



## Social Construction of Junior High School Social Studies Teachers in Kudus Regency on Merdeka Curriculum

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### Abstract

The Merdeka Curriculum brings challenges for social studies teachers in adjusting learning. The meaning of the teacher's social construction is a research gap that can be studied in facing this challenge. This study examines the social construction of junior high school social studies teachers in Kudus Regency in understanding the Merdeka Curriculum using Peter L. Berger's Social Construction Theory. The method used in this research is a qualitative method with the data source obtained from Grade VII & VIII Social Studies Teachers, Principal, and Vice Principal for Curriculum at SMP NU Putri Nawa Kartika. Data collection techniques used in this research are interviews and documentation. The results showed that three stages of social construction shape the meaning of the Merdeka Curriculum. Externalization can be seen from the teacher's adaptation in understanding and implementing the curriculum. Objectivation appears through institutionalizing the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum into learning practices. Internalization shows deep meaning that develops gradually, forming teachers' professional beliefs and practices.

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## INTRODUCTION

Curriculum development in Indonesia continues to transform so that education in Indonesia can meet the needs of the times. Currently, education in Indonesia uses the Merdeka Curriculum since its inauguration on February 11, 2022, which was inaugurated by the Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Nafi'ah et al., 2023). The basic goal of the Merdeka Curriculum is to make education in Indonesia adaptable to nature and the times so that students can develop their respective talents and interests (Cholilah et al., 2023). The Merdeka Curriculum is a form of simplification of the previous curriculum, the 2013 Curriculum (Fatkhurohmah et al., 2024), where this curriculum change is an innovation from the government to improve the condition of Indonesian education (Iskandar et al., 2023).

The Merdeka Curriculum has six main concepts. First, based on the objectives of the national education system and the Pancasila Student Profile. Second, using Learning Outcomes (CP) as a reference for competencies arranged by phase. Third, the curriculum structure regulates the allocation of annual lesson hours with flexibility for education units. Fourth, learning applies differentiated methods referring to the abilities of students. Fifth, assessment focuses on formative and authentic assessment through the Pancasila Learner Profile Strengthening Project (P5), with the elimination of the separation of attitudinal, social, and spiritual assessments. Sixth, teaching tools are provided directly by the government in the form of textbooks, non-textbooks, and other sources (Fadil et al., 2024). Then, the Merdeka Curriculum Handbook (Kementerian Pendidikan, 2022) also explains the structure of the Merdeka Curriculum, which consists of intracurricular activities, projects to strengthen the Pancasila student profile, and extracurricular activities. In addition, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes the activeness and freedom of students in learning. This is by the principles of *Merdeka Belajar*, namely learner-centered, the process is literacy, and there is a mind, taste, and scope in learning (Gunawan, 2022).

The Merdeka Curriculum has a direct impact on all subjects, including Social Studies. Teachers, as the spearheads of learning, are faced with great

challenges to adapt to these changes (Muliawan, 2024). Curriculum changes can also be a challenge in the world of education; teachers not only need to understand the concept of the new curriculum, but also design and implement lessons that are aligned with the principles of the new curriculum (Maskur, 2023). Changes too quickly can make teachers feel difficult and will have an impact on the continuity of learning in the classroom (Finanda et al., 2024).

Understanding the teachers' social construction of the Merdeka Curriculum is a research gap that can be studied in facing the challenges of the Merdeka Curriculum faced by teachers. Social Construction, according to Peter L. Berger (in Dharma, 2018), is a process in which humans form meanings about their social reality through a process of social interaction. Based on this theory, the stages of social construction are divided into three main stages: externalization, objectivation, and internalization. The Externalization stage explains that individuals will recognize and understand the subjective reality around them. The Objectivation stage occurs when social reality begins to be institutionalized and is considered objective. The Internalization stage occurs when individuals adopt and integrate meanings into their beliefs and behavior (Safrudin et al., 2024).

In the context of this study, the meaning of the Merdeka Curriculum by social studies teachers can be studied using the three main stages of social construction theory: externalization, objectivation, and internalization. The externalization stage explains the teacher's initial adaptation in interpreting the Merdeka Curriculum. The objectivation stage, which describes the values, institutional patterns, and normative system of the Merdeka Curriculum, is accepted as an objective reality that shapes the way teachers implement the curriculum in learning. The internalization stage, which shows that the meaning of the teacher develops, is created from the process of integrating the values & principles of the Merdeka Curriculum into their professional beliefs and practices.

Based on the results of research conducted by Hadi Wiyono (2023), the social construction of social studies teachers toward Merdeka Curriculum implementation in Pontianak and Singkawang

varies. There are two categories: teachers who perceive social studies learning in the Merdeka Curriculum as aligned with student competencies and conditions and those who do not. Several factors influence this social construction, including teacher age, student conditions, independent curriculum webinars, the role of *Guru Penggerak*, and school infrastructure. The results of research from Basri & Rahmi (2023) highlight several challenges faced by social studies teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at SMPN 1 IV Koto, Agam Regency. These include difficulties in shifting their mindset from the 2013 Curriculum, limited training and socialization, literacy issues and restricted digital access, insufficient teacher competence, and inadequate learning facilities and infrastructure.

Based on these 2 (two) previous studies, this study found several gaps that need to be studied further. Empirically, there are gaps in empirical evidence related to how the social construction of social studies teachers relates to the Merdeka Curriculum, most of which only discuss its implementation and challenges. The meaning of the teacher's social construction is a research gap that can be studied in facing the challenges of the Merdeka Curriculum. Theoretically, there are not many studies that examine teachers' social construction of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum using Peter L. Berger's Social Construction Theory. Therefore, this study has novelty in the aspects of analysis and data by presenting new findings regarding the social construction of junior high school social studies teachers regarding the Merdeka Curriculum using Peter L. Berger's Social Construction Theory.

Junior high schools in Kudus Regency began implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in the 2022/2023 academic year by applying to grade VII first (Oktaviani, 2023). However, now the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has been applied to all grades, from grade VII to grade IX. Based on data from the Basic Education Data (DAPODIK) of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, there are 54 junior high schools or equivalent in Kudus Regency (Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah, 2025). Based on this number, 52 schools have implemented the Merdeka Curriculum

Implementation (IKM), which means that 96% of schools in the Kudus Regency have implemented the Merdeka Curriculum. Despite widespread implementation, the meaning of IKM is still not uniform among social studies teachers (Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah, 2025).

The results of preliminary observations show that there are challenges felt by most junior high school teachers in Kudus Regency in the process of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, especially at SMP NU Putri Nawa Kartika. This includes teachers and students who are still in the stage of adjusting to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. In addition, the interpretation of social studies is affected by teachers who have not fully mastered the concept of this curriculum, as well as the habits of students who still tend to be passive due to the old learning methods dominated by lectures by several teachers. In addition, the use of technology in learning is still an obstacle due to the lack of training for teachers and limited school facilities.

Based on these problems, this study aims to examine the social construction of junior high school social studies teachers in Kudus Regency on the Merdeka Curriculum using Peter L. Berger's Social Construction Theory. This study formulates the main problem, namely how the social construction of junior high school social studies teachers in Kudus Regency is formed from the externalization, objectivation, and internalization stages. This research is expected to make a theoretical contribution in enriching the study of social studies teachers' social construction of the Merdeka Curriculum and can serve as input for education policymakers in designing curriculum development strategies that are more effective and run according to goals.

## METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to describe in depth the understanding of social studies teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The research location is at SMP NU Putri Nawa Kartika, which has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum since the 2022/2023 school year. The research technique uses structured interviews and documentation. Structured

interviews with a list of questions so that the information is more focused and by the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2016). Then, documentation in the form of teaching modules and documents related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the school.

The selection of informants using the purposive sampling technique consists of key informants, namely the Head of SMP NU Putri Nawa Kartika, MS (43), who provides information related to the Merdeka Curriculum implementation policy. The main informants are two social studies teachers, namely the seventh-grade social studies teacher, NRW (24), and the eighth-grade social studies teacher, SM (36). These two teachers were chosen because they were directly involved in the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Social Studies Subjects. In addition, there are also supporting informants, namely the Deputy Head of SMP NU Putri Nawa Kartika for Curriculum, FKA (29), who provides additional information regarding the management and implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at school.

This study uses the Miles and Huberman model data analysis technique (Sugiyono, 2019) which consists of three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The data were reduced, selected, and focused on aspects of teacher understanding and implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in social studies learning. The remaining data is then presented in a descriptive narrative based on thematic categories such as teacher understanding, learning implementation, and challenges faced. Conclusions are drawn by reviewing the data to ensure that the conclusions drawn remain valid and consistent.

The validity of data in the study was ensured through the source triangulation technique by comparing the results of interviews and supporting documents (Susanto et al., 2023). Researchers compared teacher interviews with additional information from the school to get a more objective perspective. Then, researchers also matched the results of interviews with documents such as teaching modules to ensure the suitability of teacher understanding with learning guidelines. This

combination of various sources strengthens the validity of the resulting data.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

SMP NU Putri Nawa Kartika is one of *Sekolah Penggerak* in Kudus Regency, which was established in 2022. Then, in the 2022/2023 academic year, they began implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Social studies teachers in this school are classified as novice teachers. SM (26) has been teaching at SMP NU Putri Nawa Kartika since 2018, with 6 years of teaching experience to date, and has experienced curriculum changes once in the 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum. In addition, NRW (24) started joining as a social studies teacher at SMP NU Putri Nawa Kartika in February 2024 and has never experienced curriculum changes. The following is an explanation of the 3 (three) stages of the social construction process of the social studies teacher at SMP NU Putri Nawa Kartika:

### Externalization Stage

At the externalization stage, the initial adaptation process experienced by SM (36) began with obtaining information about the Merdeka Curriculum through socialization and training provided by the school and outside the school. In addition, the information absorbed by SM (36) was also through discussions with colleagues at SMP NU Putri Nawa Kartika. This was stated directly by SM (36), who stated that:

“The information I get about the Merdeka Curriculum is from training at MGMP. In addition, there is also training and information on PMM applications and learning based on the Merdeka Curriculum. But more is indeed in MGMP. Besides being given training, there are also discussions with peers who can gain knowledge from other colleagues. (interview on December 18, 2024).

Based on this statement, it can be concluded that SM (36) received information about the Merdeka Curriculum through socialization and training from several parties, including the school and outside the school. The school provides training such as using the Merdeka Teaching Platform application and learning training based on the Merdeka Curriculum. Meanwhile, information about the Merdeka Curriculum is mostly received

from outsiders, namely from MGMP (Subject Teacher Consultation), which not only provides training, but there are also discussions with colleagues in MGMP (Subject Teacher Consultation) IPS Kudus Regency. And learning training. Socialization and training made SM (36) able to interpret the Merdeka Curriculum in the initial stages of its adaptation.

The school not only provides initial training for teachers but also continues to strive to improve the competence of educators through various ongoing training. This was explained by the Vice Principal for Curriculum at SMP NU Putri Nawa Kartika, FKA (29), who strengthened the results of an interview with SM (36), who had previously explained that the school routinely held IHT (In-House Training). The following is a more complete interview with the Vice Principal for Curriculum at SMP NU Putri Nawa Kartika, FKA (29):

"The training here is like making questions, some are multiple choice, some are descriptions or assessments to explore the students, then given examples and practiced. Other training also includes giving exercises at the beginning of the school year and then continuing in the middle of the school year, but it is more about the learning process or improving technology and student activeness." (interview on December 18, 2024).

Based on this explanation, it can be concluded that schools not only focus on the initial implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum but also actively develop teachers' skills through continuous training. This training not only includes a basic understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum but also covers technical aspects such as question making, assessment, and the application of technology in learning to increase learner engagement.

SM (36) initially interpreted the Merdeka Curriculum as having a Diagnostic Assessment conducted at the beginning of the learning process, with its results used for lesson planning. The curriculum is also student-centered, with teachers acting as facilitators. However, SM (36) found that assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum was challenging because it focused more on evaluating individual students.

One of the initial challenges SM (36) faced was the condition of students at SMP NU Putri

Nawa Kartika, where most students were from Islamic boarding schools and were not allowed to bring mobile phones. This posed difficulties in integrating technology into learning, as required by the Merdeka Curriculum. Additionally, managing student engagement in the learning process was another challenge. To address these issues, SM (36) utilized the computer lab during lessons or formed groups where at least one student had access to a mobile phone. Despite these challenges, SM (36) continued adapting to ensure effective implementation of the curriculum.

The Externalization process is also reflected in the experience of NRW (24), who started her adaptation by obtaining information through socialization and training activities related to the Merdeka Curriculum provided by SMP NU Putri Nawa Kartika. The school provides socialization and training in the form of IHT (In-House Training) provided by teachers at school. In addition, in his experience at the old school, NRW (24) also received information from meeting activities conducted by all teachers to unite perceptions about the Merdeka Curriculum. The following is a complete explanation from NRW (24):

"The first time what helped me understand about the Merdeka Curriculum was through training in the form of IHT provided by the school, then in my old school there was also a meeting of all teachers whose purpose was to unite perceptions about the desired independent curriculum. At the meeting, we will also discuss and explore together about the independent curriculum." (interview on December 18, 2024).

Based on this explanation, it can be concluded that the initial adaptation of NRW (24) began when information about the Merdeka Curriculum was provided from the school in the form of IHT (In-House Training) and discussion activities with other teachers to discuss and explore the concepts of the Merdeka Curriculum. These activities made NRW (24) able to interpret the Merdeka Curriculum at the beginning of his adaptation.

The head of SMP NU Putri Nawa Kartika, MS (43), provided a statement reinforcing the results of the interview with NRW (24), who explained that the school had held IHT (In-House

Training) training as a first step for teachers in understanding and implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Through this training, the school tries to ensure that all educators have a uniform understanding and do not experience misunderstandings in implementing the curriculum.

"In this junior high school, after obtaining the decree, we immediately formed a curriculum team consisting of the deputy head of curriculum, deputy head of student affairs, including the learning committee. The learning committee may have been appointed from BBGP as the implementer in the field as a companion to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which consists of 2 teachers. For the first implementation, we started with training from the school in the form of IHT which runs for several months at the beginning of the year so that teachers have no misconceptions or misunderstandings with the Merdeka Curriculum." (interview on December 18, 2024).

Based on this explanation, it can be concluded that SMP NU Putri Nawa Kartika has a structured strategy in starting the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The formation of a curriculum team and learning committee is the first step to ensure that the implementation of this curriculum goes well. In addition, IHT, which was held for the first few months, was part of the school's efforts to guide teachers to have a clearer and more directed understanding. With assistance from BBGP (*Balai Besar Guru Penggerak*) and teachers appointed as learning committees, the school tries to provide full support in implementing this new curriculum.

NRW (24) initially perceived the Merdeka Curriculum as an interesting and distinct innovation compared to the previous curriculum. However, its optimal implementation was challenging due to the need for adaptation. Despite this, the learning methods promoted by the Merdeka Curriculum had already been practiced beforehand. In an in-depth interview, NRW (24) acknowledged the curriculum as a breakthrough but found its application difficult due to ingrained habits from the previous system. Nevertheless, NRW (24) managed to adjust, as the previously applied teaching methods aligned with the curriculum's principles of providing students with learning freedom.

NRW (24) did not face difficulties in understanding the concept of the Merdeka Curriculum but encountered challenges in classroom management. The freedom of learning promoted by the curriculum was sometimes misinterpreted by students, making it harder to maintain their focus. Additionally, a major issue was students' lack of access to mobile phones and the internet, including unstable signals, limited quotas, or unsupported devices. As a result, NRW (24) often had to provide a personal internet quota to ensure the learning process could continue.

Interviews with SM (36) and NRW (24) reveal that both undergo the externalization stage in line with Peter L. Berger's Social Construction theory. However, their adaptation to the Merdeka Curriculum differs based on their backgrounds and experiences. SM (36), previously accustomed to a structured approach in Curriculum 2013, faced challenges in transitioning to more flexible, student-centered methods. In contrast, NRW (24) did not experience significant difficulties, as his teaching practices were already aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum before its official implementation. He was familiar with project-based learning and differentiated instruction, making externalization more of a confirmation rather than a major shift.

### Objectivation Stage

At the objectivation stage, SM (36) has used the stages of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in learning, which is guided by the implementation stage of the Merdeka Curriculum. This is based on the results of in-depth interviews with SM (36), who have conducted the implementation stage even though it is still in the learning and adjustment process. This stage begins with a diagnostic assessment that is conducted before learning. Furthermore, teachers plan learning based on the results of the diagnostic assessment, including the preparation of Teaching Modules (MA), Learning Objectives (TP), and Flow of Learning Objectives (ATP). In its implementation, learning is done using a group approach.

SM (36) also understood the main values and principles of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in learning. This is based on the results of in-depth interviews with SM (36), where one of the most important principles in the Merdeka Curriculum,

according to SM (36), is to give students the freedom to develop according to their abilities. This principle is realized by prioritizing an understanding of each learner's ability to receive learning material. SM (36) emphasizes the importance of a learner-centered approach, where learning is designed to encourage students to be more active and interactive.

The objectivation process is also reflected in the experience of NRW (24), who implemented the implementation stages of the Merdeka Curriculum in learning, including Diagnostic Assessment, learning planning, and learning implementation. This is based on the results of in-depth interviews with NRW (24), who implemented the implementation stages of the Merdeka Curriculum, starting with the implementation of diagnostic assessments at the beginning of learning through non-test methods, such as indirect oral questions. Then, the planning stage used lesson plans that integrated the principle of differentiation. At the implementation stage, the differentiation of results is applied by Learner Worksheets (LKPD), while the differentiation of processes is applied by providing guidance and learning methods tailored to the needs of each group. However, material differentiation, although designed by the teacher, has not been fully implemented in classroom learning. This shows that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum stages has been running, although there are still aspects that require further development.

NRW (24) has also understood the main values and principles in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in learning. This is based on the results of in-depth interviews with NRW (24), where the values and principles interpreted by NRW (24) are students' freedom to learn and learning according to students' abilities. Freedom of learning is realized by giving space to learners to be active, independent, and develop their potential according to their abilities. Meanwhile, learning is adjusted to the learners' academic abilities, where teachers give more attention to learners who need help while giving more freedom to learners who already have high abilities.

Based on the explanation above, the objectivation process, according to Peter L. Berger's

Social Construction theory (Dharma, 2018) experienced by SM (36), and NRW (24), shows that the objectivation process in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum goes hand in hand with changes in institutional patterns in educational institutions. They conduct diagnostic assessments, planning, and differentiation-based learning not just as a personal initiative but as part of an institutionalized normative system. Diagnostic assessment, which was originally only an alternative method, has now turned into a standard that is recognized and followed collectively. The principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, such as providing freedom to learn according to students' abilities, have also turned into an objective reality that must be implemented. This process is in line with the objectivation stage of Peter L. Berger (in Dharma, 2018), where the results of externalization are institutionalized into norms that appear fixed and independent of the individuals who create them.

### **Internalization Stage**

At the internalization stage, SM (36) has integrated the values & principles of the Merdeka Curriculum into her teaching practice. This is based on the results of in-depth interviews with SM (36), who explained that the change in learning methods with the values and principles in the Merdeka Curriculum, in the form of a group differentiation method, encouraged SM (36) to switch from a teacher-centered approach, such as the lecture method, to a more learner-centered approach through group learning. SM (36) now acts as a facilitator who directs students to have opinions and adapts learning to the abilities and desires of individual students. Despite the challenges in managing diversity, SM (36) still tries to integrate the principle of learners' freedom of learning into her professional practice.

The internalization process is also reflected in the experience of NRW (24), who has integrated the values & principles of the Merdeka Curriculum into her teaching practice. This is based on the results of in-depth interviews with NRW (24), who explained that the changes in learning methods with the values and principles in the Merdeka Curriculum, in the form of deepening assessment and group differentiation learning methods, made social studies learning implemented by NRW (24)

more meaningful and students more active. NRW (24) showed an increased understanding of the assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum through deepening and independent practice. In addition, the lecture method has been reduced and replaced with group learning, ice breaking, and learning activities outside the classroom to create a more interesting atmosphere.

The integration of Merdeka Curriculum values in SM (36) teaching aligns with the internalization stage in Peter L. Berger's Social Construction theory. SM (36) has shifted from teacher-centered methods to a more flexible, student-centered approach by allowing students to choose their learning methods. This adaptation shows not only an understanding of policy demands but also an effort to internalize and apply the curriculum's principles. Meanwhile, NRW (24) is still in the transition stage of internalizing Merdeka Curriculum values. While he applies diagnostic assessments, he struggles to adjust learning strategies due to limited training and support. His adaptation process remains gradual as he moves from a static to a more dynamic teaching approach, highlighting that internalizing the Merdeka Curriculum requires time and assistance.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis using Peter L. Berger's Social Construction theory, it is concluded that three stages of social construction shape social studies teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum, namely the externalization stage, the objectivation stage, and the internalization stage. Externalization can be seen from the adaptation and changes in the mindset of teachers in understanding and implementing the curriculum. Objectivation can be seen through the institutionalization of the Merdeka Curriculum principles that have been institutionalized in learning practices. Meanwhile, internalization shows that deep meaning and changes in curriculum values occur gradually, which shape teachers' professional beliefs and practices. This research is limited to examining two social studies teachers in one school and relies on interviews and documentation, so it does not represent a broader context or classroom dynamics. Further research is

recommended to involve more participants from various schools, add observation methods, and explore other relevant theories.

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