism is more closely related to training and academic supervision.

Furthermore, research by Nugraha & Sari (2021) shows that an organizational culture that supports collaboration among teachers can indeed foster motivation to improve the quality of learning. However, teachers acquire mastery of learning methodologies, digital skills, and curriculum development more through workshops, intensive training, and practical experience. This reinforces the evidence that organizational culture does not work as a direct determinant of professional competence.

Within the framework of Herzberg's motivation theory (2008), organizational culture can be viewed as a motivating factor that provides psychological satisfaction and shapes work commitment. However, factors that improve teachers' professional competence, such as training, career development policies, and the provision of learning resources, fall more into the category of hygiene factors. Therefore, although organizational culture remains important, it is not strong enough to significantly improve teachers' professional competence.

Research by [Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom \(2010\)](#) also confirms that school culture does contribute to student achievement and teacher performance, but teacher professionalism is more influenced by education policy and the form of teacher training. This means that although school organizational culture has a motivational function, the results of this study show its limitations as a factor in leveraging teacher competence.

[Maslowski \(2001\)](#) in his study also shows that school culture affects the work climate and interpersonal relationships, but improving teacher professionalism requires intervention through training, certification, or planned self-development programs. These findings are in line with research results showing the low percentage of direct influence of organizational culture on teacher competence.

The results of this study indicate that teachers acquire more professional competence through external factors such as formal education, continuing development programs, and government policies. Organizational culture is only a background factor that helps create a conducive atmosphere for professional learning, but does not directly improve the technical skills required by teachers.

Research by [Tairas & Hidayat \(2021\)](#) adds that organizational culture functions more through mediating variables such as work motivation, satisfaction, or commitment. This clarifies that organizational culture does not directly build competence but rather influences psychological conditions that can then have an impact on improving abilities when supported by other external factors.

In the context of schools, this means that even though a positive organizational culture can make teachers more disciplined, enthusiastic, and motivated, professional competence must still be supported by formal mechanisms. Training programs, curriculum development, integration of educational technology, and academic supervision are key to building teacher competence.

In addition, the low influence of organizational culture on professional competence can also be explained by human resource theory. According to [Wirawan \(2012\)](#), teacher competency development is more effective through training systems, mentoring, and performance-based evaluations. Organizational culture acts as a motivator, but it does not have the technical instruments to directly hone teachers' skills.

International research by [Day & Sachs \(2004\)](#) confirms that teacher professionalism is the result of systematic continuous professional development programs. Organizational culture does provide enthusiasm, but professional skills only develop through reflective practice, academic collaboration, and continuing education.

The results of this study are also relevant to the study by [Bush & Middlewood \(2013\)](#), which states that educational leadership and school policy play a greater role in determining the direction of teacher professional development, while organizational culture only serves as a supporting foundation. In other words, organizational culture is not a major factor in improving professional competence.

These findings have important implications for educational practices at SMP Muhammadiyah Kota Medan. School principals and education administrators need to understand that building a positive organizational culture is indeed important for creating a healthy work environment, but it must be integrated with concrete policies for developing teacher professionalism. Without systematic capacity building programs, organizational culture will only result in loyalty without competency improvement.

Organizational culture functions as an environment that encourages or hinders this change process, but it is not the primary determinant. Therefore, even a strong organizational culture will not have a significant impact without the commitment of individual teachers. Differences in

professional competence levels among teachers within the same organizational culture indicate that individual factors play a greater role. This reinforces the finding that organizational culture makes only a small direct contribution. In practice, organizational culture is often more effective in fostering compliance with school rules and regulations than in encouraging in-depth scientific development. Developing professional competence requires a reflective process, independent learning, and active involvement in scientific activities. This process largely occurs outside the mechanisms of formal organizational culture.

In Islamic education, lifelong learning is a fundamental principle. Teachers are required to continuously expand their knowledge as a form of scientific responsibility and devotion to Allah Swt. An organizational culture that supports the value of learning can accelerate this process, but cannot replace it. Professional competence is still built through individual commitment to learning. These findings indicate that improving school organizational culture alone is not sufficient to significantly improve teacher professional competence. A more comprehensive and sustainable approach is needed. This approach includes strengthening the teacher professional development system, improving the quality of training, and creating an academic climate that encourages reflection and innovation in learning. Organizational culture should be positioned as a supporter of the competency development process, not as the primary instrument for improving teacher professionalism. From an Islamic perspective, teacher professionalism is part of worship and a scholarly mandate. Teachers are required to carry out their profession with *itqan*, meaning working diligently and with quality. An organizational culture based on Islamic values can strengthen this awareness, although its influence remains indirect.

Therefore, the finding that organizational culture has only a 4% direct influence places organizational culture in a significant role within the framework of developing teacher professional competency. This study confirms that teacher professionalism is the result of a complex interaction between individual factors, the education system, and the work environment. Overall, organizational culture remains important in reinforcing values and work ethic, but improving teacher professional competency requires a conscious effort to learn, a commitment to knowledge, and ongoing systemic support from an Islamic educational perspective. Thus, although organizational culture has a contribution, its small percentage indicates the need for greater focus on other aspects, such as training policies, continuous coaching, the use of educational technology, and government support for improving teacher quality. This also explains why teachers' professional competence cannot depend solely on organizational culture.

In conclusion, organizational culture remains important in the context of school management because it creates a conducive working atmosphere. However, improving teachers' professional competence requires a comprehensive approach that combines organizational culture with professional development systems, education policies, and infrastructure support. Without this, the contribution of organizational culture will only be a supporting factor with relatively little influence, as evidenced in this study.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that organizational culture has a direct influence on the professional competence of teachers at Muhammadiyah junior high schools in Medan City of 4%, while the remaining 96% is influenced by factors other than organizational culture. In general, both organizational culture and teacher professional competence are in the high category, although a small number of teachers are still in the adequate category. These findings confirm that improving teachers' professional competence is not the result of a single factor, but rather a multidimensional process involving organizational culture, work motivation, educational policy support, and

the availability of continuing training. Therefore, efforts to strengthen the professional competence of teachers at Muhammadiyah Junior High Schools in Medan require a holistic approach, in which school principals play a role as facilitators capable of creating a conducive work climate, while structural support and the personal commitment of teachers remain key to improving the quality of learning.

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