



Persepsi Guru Terhadap Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka Di Wilayah 3T: Studi Kasus SD Negeri Juanga, Pulau Morotai

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Abstract

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This study aims to uncover teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the 3T (Underdeveloped and Remote Areas) region, focusing on a case study of Juanga Public Elementary School on Morotai Island. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were obtained through in-depth interviews, non-participatory observation, and document analysis. The results indicate that teachers have positive perceptions of the Independent Curriculum because it provides flexibility in learning and is oriented towards student character development. However, limited training, infrastructure, and resources hinder its implementation. A key finding of this study is the utilization of local potential as a curriculum adaptation strategy, which has proven effective in supporting project-based learning in remote areas. This confirms that the success of education policy implementation is determined not only by national policies but also by teachers' creativity in managing local resources. This research contributes to the development of education policy implementation theory and provides practical recommendations for the government in designing more contextual training programs for teachers in the 3T (Underdeveloped and Remote Areas) region.

Keywords: *Independent Curriculum; Teacher Perceptions; 3T Regions; Education Implementation*

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INTRODUCTION

The transformation of education in Indonesia has entered a new phase with the implementation of the Independent Curriculum by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. This curriculum is a response to the challenges of 21st-century education, which demands adaptive, contextual learning, and a focus on developing students' character and competencies. The Independent Curriculum is designed to provide educational units and teachers with flexibility in developing operational curricula, designing differentiated learning, and implementing authentic, project-based assessments, enabling students to develop according to their individual potential and needs (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

One of the main principles of the Independent Curriculum is granting pedagogical autonomy to teachers. Teachers are no longer positioned merely as

transmitters of material, but rather as facilitators of student-focused learning. Therefore, teachers' perceptions of this policy are a key factor in its successful implementation at the educational unit level. Teachers with positive perceptions tend to be more open and prepared to face new pedagogical challenges, while negative perceptions can create psychological and technical barriers to curriculum implementation (Sunarni & Karyono H., 2023).

However, the success of curriculum implementation cannot be separated from the geographic, social, and cultural context in which education is implemented. In the 3T (Disadvantaged, Frontier, and Outermost) regions, various limitations such as internet access, infrastructure, digital literacy, and minimal teacher training and mentoring remain major obstacles. Research conducted by (Leasa et al., 2023) in outermost areas shows that teachers face difficulties in developing teaching modules and implementing differentiated learning due to minimal technical support and a lack of curriculum literacy. On the other hand, a study by (Suryaningrum, 2023) confirms that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in remote areas requires policy interventions based on local needs so that it is not merely an administrative burden, but truly contextual and impactful on learning.

Juanga Elementary School, located on Morotai Island, North Maluku Province, is one of the elementary schools in the 3T region that has begun implementing the Independent Curriculum. The remote geographic context, limited infrastructure, and low frequency of training make the teachers' experience in implementing this curriculum unique and challenging. This study aims to explore teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at Juanga Elementary School and identify local challenges and potentials that influence its successful implementation.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the study of education policy implementation in the context of remote areas, a topic rarely explored. Most previous studies, such as those by Rahmawati et al., 2023 and Athifah Muzharifah et al., 2023, have focused on urban areas or leading schools. Therefore, there is a research gap in the literature regarding how the Independent Curriculum is perceived and implemented by teachers in elementary schools in the 3T (third-territory) regions, which face structural and systemic limitations.

To understand this phenomenon, this research is grounded in a relevant theoretical framework. This framework combines perception theory (Prof & Suneja, n.d.) and the concept of education policy implementation (Fullan, 2019). Perception theory helps explain how teachers' experiences, attitudes, and motivations influence their views on the Independent Curriculum. Meanwhile, the concept of policy implementation provides perspective on how structural factors, institutional support, and local context influence policy translation at the school level. By combining these two foundations, the research can provide a more comprehensive analysis of the dynamics of curriculum implementation in the 3T (United, 3T) regions.

Based on this framework, this research focuses on answering several main questions. The research problem formulations are: (1) What are teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at Juanga Public Elementary School? (2) What are the main challenges faced by teachers in

implementing the Independent Curriculum in the 3T region? (3) What factors support the successful implementation of the curriculum? In line with these problem formulations, this research aims to: (1) describe teachers' perceptions of the Independent Curriculum; (2) identify implementation challenges at Juanga Public Elementary School; and (3) explore supporting factors that influence the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the 3T region.

The practical benefit of this research is that it provides an empirical overview that can be used by policymakers, regional education offices, and teacher training institutions in designing strategies for mentoring, training, and evaluating the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum that are more contextual, inclusive, and sustainable for schools in the 3T (third- and third-most remote) regions. Therefore, this research is not only academically significant but also strategically important in supporting the transformation of Indonesian education towards equity and justice.

To clarify the direction of this research, a conceptual framework was developed that illustrates the relationship between the context of the 3T region, teacher perceptions, and the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at Juanga Public Elementary School. This framework emphasizes that limited infrastructure, resources, and institutional support in the 3T region influence teacher perceptions, which in turn determine the success of curriculum implementation. Furthermore, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum has various impacts, both in the form of challenges and local potential that can be optimized. A visualization of this conceptual framework is presented in Figure 1.

Research framework: Teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the independent curriculum in the 3T region

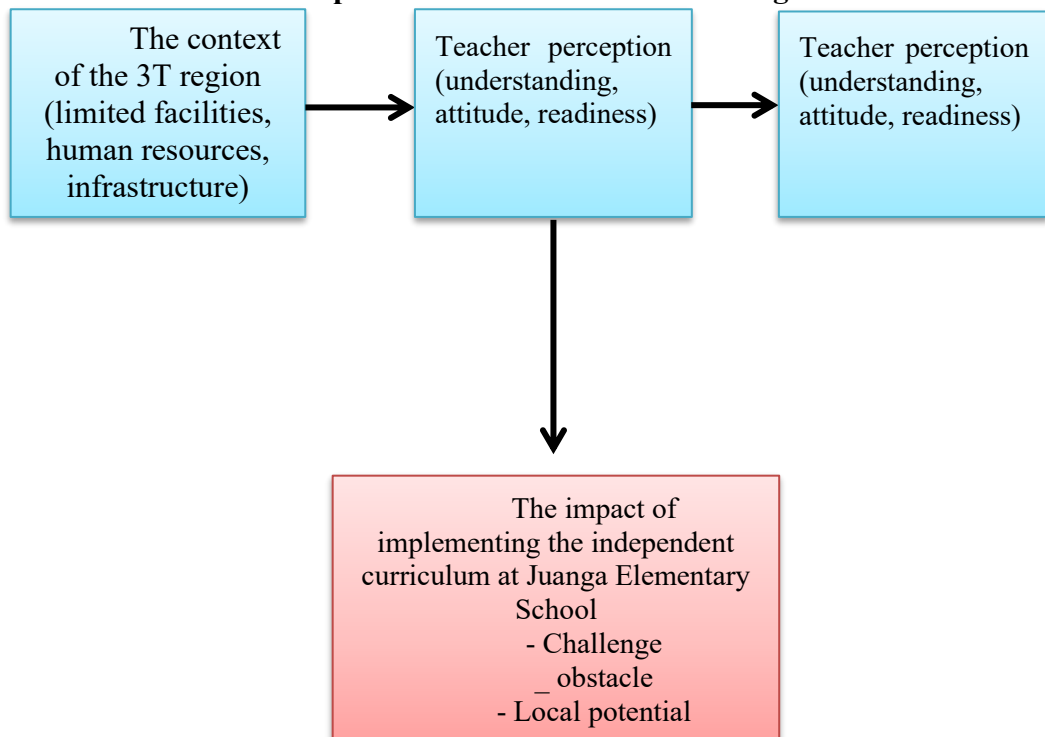


Figure 1. Flowmap of the Thought Framework

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, aiming to provide an in-depth description of teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum and the challenges they face in elementary schools in the 3T (Third-T) region. This approach was chosen because it is appropriate for understanding the phenomenon contextually and subjectively through the perspectives of participants. Data were collected through direct interactions with key informants, allowing researchers to obtain a comprehensive picture of the reality of curriculum implementation in the field (A. Ang'ana & Walter J. Ongeti, 2023).

The research location was Juanga Public Elementary School, located in South Morotai District, Morotai Island Regency, North Maluku Province. This school was selected purposively because it represents the characteristics of the 3T (United Territories) region, namely areas with limited infrastructure, educational resources, and access to teacher training. The subjects in this study were teachers teaching in grades I, II, IV, and V, as well as the principal and vice principal in charge of curriculum, who were directly involved in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, non-participatory observation, and documentation. Interviews were used to explore teachers' perceptions, understanding, and experiences in implementing the curriculum (Moloeng Lexy, 2017). Observations were conducted to directly observe classroom learning practices and interactions between teachers and students. Meanwhile, documentation was used to supplement the data through a review of teaching materials, learning implementation reports, and the operational curriculum documents of educational units (KOSP) used in schools.

The research instrument consisted of a semi-structured interview guide based on teacher perception indicators, including understanding of the Independent Curriculum, attitudes toward policy changes, and technical and non-technical challenges in implementation. Additionally, an observation sheet was developed to record implementation aspects such as learning strategies, use of teaching modules, and assessment methods used.

This research procedure was carried out through several systematic stages, namely:

1. Preparation Stage
 - Prepare research designs and instruments (interview guidelines & observation sheets).
 - Determine participants using purposive sampling techniques.
 - Coordinate with the school for research permits.
2. Data Collection Stage
 - Conduct in-depth interviews with teachers, the principal, and the vice principal.
 - Conduct non-participatory observations of the learning process.

- Collect supporting documents, such as teaching materials and learning implementation reports.
- 3. Data Analysis Stage
 - Data was analyzed interactively according to the Miles & Huberman (1994) model through data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions.
- 4. Data Verification and Validation Stage
 - Data validation is conducted through technical and source triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing.
 - This aims to ensure the validity, consistency, and credibility of the research findings.

The following table presents a summary of the research procedure flow:

Table 1. Research Procedure Flow

Stage	Main Activities	Outputs
Preparation	Instrument development, participant selection, permit coordination	Instrument ready to use, participants identified
Data collection	Interviews, observations, documentation	Qualitative data was collected
Data analysis	Reduction, presentation, drawing conclusions	Initial research findings
Verification	Triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing	Tested data is valid and credible

Data were analyzed using interactive model analysis techniques from (Dr. Basuki, 2019), which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction was carried out by sorting relevant information, grouping findings by theme, and simplifying complex narratives. The reduced data were presented in the form of narrative excerpts and a thematic matrix to facilitate interpretation. The final stage was drawing tentative conclusions and being repeatedly verified based on the consistency of findings and triangulation validation between data sources.

To ensure data validity (trustworthiness), a strategy of technical and source triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing was used. This was done to ensure that data interpretation not only reflected the researcher's perspective but was also contextually valid according to the participants (Shenton, 2004).

To strengthen validity, this study uses the principles of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability as suggested by (Nowell et al., 2017). Validity in qualitative research is determined not only by data collection techniques, but also by the researcher's in-depth engagement with the research context and efforts at critical reflection throughout the research process (Lub, 2015).

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Results

The results of this study were obtained through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis with five teachers, one principal, and one vice

principal for curriculum at Juanga Public Elementary School, Morotai Island. The data obtained were analyzed and grouped into three main themes: (1) Teacher perceptions of the Independent Curriculum, (2) Implementation challenges, and (3) Supporting factors for curriculum implementation.

1. Teachers' Perceptions of the Independent Curriculum

Most teachers understand that the Independent Curriculum provides flexibility in learning, but still need further guidance. One teacher stated:

"We like the Independent Curriculum because it gives us the freedom to choose materials according to our students' needs. But we're still confused about how to create learning modules that are appropriate for our school's situation." (Fourth-grade teacher, interview, 2025)

2. Challenges in Implementation

Teachers face limited learning resources and a lack of technical training. This is reflected in the following statement:

"Training on the Independent Curriculum rarely comes to our school. So, we just learn on our own from the internet, even though the internet connection here is often problematic." (Grade V teacher, interview, 2025)

3. Utilization of Local Potential

Despite the challenges, teachers strive to leverage local resources to support project-based learning. One teacher said:

"We've used natural materials from around the school, such as coconut leaves and bamboo, to make science teaching aids. The children become more enthusiastic because they feel connected to their own environment." (Grade II teacher, interview, 2025)

Classroom observations indicate that teachers have attempted to implement differentiated learning despite limited resources. In fourth-grade science, the teacher divided students into three groups based on reading ability and conceptual understanding.

- The first group, consisting of students with high abilities, was asked to read a science text from the teaching module and create a simple summary.
- The second group, with average abilities, was guided by the teacher to identify images and answer supporting questions.
- The third group, with low abilities, was given more intensive assistance using simple teaching aids in the form of pictures of local plants.

Teachers also adjust the form of assessment by asking students to present the results of group work according to their ability level.

Another observation of second-grade mathematics lessons showed that teachers used concrete objects from the surrounding environment, such as small stones and shells, to teach addition concepts. This strategy adapts learning to the local context while addressing the limitations of official textbooks and teaching aids.

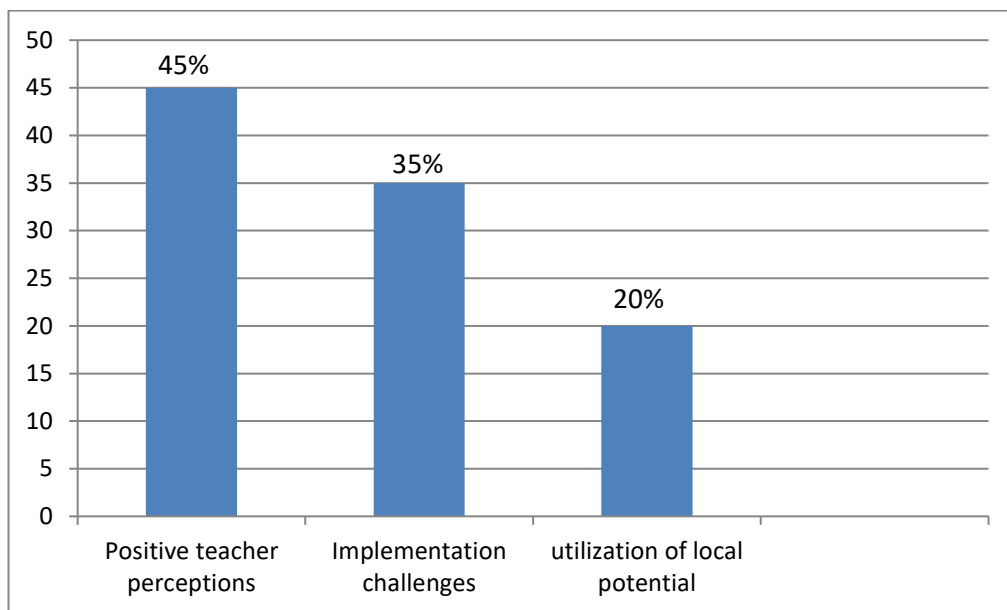


Figure 2. Themes of the Results of the Analysis of Teachers' Perceptions on the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum at Juanga Public Elementary School

Table 2. Summary of Research Findings Based on Themes and Indicators

Main Theme	Key Indicators	Key Findings
Perception of Curriculum	Understanding curriculum content	The majority of teachers understand the general concept of Independent Learning, although they have not yet delved into the technical aspects such as differentiated learning.
	Attitudes towards new policies	Teachers welcomed the curriculum changes positively, but felt the need for intensive support.
Implementation challenges	Facilities and infrastructure	Limited learning media, internet access, and other supporting facilities.
	Training and mentoring	The lack of practical training causes teachers to be confused in compiling teaching modules.
Supporting factors for implementation	School commitment	The principal actively encourages the implementation of the Independent Curriculum and facilitates discussions between teachers..
	Local potential	Teachers try to relate teaching materials to the local context (culture and surrounding environment).

The research results show that teachers at Juanga Public Elementary School have a fairly good conceptual understanding of the Independent Curriculum, particularly regarding its objectives and basic principles. However, their technical understanding of the implementation of differentiated learning, diagnostic assessments, and the development of teaching modules remains limited. Teachers generally rely on teaching materials from the Ministry of Education and Culture's digital platform, but experience technical challenges due to limited internet access and digital devices.

Regarding attitudes, most teachers welcomed the flexibility offered by the Independent Curriculum, but felt the need for ongoing training and technical assistance. In practice, teachers faced challenges such as a lack of hands-on training, limited planning time, and limited learning resources. Nevertheless, a collaborative spirit among teachers and the support of the principal were internal strengths that helped sustain the adaptation process to this new curriculum.

Discussion

The results of this study support the findings (A. Ang'ana & Walter J. Ongeti, 2023) that individual perceptions of new policies are strongly influenced by local context and direct experience in implementation. Teachers at Juanga Public Elementary School showed enthusiasm for the spirit of change in the Independent Curriculum, but structural challenges in the 3T region hampered optimal implementation. The findings of this study align with the results of a study (Leasa et al., 2023) which showed that teachers in the Nias Islands region face similar challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum, particularly limited training and access to learning resources. However, in contrast to the results of the study at Juanga Elementary School, teachers in Nias emphasized digital infrastructure constraints, while teachers in Morotai relied more on utilizing local potential as a project-based learning solution. This indicates the existence of unique adaptation patterns in each 3T region.

Furthermore, a study by (Ramadhan et al., 2025) in the border areas of Kalimantan confirmed that teachers' perceptions are strongly influenced by local government support. In Morotai, institutional support remains limited, yet teachers nonetheless took the initiative to develop media based on their local environment. This comparison demonstrates that while teachers in the 3T (United Territories) face similar structural barriers, adaptation strategies can differ depending on local socio-cultural and geographic characteristics.

This finding also supports a study (Sunarni & Karyono H., 2023), which suggested that principal support plays a significant role in building a school culture open to change. At Juanga Public Elementary School, the principal encourages teachers to engage in regular discussions and integrate local values into their learning, an ideal practice within the context of the Independent Curriculum.

Thus, this research provides a new contribution in the form of emphasizing the role of local potential as one of the keys to the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum in remote areas, something that has not been discussed explicitly in previous research.

Although teachers at Juanga Elementary School expressed positive perceptions of the Independent Curriculum, technical implementation practices

remained limited. This situation can be explained by Fullan's (2019) theory of educational policy implementation, which emphasizes that educational change requires not only top-down policies and instructions but also support for individual capacity and the school ecosystem. In the Morotai context, although teachers understand the urgency of change and are motivated to adapt, they face barriers in the capacity dimension, particularly limited resources, minimal training, and a lack of institutional support.

In other words, teachers' positive perceptions have not yet fully translated into technical practice because the supporting ecosystem is not yet optimal. This aligns with Fullan's findings that policy implementation requires a balance between understanding, technical skills, and environmental support. These findings emphasize that policy interventions in the 3T (third-to-third) regions need to focus not only on curriculum socialization but also on building teacher capacity through ongoing mentoring and the provision of resources appropriate to the local context.

This research also yielded significant new findings, namely the utilization of local potential as a strategy for adapting the Independent Curriculum in remote areas. Teachers at Juanga Elementary School were able to integrate the surrounding environment, such as using bamboo, coconut leaves, and other local natural resources, as project-based learning media. This strategy not only addressed limited facilities but also strengthened the connection between students and their socio-cultural context.

This contribution is significant because most previous literature on the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the 3T (United Nations) regions has focused on structural barriers such as a lack of digital infrastructure, inadequate training, and limited learning resources (Leasa et al., 2023; Ramadhan et al., 2025). Meanwhile, the aspect of teacher creativity in adapting the curriculum through local potential has rarely been explored in depth. Therefore, this study enriches the academic discourse by confirming that strategies based on local potential can be a key to the successful implementation of education policies in remote areas.

Thus, this study emphasizes the importance of understanding education policy implementation not only from the perspective of curriculum documents but also from the perspective of teachers' experiences in specific social and geographic contexts. A contextual approach to training, monitoring, and evaluating implementation is key to the future success of the Independent Curriculum, particularly in the 3T (third-third) regions.

The theoretical implications of this research lie in strengthening our understanding of the relationship between teacher perceptions and the successful implementation of educational policies. The results indicate that positive teacher perceptions do not automatically guarantee the technical implementation of the curriculum if they are not supported by systemic capacity and support. This extends the theoretical study of teacher perceptions within the framework of policy implementation (Fullan, 2007), emphasizing the importance of balancing cognitive (understanding), affective (attitude), and conative (action) aspects in the process of educational change.

Traine The practical implications of this research are the need for more targeted government intervention, particularly for schools in the 3T (frontier and remote) regions. Teacher training programs should not only focus on policy dissemination but also include ongoing mentoring that is contextualized to school conditions and local potential. Furthermore, providing simple, environmentally-based learning resources and strengthening collaborative networks between schools in remote areas can help teachers develop more innovative learning practices aligned with the spirit of the Independent Curriculum. In this way, the government and stakeholders can narrow the implementation gap between urban and remote schools.

CONCLUSION

Based on research conducted at Juanga Public Elementary School on Morotai Island, it can be concluded that teachers generally have a positive perception of the Independent Curriculum. Teachers understand the curriculum's basic principles, such as flexibility, differentiated learning, and authentic assessment, although in practice they still face technical and operational challenges. Limited infrastructure, a lack of contextual training, and limited internet access are key challenges in implementing this curriculum in the 3T (frontier and remote) areas. However, the collaborative spirit of teachers, the commitment of school leaders, and the utilization of local potential are important supporting factors that have enabled gradual adaptation to this new policy.

Theoretically, the results of this study reinforce previous studies that emphasized the importance of teacher perceptions and preparedness in successful curriculum implementation. This research also broadens the scope of studies on the implementation of the Independent Curriculum by adding the unique context of the 3T (United Territories) region, which has previously been rarely explored. These findings underscore that education policy implementation cannot be understood universally but must consider local social, geographic, and cultural conditions.

Practically, this research provides important insights for policymakers, particularly in designing contextual, sustainable, and field-based teacher training programs. Strengthening teacher learning communities, empowering school principals, and utilizing local potential as learning resources can be relevant strategies for promoting the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum in remote areas. The research's primary contribution lies in emphasizing the use of local potential as a curriculum adaptation strategy in remote areas, a topic rarely discussed in previous literature.

For further research, it is recommended that studies on perceptions and practices of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum be conducted involving more schools from various 3T regions in Indonesia, as well as expanding the subject to other educational levels such as junior high or senior high schools. Quantitative or mixed-method research can also be used to measure the correlation between teacher perceptions and learning effectiveness based on student learning outcomes. Thus, this study not only highlights teachers' perceptions of the Independent Curriculum but also offers a strategic overview of how education policies can be adapted to the context of 3T regions.

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