

Perceptions on curriculum implementation: A case of early childhood in Indonesia development teachers as agents of change

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Abstract

‘Guru Penggerak’ is a term for teachers who are selected as agents of change in the implementation of the independent curriculum in Indonesia. This study aims to explore the perception of teachers as agents the independent of change in curriculum implementation in Indonesia. This study used a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological method involving 20 "guru penggerak". The results of this study show that “guru penggerak” perceive that in implementing the independent curriculum they must develop their early childhood teaching skills, innovate classroom learning, share experiences with other teachers, striving to gain support from peers and the principal, and overcome various limitations by attending various trainings. To be able to fulfil their role as change agents, they also expect to be given resource support. In light of these findings, implications for supporting teachers' practice as change agents in the implementation of the new curriculum are presented and discussed. Finally, suggestions for future practice and research are made based on the limitations of this study.

Keywords : *early childhood education, independent curriculum, perceptions on curriculum implementation, teachers as agents of change*

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Introduction

In the last decade, there has been a tendency in various countries to formulate and renew early childhood education curricula, such as in Finland (Rajala & Lipponen, 2018), the United States (McCallop, et.al., 2021), the UK (Faulkner & Coates, 2013), Australia (Garvis et al., 2021), and Indonesia (Adriany, 2022), with the aim that the new curriculum can stimulate child development, develop the skills of the 21st century, child independence, language and literacy, inclusive education, good relations with the environment, and prepare children to pursue further education (Boulden, 2021; Erdem, 2019), (Lee et al., 2013; Josephine, 2011). These changes aim to make childhood education relevant and effective in supporting children's growth and development optimally, aligning with the evolving knowledge about children, changing demands for further education, evolving learning methods, and acknowledging the crucial role of parents and communities in early childhood development (Faulkner & Coates, 2013; Garvis et al., 2021; McCallop, et.al., 2021 2021; Rajala & Lipponen, 2018)), (Mantra et al., 2022). The new curriculum embodies holistic, game-based, child activity in learning, 21st-century skills, connections with nature, project-based, inclusive (Hedges, Cullen, and Jordan, 2011), and interactions between teachers, parents, families, and children. (Barnet dan Frade, 2010). The new curriculum must involve the teacher in its implementation (Madondo, 2021; Mligo, 2016).

Teachers have a crucial role in any curriculum change (Mligo, 2016; Williams & Charles, 2008), (Adentwi, 2005). Various studies inform teachers as the primary implementers who bring the vision and principles of the curriculum into the classroom, understand, plan, and integrate new curricular elements into day-to-day learning practices (Faulkner & Coates, 2013; McCoy et al., 2020; Vikane & Høydalsvik, 2024). Teachers are responsible for monitoring new curriculum outcomes to optimize children's development. Teachers must improve their skills and work with parents to implement the new curriculum. Therefore, each emerging new curriculum teacher is an important individual to be prepared for before implementing curricula. Unfortunately, teachers do not always welcome these top-down curriculum changes. Few teachers oppose curriculum changes because they believe the government aims to diminish their autonomy, increase their teaching burden, and diminish

school support (Madondo & Tsikira, 2021a; Mligo, 2016; Vikane & Høydalsvik, 2024), (Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2015). Teachers must adjust to the new curriculum again, disregarding their existing abilities (Rahimi & Alavi, 2017). Consequently, they often adopt a shortcut by copying curricular documents from other schools, rendering the new curriculum ineffective (Ryder & Banner, 2013; Williams & Charles, 2008), (Orril & Anthony, 2003). Furthermore, the teacher's well-being and poor teacher quality contributed to the late adoption of a new curriculum (Adriany, 2022).

Various studies have recognized and proven the critical role of teachers in the implementation of the new curriculum (Katshuna & Shikalepo, 2023; Khorasgani, 2021; Madondo, 2021; Madondo & Tsikira, 2021b). The teachers' drive program in the Indonesian context emphasizes the role of teachers in implementing the new curriculum. Teachers holistically, actively, and proactively serve as learning leaders, encouraging student growth. They also serve as examples and agents of transformation within the educational ecosystem, ensuring Indonesian student profiles align with national educational goals (Rasmani et al., 2023). This concept highlights teachers' role as change agents, leaders, and managers in the learning process (Banasiak & Karczmarzyk, 2018; van der Heijden et al., 2015; Wattleton, 2004).

Teachers such as *Guru Penggerak* have been studied, for example, their role as community mobilizers, agents of change, creators of discussion and collaboration platforms, creating fun learning, and motivators in the classroom (Jannati et al., 2023). Aditya and Fatonah (2023) informed that *Guru Penggerak* had been facilitated with various pieces of training to carry out their roles well. The university's community partnership program has also helped enhance the confidence and determination of teachers to participate in *the Guru Penggerak program* (Rasmani et al., 2023). Yokoyama et al. (2023) discovered that some *Guru Penggerak* continue to need more consistent implementation of their leadership in learning.

There has been extensive research on the role of *Guru Penggerak* in implementing Indonesia's independent curriculum in primary and secondary schools (Aditiya & Fatonah, 2023; Jannati et al., 2023; Rasmani et al., 2023; Yokoyama et al., 2023). However, there needs to be more empirical evidence focusing on *Guru Penggerak* in early childhood education, especially in rural areas of Indonesia. Furthermore, there is little investigation into *Guru*

Penggerak PAUD's perceived role as agents of change, particularly from insider perspectives. The novelty of this research is to capture the experiences of 20 early childhood education teachers in their roles as both *Guru Penggerak* and agents of change in implementing the independent curriculum. The research aimed to explore their perceptions, struggles, and support for implementing the curriculum and innovating learning in the classroom. This study contributes a new perspective on the role of teachers as agents of change in early childhood education.

The main question in this study: What are the perceptions of *Guru Penggerak* as agents of change in the implementation of an independent curriculum?

Literature Review

Teacher's Position as an Agent of Change in Contemporary Childhood Education Curriculum

Fullan (2016: 52) states that the implementation of the new curriculum as an educational change will work well if teachers are not only implementers but are encouraged to become agents of change in translating the new curriculum into classroom learning practices. Teachers must be able to understand, accept and adapt the new curriculum according to student needs. They do not just follow the guidelines but do continuous professional development, share in the community and innovate in the classroom. Van der Heijden et al (2015) explain that as agents of change, teachers play an important role as agents of change in improving the quality of education. They have an important role in driving and managing change in the education system on a macro scale or the classroom learning system on a micro scale, even when the role is difficult to implement (Priestley et al., 2015). For instance, even without support for implementing changes in education or learning, a change agent teacher consistently demonstrates an innovative attitude by utilizing the various available environmental supports (Fu & Clarke, 2017).

As change agents, teachers typically exhibit a lifelong learning attitude (Mendenhall et al.,

2021; van der Heijden et al., 2015). They consistently innovate in material development and selecting innovative learning methods, foster student character development, and consistently work collaboratively to build social support (Fu & Clarke, 2017; MacLean, 2018). They teach what they know and try to teach new things from their exploration of innovative learning practices (Madondo, 2021). In implementing these ideas for change, various studies report that early childhood education teachers collaborate with parents (Madondo, 2021), other professionals, colleagues, leaders, the teacher community, and the wider community (Lukacs & Galluzzo, 2014; Pantić & Florian, 2015). Brown et al. (2021) describe five characteristics of teachers as agents of change, namely: 1) Attitude of change in knowledge, beliefs, and values; 2) Mastery of subject knowledge and/or pedagogy; 3) open-minded and always ready to develop; 4) always encouraging others to make changes; and 5) utilising effective networks and overseeing change. It demonstrates that early childhood teachers, as agents of change, play a more driving role than just actors in curriculum change (Madondo, 2021). Of course, the role of teachers as drivers has various obstacles, especially when the government or institutional leaders initiate the implementation of a new curriculum (Lukacs & Galluzzo, 2014).

Contemporary Childhood Education Curriculum in Indonesia

All PAUD institutions in Indonesia are implementing the “Merdeka PAUD Curriculum,” a refinement of the Early Childhood Education curriculum. This curriculum was launched in 2022 and is targeted to become the national curriculum by 2024. Merdeka Curriculum” is a curriculum concept introduced in Indonesia's Education Reform that focuses on freeing the curriculum from dependence on predetermined textbooks, as well as giving teachers more flexibility in designing learning that suits the needs and conditions of students in their environment (Jannah & Rasyid, 2023). The curriculum was developed with the principles of the previous curriculum, focusing on teachers as leaders in learning and environment-based learning (Husein, 2020; Rahayu et al., 2022).

The main focus of the curriculum is on developing aspects of religion, moral values, physical-motor, cognitive, social-emotional, and cultural arts. PAUD aims to foster the

development of religious attitudes, social behaviour, Pancasila values, health and physical fitness, polite language, logical and creative thinking, environment adaptation, self-confidence, and developable talents. This curriculum is implemented with a child-centred learning approach, emphasizing learning through play that is contextual, active-creative, and individualized (Qoyyimah et al., 2020; Rahayu et al., 2022). This approach is adapted from various early childhood learning approaches in the world, such as the Montessori approach in the formation of children's independence, the Reggio Emilia approach in collaborative art learning between teachers and children or children and parents, the High Scope approach, which emphasizes hands-on or experimental learning, the Bank Street approach, which emphasizes a holistic approach to children's learning with a focus on developing social-emotional skills, and the Te Whāriki approach, which emphasizes experiential learning, exploration, and children's independence (Adriany, 2022).

Implementing learning principles in early childhood education institutions, such as Finland, prioritizes the development of children's creativity (Korhonen et al., 2023). However, it is crucial to acknowledge that when adopting these principles, it is important to consider Indonesia's distinctive cultural, social, and educational contexts, leading to adaptation rather than outright adoption. For example, the application of the Montessori approach varies significantly between Indonesia and Finland. In Indonesia, teachers typically receive informal Montessori training, whereas, in Finland, they undergo formal Montessori training at specific institutions that cater to Montessori school directors. In terms of cultural context, implementing Montessori in Indonesia will likely be tailored to local cultural values, such as family traditions and religious beliefs (Qadafi et al., 2023). On the other hand, the Montessori approach in Finland may align with local cultural values of equality, freedom, and participation while emphasizing universal Montessori principles (Mertala, 2022; OECD, 2015).

The comparison between the global early childhood education curriculum and the Indonesian early childhood education curriculum offers both challenges and opportunities (OECD, 2015). The challenges include needing more qualified personnel to understand, implement, and improve the curriculum. This issue is prevalent in many countries undergoing curriculum reform, but it is particularly acute in Indonesia, where many early childhood

education teachers lack formal training in children's education. They often have only high school diplomas and view early childhood education as a part-time or transitional job. Furthermore, low salaries and a lack of respect for the early childhood education profession hinder the adoption of the new curriculum, which calls for various content and pedagogical changes (Adriany, 2022; OECD, 2015).

Method

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach. The approach in this study is phenomenology because this research approach is suitable for describing the meaning of individual life experiences in a phenomenon (Finlay, 2012). Leedy and Omrod (2016) also added that when there is insufficient information on a topic, qualitative methodology with a phenomenological approach can explore the parameters of a particular phenomenon according to the personal experiences of participants (van Manen & van Manen, 2021). Researchers use this approach for data collection and analysis to obtain in-depth information about the perceptions of PAUD teachers about the role of driving teachers as agents of change. Researchers analyze the results of individual interviews to gain knowledge about the unique experiences of PAUD teachers and collective perceptions (Wertz, 2005).

Context Research and Participants

The research was conducted at the *Sekolah Penggerak* at the PAUD institution level. There are four Sekolah Penggerak on Nias Island, Indonesia, and two schools on Simeulue Island, which are remote areas from the provincial capitals in North Sumatra and Aceh, Indonesia. All of these schools have been the pioneers of Sekolah Penggerak since 2021. The sample schools were selected based on the schools' willingness to serve as research sites.

Furthermore, the researcher selected the *Guru Penggerak* from each school based on having been a *Guru Penggerak* for two years, with 20 willing participants. From each school, five *Guru Penggerak* were selected on a volunteer basis, where teachers who were designated participants expressed their willingness. The researcher explained the purpose of the study to *Guru Penggerak* before each participant expressed their willingness to participate through the online consent form. The researcher assured the participants that their names would be masked to protect their identity and confidentiality.

Data Collection Technique

The research was conducted at the *Sekolah Penggerak* at the PAUD institution level. There are four *Sekolah Penggerak* on Nias Island, Indonesia, and two schools on Simeulue Island, in remote areas. Data collection began with a 90-minute online group interview (FGD) to obtain data relating to 1) the willingness of *Guru Penggerak* to be agents of change in the new curriculum, 2) how *Guru Penggerak* implement classroom learning with the new curriculum, and 3) how they get support from colleagues when innovating in the classroom. The interview topics were sent to the participants before the FGD through WhatsApp messages. The interviews were recorded via Zoom meeting, and the results were transcribed. Unique points from the FGD results were explored with one session of face-to-face individual interviews. Each session lasted between 10 and 15 minutes. An interview guide was distributed before the interview began. We have conducted triangulation by asking several teachers who are willing to be interviewed individually after the FGD. There are 7 teachers who are willing to be interviewed via telephone. The results of the individual interviews have been analyzed and included in the findings.

Data Analysis

This study used thematic analysis as an appropriate analytical tool to identify themes from the interview data regarding the role of “*Guru Penggerak*” as agent of change in the implementation of the independent curriculum in Indonesia. After extracting themes from

the data, the process was repeated to ensure comprehensive verification of all data sources using triangulation. The triangulation procedure utilized member checking. The researcher ensured that all Indonesian transcriptions of the data from the individual and group interviews were returned to the participants, guaranteeing thorough comprehension of the data. Every participant thoroughly examined the transcriptional and submitted them, regardless of whether they made any revisions. or not. The transcriptions underwent meticulous analysis to ascertain the presence of repeating themes, hence facilitating the emergence of natural themes and categories. The researchers demonstrated their commitment to the study by ceasing coding and analysis once they reached the saturation threshold, indicating that no new themes were emerging from the data (Urquhart, 2013). In order to analyze, we adhered to the procedures described by Widodo (2014) as follows:

1. Make sure to listen to the recording multiple times.
2. Please transcribe the given information in the appropriate format.
3. Analyze the data by carefully examining the words and sentences of each participant.
4. Determine if the data aligns with the participants' intentions.
5. Enhance the credibility of the data by seeking feedback from the participants on its interpretation.

Through all the tentative themes, we finally identified overarching themes and subthemes including (1) improving teaching skills (enhances the proficiency of teachers in designing, executing, and assessing learning activities, as well as in comprehending the unique traits of each child), (2) fostering innovation in the classroom (training in many innovative methods for planning, executing, and assessing learning in order to make changes in the classroom), (3) sharing knowledge and experiences with other teachers (discuss various good practices. collaborating in the classroom, and giving each other advice to create meaningful learners), (4) getting support (the support of peers, leaders, and parents), (4) overcoming limitations (organizing schedules, used a religious approach, and adapt to various learning technologies and (5) expecting facilities (school facilities and infrastructure adn reduce the intensity of online training)

Result

Through analyzing interviews with “guru penggerak” about their perceptions of the implementation of the independent curriculum and their roles as activists, five main themes were identified: improving teaching skills, fostering innovation in the classroom, sharing knowledge and experiences with other teachers, getting support, overcoming limitations, and expecting facilities.

Improving Teaching Skills for Early Childhood

As teachers who live far from the provincial capital, teachers admitted that they rarely have opportunities to improve their knowledge as teachers. Due to financial reasons, being unable to leave work because there are no substitute teachers, or being unable to leave their families for long periods, teachers admitted that they feel left behind by other early childhood education teachers. They admitted that joining the *Guru Penggerak* was to improve their teaching skills. One participant said that:

“I am interested in joining the teacher mobilizer program because it is a government program. Secondly, it improves our quality of life because it is difficult for us who live on the island to go to the city for training. If we join this program, the facilitators will come here to share their knowledge with us (P. 4-FGD).”

In addition to improving teaching skills, one teacher acknowledged that implementing the independent curriculum could improve their knowledge of children.

“At first, I did not understand that every child learns differently. Through this program, I gained new knowledge. I cannot serve every child in the same way (P.7-interview).”

Teachers generally recognize that the implementation of an independent curriculum in early childhood education units enhances the proficiency of teachers in designing, executing, and assessing learning activities, as well as in comprehending the unique traits of each child.

The facilitators formally assigned by the government provide regular training on curriculum implementation to them. Despite the activities being conducted online, participants are entitled to remuneration for the facilitators, transportation expenses, certificates, or honorariums.

Innovation in the Classroom

Teachers also admit they are more willing to innovate with the independent curriculum. They feel more free to develop learning in the classroom because they can organize the material in one year according to the child's ability. They can complete the material more flexibly than in the previous curriculum. They had to complete the material for the foundation phase with attention to the elements of religion and ethics, teak and literacy in one or two years. Teachers can concentrate on the elements children need according to their abilities. One of the teachers explained:

“I always practice and innovate with the new knowledge I get. Now I prefer to encourage or help children to be independent in learning, for example I am more patient in waiting for children to work on their projects. I enjoy it more if children show a happy attitude when learning. Now children often learn with their own interests. I only give class rules with the agreement of the children, for example, throwing garbage in its place. Student character building is more important to me (P. 19-FGD)”

Teachers admit to using digital resources such as videos displayed on laptops and LCDs for teaching.

“We used to make more speeches in front of the children. We were busy keeping the children in order so they would not run around. Now, we focus more on how children can learn. I provide learning according to the child's wishes using videos. The videos can be tutorials or stories. I made some videos, and some were taken on YouTube. For example, the video drawing activity is about how to draw various images similar to the object to be drawn. If a child does not want to draw, I allow him to do other things; for example, he wants to play

puzzles (P. 2-interview).

Another participant interrupted,

“I always approach the children, and I also learn to use electronic tools in learning or natural materials in the environment around the school to save learning funds” (P. 9-FGD).

However, when innovating in the classroom, teachers admit they still experience challenges from teachers, students, facilities and infrastructure, and parents' expectations. One teacher said:

“In class, there are always children who are difficult to manage, shy children and difficult to make friends with their friends; the classroom is also not spacious; there is no LCD, so if you use a laptop, not all children can see (P.11-FGD).”

Another participant added that:

“It is important for parents that their children can read, count and write. Meanwhile, the child prefers to learn something other than counting and reading. As a teacher, I have to be motivated; for example, I teach it through various games or ice-breaking (P. 5-interview).”

The teachers admitted that they were educated to make changes in the classroom with various innovations in learning planning, implementation and evaluation. These innovations include [specific types of innovations]. In planning, teachers practice making learning modules and media. In implementing learning, teachers are trained to implement differentiated and project-based learning. In assessment, teachers are trained to use portfolio-based assessment and assessment with various sources, such as assessments from parents.

Sharing Knowledge and Experience with Other Teachers

As *Guru Pengegrak*, they receive systematic and planned strengthening of curriculum implementation competencies from the government, so they must share their knowledge and experience with other teachers from their schools and other neighbouring schools. Sharing

with peers is done in school meetings. In these forums, they convey innovations tested in their respective classes. One participant commented:

“Usually, I share the results of training or classroom practice trials during meetings with fellow teachers. I suggest what should be considered and followed up by the principal and classroom teachers, and support fellow teachers in finding learning media on YouTube or encouraging other teachers to participate in certain training through the online platform of independent teaching (P.1-interview).”

Some participants share their knowledge and experience in teacher-learning groups and teacher-learning communities. Teacher learning groups typically involve only one school. Teacher learning communities consist of teachers from several schools implementing the independent curriculum. The teachers' learning group shares knowledge and experiences every day after the lesson. The learning community schedules knowledge and experience sharing once every 15 days. One of the participants shared her story:

“In our school, we have learning community activities in the form of reflection every 15 days. We share our experiences with other teachers, especially about good practices (P.11-FGD)”

There are three strategies for sharing knowledge and experience that participants always use. First, discuss various good practices. Second, collaborating in the classroom, and third, giving each other advice to create meaningful learners. However, some teachers admitted to experiencing some difficulties in sharing knowledge and experiences, including a low level of understanding of learning models and the diversity of children's characteristics, teachers' need to understand the independent curriculum and difficulties in determining meeting schedules. One participant shared her experience in sharing:

“Sorry, there is one teacher who is under our supervision. I always need help in conveying good practices to him. I have often explained it to him, but he has not understood it. But I still convey it even though it is not well understood (P.19-FGD) ”

Another participant interrupted.

“Some teachers do not understand the independent curriculum; they still teach using the lecture model or assignments from textbooks, so they find it difficult to understand when sharing experiences (P.6-interview).”

Peer support

As *Guru Penggerak* implemented the independent curriculum, the participants admitted they needed the support of peers, leaders, and parents to carry out their duties. *Guru Penggerak* received peer support through collaborative good practices, suggestions, and opportunities to share. The lead teachers admitted that they could share their good practices with their colleagues in the classroom. The participants commented:

“To get the support of friends, I always set a good example for other teachers to apply; for example, I first completed the teaching module. Then other colleagues can read, make suggestions, or adopt (P. 4-interview).”

“Sometimes we collaborate to improve our understanding of good practices that other teachers have done (P.11-FGD).”

“Peer support is a cornerstone of our professional development. Through this support, we can effectively transfer our knowledge to other teachers and receive constructive feedback on our practices (P. 16-FGD).”

“I always convey good practices and learning needs to the principal. Yes, sometimes the needs are met, but sometimes they are not. But I only get support if I convey it (P.15-FGD)”

“Parents play a crucial role in their child's development. I can better understand the child's progress by encouraging parents to share evidence of their child's learning at home, such as videos of their activities. This collaboration with parents has proven to be invaluable

(P. 10-FGD).”

Overcoming limitations

The location of Nias Island and Semelue Island, far from the provincial capital, causes many limitations for *Guru penggerak* as agents of change in implementing the independent curriculum. For example, sharing activities must be carried out online due to needing help organizing schedules. Independent training or online discussions cause teachers difficulty getting stable internet access and laptops supporting online training activities. However, participants never submit to these limitations. One participant explained what he did to keep sharing in online training or discussions:

“Sometimes the internet network is unstable, and the lights often go out. There is also a need for more facilities and infrastructure, such as laptops, that support it. I usually borrow other people's laptops and visit places where the signal is more stable, such as the mountains; the important thing is that sharing activities can be carried out. The participants can use their cellphones, but I have to use a laptop to be able to share the material (P.17-FGD).”

The lack of teachers' honorariums has discouraged some teachers from participating in sharing activities conducted by teacher mobilizers. Participants in the sharing activities complained that they had no money to buy credit and no laptop. *Guru Penggerak* used a religious approach to encourage teachers to participate in activities to increase their knowledge and experience with the independent curriculum.

“Indeed, kindergarten teachers' salaries are meager. I have experienced it myself, but I always tell the teachers to do it happily and get Allah's reward. The honorarium is just an addition (P.14-FGD)”

Guru Penggerak also needs more mastery of IT. They need to become more familiar with the use of IT, such as laptops, the internet, or projectors. However, their choice to become *Guru Penggerak* mobilizers forces them to adapt to various learning technologies.

“As Guru Penggerak, I feel responsible for the children, my peers and other teachers who want to know about the independent curriculum. I always do self-training or regular discussions in study groups. I share my little knowledge with other teachers. For example, I have tried a learning model that works to make children learn. So I will share the method through discussion or independent training (P.20-FGD).”

In an individual interview, one of the teachers added:

“Even though we are in a remote area, we still try to carry out our duties as Leading Teachers by practicing using learning technology independently or in groups (P.7-interview).”

Resource Support

Participants acknowledged that there had been a lot of government support in educating them, such as *Guru Penggerak*, to implement the independent curriculum. They have been trained by facilitators who understand the independent curriculum, receive assistance in implementation, and receive rewards for each training activity they participated in. However, this support is still limited to increasing the capacity of *Guru Penggerak*, while implementing the new curriculum requires much support for facilities and infrastructure. The limitations of school facilities and infrastructure have always been a control for participants in applying the learning theories they have received from facilitators. For example, the school internet network, laptops and projectors do not support learning using IT. All still use teachers' facilities. One participant suggested:

“In every driving school, good IT facilities are provided, so that teachers are easier in the learning process (P. 16-FGD)”

“Hopefully, in the future, the government will provide more learning resources and provide financial assistance for learning progress (P. 9-FGD).”

Teacher welfare also needs to be improved to keep pace with the high demands of the

independent curriculum on teachers' working hours.

“Teachers' welfare must be a concern for the government because now teachers must prepare many lesson plans, learning that caters to children's differences, and assessments according to children's abilities. Kindergarten teachers' salaries are still very low (P. 8-FGD).”

Although teachers admitted that the training could improve their knowledge and experience, some teachers hoped that the government would reduce the intensity of online training so as not to interfere with teachers carrying out learning tasks in the classroom.

“The government is expected to reduce the burden on teachers by not implementing Zoom every month because it can interfere with learning in the classroom (P.3 interview).”

Discussion

The participants acknowledged that implementing the independent curriculum gave them better early childhood education knowledge and experience. The independent curriculum better prepares them to implement the curriculum according to the standards set by the government. They have been required to be active learners before implementing the classroom curriculum according to their position as *Guru Penggerak* or agents in curriculum change. The Indonesian government has realized this by designing *Guru Penggerak* program as a pilot teacher in implementing the new curriculum. This study is in line with the research of Priestley et al. (2015) and van der Heijden et al. (2015), who state that teachers hold a crucial position as agents of change in improving the quality of education and play an important role in driving and managing changes in the education system on a macro scale or the classroom learning system on a micro scale, even when these roles are very difficult to implement.

Participants, as *Guru Penggerak*, are not just teachers but also agents of change. They

make classroom learning innovations through systematic training that they follow continuously. They share their innovations in discussion forums as part of their duties. In the classroom, they share innovations through training or collaborative teaching practices. Teachers position themselves as agents of change by always making individual learning innovations and utilizing available facilities and infrastructure (Fu & Clarke, 2017). They demonstrate lifelong learning.(Mendenhall et al., 2021; van der Heijden et al., 2015). They not only pass on what they learned from the training but also share innovative learning practices that they have piloted in the classroom (Madondo, 2021).

Teachers' efforts to improve their teaching skills are related to the learning innovations they implement in the classroom. Master Teachers have endeavoured to improve their teaching skills to innovate learning in the classroom. They attended various trainings and sought new experiences to increase their confidence in innovating more creative learning methods. For example, a teacher, for example, gives students more freedom to complete their assignments rather than helping them to finish their assignments immediately. They believe that students' character building in learning is more important than completing assignments on time as mandated in the new curriculum. The findings of this study support the opinion that one of the characteristics of teachers as agents of change is readiness to change in terms of knowledge, beliefs and values (Brown et al., 2021; Fullan, 2020: 52).

Guru Penggerak also tries to reduce dependence on the government to develop teaching materials by designing learning modules independently or in groups. The government provides teachers with the flexibility to design learning that meets the needs and conditions of students in their environment (Jannah & Rasyid, 2023). They have taken a leadership role in learning and implementing environment-based learning (Husein, 2020; Rahayu et al., 2022). They have reduced their complaints about the limitations of implementing the new curriculum. Lead teachers have made efforts to implement learning with child-centred, contextual, play-based, active-creative, individual, and group approaches, as well as develop the characteristics of Indonesian childhood education that prioritize religious and moral development (Qoyyimah et al., 2020; Rahayu et al., 2022; Qadafi et al., 2023). They emphasize experiential learning by providing children with opportunities to explore and build independent character without limiting their freedom in learning (Adriany, 2022; Mertala,

2022; OECD, 2015).

Guru Penggerak also built social support by sharing their good practices, collaborating with other teachers in the classroom, or conveying things to the school principal. *Guru Penggerak* realizes that social support is critical to their roles as change agents in implementing the new curriculum. They try to get parents' support in dealing with children's learning or assessment issues. The research findings support previous studies by researchers, including Fu & Clarke (2017) and Mac Lean (2018), who reported that teachers who are change agents must build social support. They must also collaborate with parents (Madondo, 2021). They always try to establish relationships with professionals, peers, leaders, the teacher community, and the wider community (Lukacs & Galluzzo, 2014; Pantić & Florian, 2015). This suggests that *Guru Penggerak* has fulfilled the roles of classroom teacher and peer teacher in implementing the independent curriculum and overcoming barriers to performing these roles (Lukacs & Galluzzo, 2014).

The attitudes of sharing knowledge and experiences with teachers and seeking support are interconnected. Lead teachers believe that sharing experiences with other teachers is effective for improving teaching skills. Teachers recognise that community activities provide an opportunity to reflect on their learning innovations. Sharing experiences can be a means for the lead teachers to gain support from principals, supervisors and other teachers. *Guru Penggerak* have endeavoured to develop skills and implement innovations, overcoming limitations such as lack of resources, time or policy support. However, participants in this study still recognised these limitations as barriers to implementing more effective learning practices. They are hopeful for improved facilities, such as IT facilities, learning resources and improved teacher welfare. These findings corroborate research findings that explain that teachers need resource support in improving effective learning (Brown et al., 2021; van der Heijden et al., 2015).

Overall, this study shows that *Guru Penggerak* have realised that improving their teaching skills can promote innovation in the classroom. However, innovation requires the support of various parties and the availability of facilities and resources. Teachers believe that good curriculum implementation must be accompanied by better learning facilities. Thus, improving the quality of early childhood education cannot rely solely on individual teachers

as agents of change but must be supported by a broader and more comprehensive education system.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the research findings, the perception of the role of teachers as agents of change is to improve teaching skills for early childhood and make innovations in terms of planning, implementing and evaluating learning. Teachers share knowledge and experiences with other teachers through discussions of various good practices, collaborating in class, and giving advice to each other in order to create meaningful learning. Teachers receive support from peers, leaders and parents in their roles. Teachers share facilities such as laptops, internet or projectors and expect support from the central and local governments. This research contributes a new perspective on the role of teachers as agents of change in early childhood education. The small number of samples in this study means that these findings cannot be generalized to the population of *Guru Penggerak* living in other rural areas.

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