



## **Optimism in Using Platform Merdeka Mengajar to Support Primary School Teachers' Practice**

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### **Keywords**

Platform Merdeka Mengajar, optimism, teaching, capacity building

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### **Abstract**

Platform Merdeka Mengajar (PMM) has been launched since 2020. Since then, it has become a resource for teachers to support their teaching and learning activities. The platform offered many opportunities for the teachers to build and develop their capacity for a better quality of teaching, from planning to classroom practices. It was essential to know their view of using the platform. This study aimed to investigate the teachers' optimism in using the platform. Besides, it explored what factors influenced their optimism in using PMM. The study used a quantitative approach to see the teachers' general tendency regarding their optimism. It involved 303 primary school teachers as the participants. It used a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire for the data collection. The analysis data covered the reliability and validity of the items, descriptive analysis, and correlation between the items constructing the optimism. The study's findings showed that the teachers in this study had a high optimism of 4.17. The study also described that planning the lesson, flexibility, capacity building, and teachers' productivity did affect their optimism in using Platform Merdeka Mengajar. Further research recommendations were described in the conclusion section.

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## INTRODUCTION

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world, most aspects of human life were affected, including the education world. School closure could not be avoided; more than one billion students, including students in Indonesia, were affected (UNESCO, 2022). In response, the government launched an emergency curriculum to accommodate the situation and the teaching-learning needs (Kemdikbud, 2020). Along with implementing the emergency curriculum, the Indonesian government launched many episodes of emancipated learning (Merdeka Belajar) to support the education stakeholders in achieving the national education goal. One of the episodes was Platform Merdeka Mengajar (SK Nomor 46/M/2022 Peta Jalan Pengelolaan Platform Digital Di Kementerian Pendidikan Kebudayaan Riset Dan Teknologi, 2022). Platform Merdeka Mengajar is a technology platform that could help teachers implement Kurikulum Merdeka, now the national curriculum. Teachers could get inspiration, references, and an understanding of the national curriculum. Teachers are also given the chance to share their works and best practices in implementing the curriculum (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, 2020)

In order to use the provided teaching platform, teachers must be at least familiar with the application. Besides, their competence in using technology is essential. It influences how they interact with the application. It could not be separated from their self-efficacy in using technology. This self-efficacy refers to their perceived ability to use technology (Teo, 2009). When teachers are confident and aware that they can use technology to support their teaching and learning activities, they are more likely to use it. Technology self-efficacy also means that the teachers are comfortable and can effectively work with the technology (Albion & Ertmer, 2001).

Platform Merdeka Mengajar, as the teaching platform provided for Indonesian teachers, provides many opportunities for the teachers to build and develop their teaching capacity. It aims to empower teachers to improve their teaching quality, upskill themselves, and progress their professional development. The platform offers four main features that teachers could explore. They are learning about the curriculum, teaching-learning activities, and self-development; the last is searching and sharing inspiration through video.

The first feature of learning Kurikulum, Merdeka, provides anything related to learning and training on implementing the curriculum. The second feature consists of an assessment, lesson plan, and related documents. The third feature offers independent training for teachers and the community, where teachers can learn, share, and collaborate. The last feature offered in this platform is searching and sharing inspiration through videos and real actions, which serve as the last activity that shows understanding of the topic. The teachers could independently learn about a particular topic they are interested in, and they could be awarded a certificate of completion. In other words, they are acknowledged for what they have learned through the platform.

All the Platform Merdeka Mengajar features could facilitate teachers' professional development. The platform has been introduced nationally by the government and through many community service activities conducted independently by academics (Anggraeni & Rizaldi, 2023; Anita Debora Simangunsong et al., 2023; Hasmawaty et al., 2023; Maisaroh et al., 2024; Prabowo et al., 2021; Rohimat et al., 2022; Surani et al., 2022). These activities support the use of Platform Merdeka Mengajar in the curriculum implementation by familiarizing the teachers with the application and realizing the existence of this teaching platform.

Several studies have investigated the use of this particular platform in various contexts and purposes like teaching and learning (Dian Ma et al., 2024; Eliya Husnatu, Ramdini, Neng Siti Nur, Sadiyah, Zahira, 2022; Hijriani et al., 2024) independent learning (Srianita et al., 2023), and assessment (Triningsih et al., 2024). There is also a study focusing on the challenges of utilizing the Platform (Alamsyah & Siti Saleha Gandana, 2023). This study found that the teachers still had linguistics, physiological, and external factors as challenges in using the Platform Merdeka Mengajar (ibid).

While all these previous studies have explored the utilization of Platform Merdeka Mengajar, a study has investigated the low access of Platform Merdeka Mengajar and its influencing factors (Ambawani et al., 2023). The study's findings indicated that time constraints, the need to be fully concentrated, and the data package seemed to result in low access to the platform in the case of a high school, the subject of their study. Another

study has explored teachers' attitudes toward using technology that described the fact that the teachers exhibited positive attitudes towards the use of technology, yet it was still not optimally utilized (Zyad, 2016)

There has not been much investigation into the intrinsic factors influencing teachers' use of Platform Merdeka Mengajar. Therefore, investigating the optimism of teachers regarding the platform will shed light on their positive attitude toward using it for their teaching and learning. It will also inform what factors influence teachers' optimism about using the platform.

## **METHODS**

This study used a quantitative approach. It tried to explore the optimism of primary school teachers in using Platform Merdeka Mengajar by collecting numeric data within the population using instruments with closed-ended questions (Creswell, 2012). The study described the overall tendency of the people in the population. It was a nonexperimental design, as the study primarily aimed to describe the current status of the investigated variable without any manipulation. It focused on the measurement facilitated by the instrument used (Creswell, 2012; Hancock & Mueller, 2010)

The participants of this study were primary teachers who used the Platform Merdeka Mengajar. This study used nonprobability sampling, which meant that the study participants were involved because they were available and represented the characteristics that the study investigated (Creswell, 2012). Three hundred-three teachers participated in this study. They consented to use their data and responses in this study. The teachers taught the first grader to the sixth grader since there was no restriction regarding the year they taught. All the participants returned all the questionnaires distributed.

Data collection was administered using a questionnaire. The questionnaire adapted items from the Technology Readiness Index 2.0 (TRI 2.0) (Parasuraman & Colby, 2015). This study is part of a larger research. This particular study investigated one of the constructs in TRI 2.0, which was optimism. It was one of the constructs that contributed to the readiness index of the users in using technology. The teachers were the technology users, the Platform Merdeka Mengajar. 4 items were being explored in this study. They planned the lesson, flexibility, capacity building, and teachers' productivity. The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale.

Once the data was collected, the data went through the data analysis process. Firstly, the study looked at the demographic information of the participants. Secondly, it presented the investigated variables' reliability, validity, and descriptive statistics. Lastly, the study identified which items contributed significantly to the variable, optimism. Besides, the study looked at the correlation between the items of the variables and determined which were strongly correlated. After conducting the data analysis and presenting the research findings, the interpretation of the data and discussion were provided. The discussion section provides the opportunity to confirm the findings with the existing theories or research.

This study investigated primary school teachers' optimism about using PMM to support their teaching and learning and identified factors influencing teachers' optimism about using the Platform Merdeka Mengajar.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

There were 303 participants in this study, all primary school teachers in Boyolali Regency. 73% of the participants were female, and 27% were male. These teachers were between 20 and 50 years old. The details are in Figure 1.

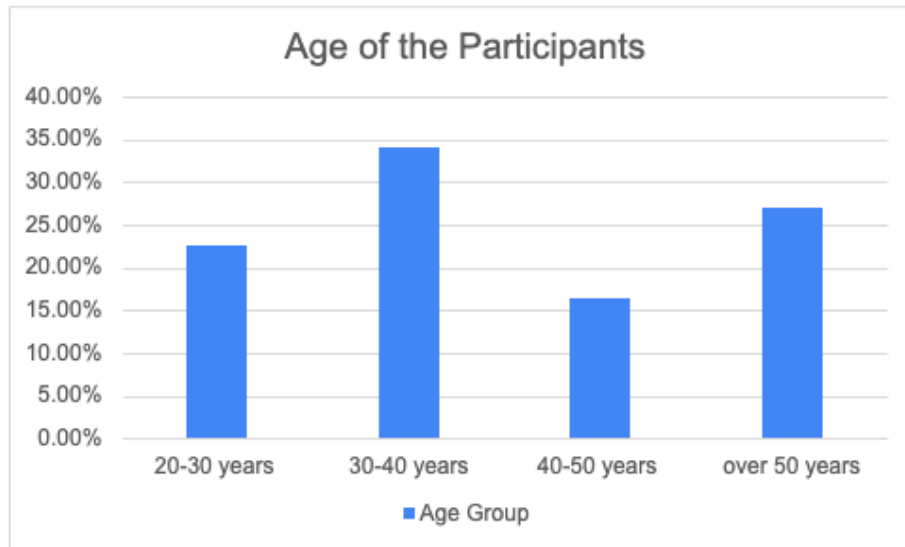


Figure 1. Age of the Participant

The Figure showed that the majority of the participants were aged between 30-40 years (34%), and 16.50% of participants were aged between 40-50 years, being the smallest group of participants. Regarding the ownership of technology, all of the participants had their smartphones, and some of them owned laptops. The participants of this study used smartphones or laptops to access the Platform Merdeka Mengajar (PMM). It can be seen in Figure 2

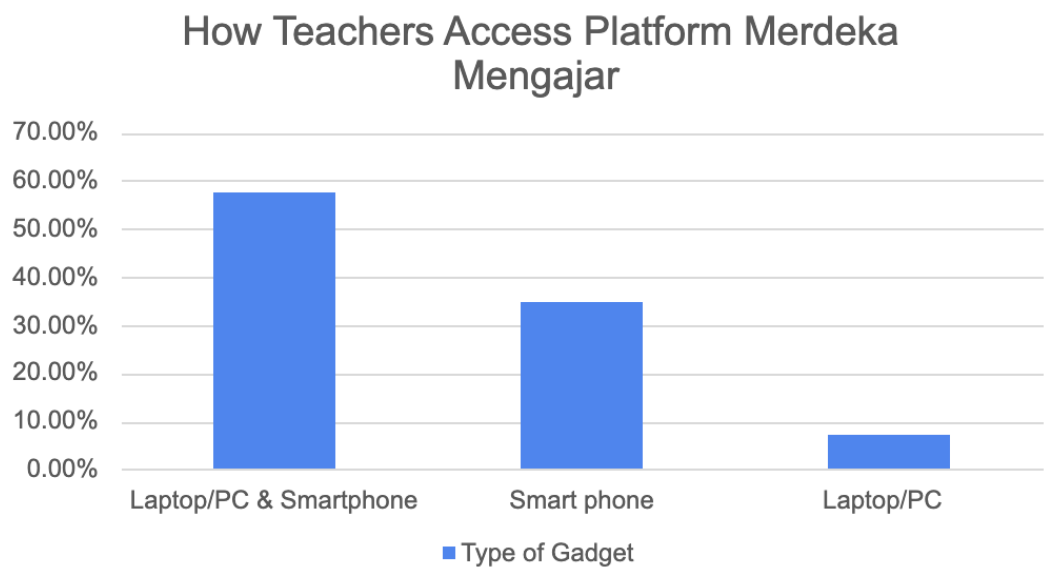


Figure 2. How Teachers Access Platform Merdeka Mengajar

Figure 2 showed more than half of the participants accessed PMM using laptops and smartphones (57.7%). A third of the participants used smartphones, and only 7.30 % accessed PMM on their laptops or PCs. It indicated that they utilized their laptop and smartphone to support their teaching and learning activities. Interestingly enough, less than 10% of the participants did not use smartphones to access PMM. A reasonable justification might be their preference for a wider display than accessing PMM using their smartphone. The demographic information has informed the gender and how the teachers access PMM to support their teaching and learning activities.

Table 1 displays the result of the reliability test of the items in the questionnaire. It looked at the value of the Cronbach's  $\alpha$

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's $\alpha$
scale	4.17	0.665	0.926

The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.926, which was in the excellent category. It indicated that all of the participants were reliable to themselves when they answered the questionnaire items. Meanwhile, Table 2 displayed the validity of the items. All items were valid since each item's Pearson product-moment correlation was bigger than the value of the  $r$ -table.

Table 2. Validity Result Test

Items	Pearson r	R-Table	Validity Test Result
Planning Lessons	0.37	0.013	Valid
Flexibility	0.47	0.013	Valid
Capacity Building	0.48	0.013	Valid
Teacher's Productivity	0.51	0.013	Valid

The descriptive statistics analysis of the variables investigated in the study is shown in the following table (see Table 3).

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

	Planning Lessons	Flexibility	Capacity Building	Teacher's Productivity	OPTIMISM
N	303	303	303	303	303
Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	4.14	4.24	4.18	4.11	4.17
Median	4	4	4	4	4
Standard deviation	0.762	0.719	0.716	0.742	0.665
Minimum	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum	5	5	5	5	5

The study showed that the teachers' optimism in using Platform Merdeka mengajar was 4.17 out of 5. It indicated that the optimism was high. Flexibility seemed to be the highest contributor to the optimism construct. The flexibility in accessing Platform Medeka Mengajar was supported because it could be accessed anywhere and anytime. It crossed the time and space boundary (Dian Ma et al., 2024). The features offered in Platform Merdeka mengajar were also varied (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, 2020). The teachers could choose which one suited their needs. In general, the four items of the constructs were in the four-value range. It suggested that they significantly contributed to the overall value of the optimism construct. The least among the four items was the teacher's productivity. It was 4.11. It was probably understandable since the Platform Merdeka Mengajar was a new tool introduced to the teachers. They might still try to familiarize themselves with tools to support their productivity. The mean value of the optimism construct was pointed out to be at the high end of the five range. It suggested that the teachers participating in this study had high optimism about using the Platform Merdeka Mengajar to support their teaching and learning activities.

The study also found that each item of the constructs correlated positively. Table 4 illustrates the correlation.

Table 4 Correlation Matrix

		Planning Lessons	Flexibility	Capacity Building	Teacher's Productivity
Planning Lessons	Pearson's r	—			
	df	—			
	p-value	—			
Flexibility	Pearson's r	0.762	—		
	df	301	—		
	p-value	< .001	—		
Capacity Building	Pearson's r	0.743	0.756	—	
	df	301	301	—	
	p-value	< .001	< .001	—	
Teacher's Productivity	Pearson's r	0.729	0.744	0.815	—
	df	301	301	301	—
	p-value	< .001	< .001	< .001	—

The flexibility in using Platform Merdeka mengajar correlated positively with how the platform could help teachers plan the lesson for their teaching. The Pearson's value for each item in the variable was > 0, confirming the positive correlation. The capacity building item was positively correlated to the flexibility item with Pearson's r value of 0.73. Meanwhile, the teacher's productivity item positively correlated to planning lessons, flexibility, and capacity building with Pearson's r value of 0.72, 0,74, and 0.81 consecutively.

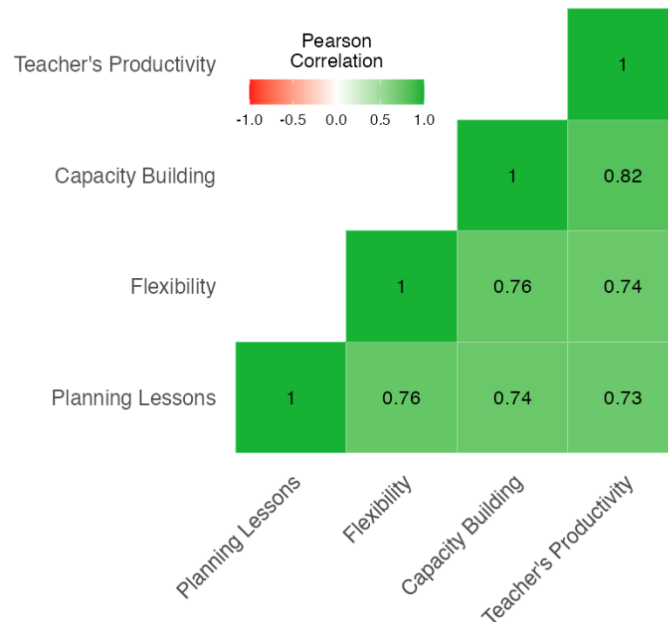


Figure 3. Correlation Map

Figure 3 illustrates the correlation between each item of the optimism contract investigated in this study. The Figure also showed that factors influencing the high optimism in using the platform Merdeka Mengajar were planning lessons, flexibility, opportunity for building teachers' capacity, and teacher productivity. The planning lessons item referred to the fact that Platform Merdeka Mengajar, according to the participants of this study, contributed to better instruction planning. They could create their teaching modules according to the

phase of the student's development and address their students' needs by considering the facilities they access at school. Creating a good lesson plan was supported by the platform features that provided sample lesson plans that the teachers could use and modify to their situation and needs. The flexibility item pointed out that the platform allowed them to access and use it anytime, anywhere, without any restrictions.

Meanwhile, capacity building meant that the teachers could build their capacity through independent training, which they could easily access on the platform. Teachers were facilitated to participate in training addressing their needs and problems. There was no need to wait for any training that used to be provided for educational institutions only. The last item, teacher productivity, described that the platform increased teachers' productivity and competencies.

## CONCLUSION

To summarize, the study has explored the optimism of primary school teachers in using Platform Merdeka Mengajar. The findings showed that the teachers in this study were highly optimistic about using the platform to support their teaching and learning activities. The factors that influenced this high optimism were the opportunity to be able to do better instruction planning, flexibility in using the platform, the ability and chance to build their capacity, and the ability of the platform to support teachers in increasing their productivity and competence. The study confirmed a positive correlation between each item of the optimism construct. It inferred that all the items in the construct contributed positively to the teachers' optimism in using Platform Merdeka Mengajar. Further study might want to explore more thoroughly how optimism might contribute to teachers' technology self-efficacy. Looking at their optimism with qualitative data would also complement and corroborate the findings.

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