

Challenges in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum: A Review of Teacher Readiness and Technological Support

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Abstract

The Merdeka Curriculum is Indonesia's most significant curricular reform in a decade, granting schools and teachers wider autonomy over learning design, assessment, and the use of digital resources. Its success, however, depends on whether teachers are prepared to exercise that autonomy and whether technological support is available to sustain it. This article reviews 24 studies published between 2023 and 2026 to examine how teacher readiness and technological support have been addressed in research on the curriculum's implementation. A qualitative systematic review was conducted following PRISMA 2020 reporting principles. Records were drawn from two bibliographic exports and supplementary searches, screened against explicit criteria, and analysed through thematic synthesis. Five themes emerged: conceptual understanding of curriculum components, professional development and training, pedagogical and assessment adaptation, institutional and management support, and technological competence and infrastructure. The synthesis shows that readiness is uneven across regions, school types, and subjects, and that the Merdeka Mengajar Platform has become a central support tool whose benefits depend on teachers' digital competence, time, and school-level facilitation. The article proposes a Readiness-Technology Alignment perspective, arguing that readiness and technological support should be planned together rather than treated as separate policy tracks. Implications for training, leadership, and policy are discussed

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum reform is rarely a purely technical exercise. It reshapes what teachers teach, how they assess learning, and how schools organise time, space, and professional collaboration. In Indonesia, the Merdeka Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) marks one of the most consequential reforms in recent years. It was introduced from 2022 as a response to persistent concerns about learning quality and the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and it has since been progressively adopted by schools across the archipelago. The curriculum emphasises streamlined essential content, learning outcomes (capaian pembelajaran) expressed as phases rather than grade-by-grade targets, project-based learning that strengthens the Pancasila Student Profile, and differentiated instruction

responsive to students' diverse needs. Teachers are asked to move from following prescribed syllabi to designing learning goals, flows, modules, and assessments that fit their classrooms.

This shift places teachers at the centre of the reform. Where earlier curricula supplied relatively detailed instructional prescriptions, the Merdeka Curriculum assigns teachers a design role that demands conceptual understanding, pedagogical judgement, and the confidence to adapt. A reform that grants autonomy without building the capacity to use it risks producing confusion, inconsistent practice, and administrative burden rather than the intended improvement in learning. This is why teacher readiness has become the dominant lens in studies of the curriculum's implementation. Research conducted in primary schools, madrasah ibtidaiyah, secondary schools, and subject-specific settings has repeatedly examined whether teachers understand the curriculum, whether they have been trained to apply it, and whether their schools support them in doing so (Nurzen, 2023; Sephiawardani & Bektiningsih, 2023; Mulabbiyah et al., 2024; Syofyan et al., 2024).

The evidence that has accumulated suggests that implementation challenges are real and multi-layered. A review of 47 articles on primary schools identified obstacles including teachers' comprehension of the curriculum, habituation to new practices, the quality of education delivered, the handling of specific subjects, and overall teacher preparedness (Yunitasari et al., 2023). Case-level studies echo these concerns. First-grade teachers, for instance, have reported unfamiliarity with the new terminology for learning outcomes, learning objectives, lesson plans, and teaching modules, as well as with the project modules that support the Pancasila Student Profile (Asmahasanah et al., 2023). Studies of English teachers add subject-specific difficulties, including adaptation by novice teachers and challenges in applying the curriculum's flexibility to language instruction (Hasibuan & Kardenia, 2024; Jannah et al., 2025; Tohamba & Ansyar, 2025). Taken together, this literature shows that readiness is not a single attribute but a bundle of understanding, skills, attitudes, and institutional conditions.

Readiness, however, is not formed in isolation. The Merdeka Curriculum was launched alongside a digital ecosystem, most visibly the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (Platform Merdeka Mengajar, PMM), which offers teaching resources, training content, and communities of practice. Technological support therefore forms the second pillar of implementation. Reviews of the platform suggest that it can help teachers implement the curriculum and continue learning (Pratiwi et al., 2024), and a survey of elementary school teachers found that the level of platform use was quite high but varied, with better technological support, more intensive training, and school administrators' encouragement identified as ways to raise it (Nuraeni, 2024). An evaluative study of Guru Penggerak teachers found that the platform positively affected teachers' skills and self-development, yet time constraints arising from additional administrative duties remained a barrier (Kusuma, 2024). Research on technology integration more broadly asks whether digital tools genuinely strengthen teachers' competence in implementing the curriculum (Rustanto & Supriyadi, 2025).

Despite this growing body of work, the literature remains fragmented in two respects. First, studies of teacher readiness and studies of technological support largely proceed in parallel. Readiness studies concentrate on understanding, training, and attitudes, and often treat technology as one competence among many. Platform and technology studies, in turn, concentrate on usage, features, and perceived benefits, and often treat teacher readiness as a background condition. As a result, it is difficult to see how the two interact: whether digital tools compensate for gaps in conceptual understanding, whether weak digital competence blocks teachers from benefiting from available resources, or whether infrastructure constraints cancel the advantages of otherwise well-prepared teachers.

Second, existing reviews tend to cover either the early implementation phase or the curriculum in general. A systematic review of problems in teachers' readiness for new

curricula (Labib et al., 2024) and a review of primary-school implementation challenges (Yunitasari et al., 2023) provide valuable overviews, but they were not designed to examine technological support as a distinct analytical dimension, and they predate much of the research produced as the curriculum matured and the Merdeka Mengajar Platform became widely used. Because the curriculum has now been in operation long enough to generate studies spanning primary, secondary, madrasah, and subject-specific contexts, the time is right for a synthesis that follows the evidence across these contexts and examines both dimensions together.

This article responds to that gap. Its novelty lies in three contributions. First, it treats teacher readiness and technological support as interacting dimensions of one implementation problem, rather than as separate topics, and reads the same body of evidence through both lenses. Second, it synthesises research published between 2023 and 2026, which allows the analysis to capture the transition from early adoption to routine use and to include recent studies of the Merdeka Mengajar Platform. Third, it moves beyond a descriptive inventory of challenges by proposing a Readiness-Technology Alignment perspective, which organises the findings into a framework that policymakers, school leaders, and teacher educators can use to diagnose where support is most needed. To the best of our knowledge within the corpus examined here, this integrated treatment has not been undertaken as the primary aim of a review.

The significance of such a synthesis is practical as well as scholarly. Indonesia's schools differ greatly in size, location, resources, and teacher qualifications, and a single training model or digital platform is unlikely to serve all of them equally. Studies of regional and school-level readiness, such as those in Kerinci Regency and Pekanbaru, show that conditions vary across settings (Bastian et al., 2023; Nurzen, 2023), while studies of management challenges point to the importance of school leadership and organisational arrangements ('Azah et al., 2024). Understanding which challenges are shared across contexts and which are context-specific is essential for designing support that is proportionate, and for avoiding the assumption that availability of a digital resource implies its effective use.

Two core concepts require definition. In this article, teacher readiness refers to the combination of understanding, skills, attitudes, and professional capacity that enables teachers to implement the curriculum's requirements in their own classrooms. Technological support refers to the digital resources, platforms, competencies, and infrastructure that help teachers plan, teach, and learn within the curriculum, including the Merdeka Mengajar Platform, teachers' digital skills, and the availability of devices and connectivity. Defining the concepts in this way allows the review to ask not only whether each condition is present, but also whether the conditions reinforce or undermine one another in practice. It also keeps the analysis close to the way the reviewed studies themselves frame their questions, which makes comparison across contexts more transparent and keeps the proposed framework grounded in the evidence.

Accordingly, this review is guided by three research questions. RQ1: What challenges related to teacher readiness are reported in studies of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation? RQ2: How is technological support, including the Merdeka Mengajar Platform, digital competence, and infrastructure, addressed in these studies? RQ3: How do readiness and technological support interact, and what do the findings imply for training, school leadership, and policy? The article proceeds as follows. The next section describes the review method and selection process. The results and discussion section presents the characteristics of the included studies, the thematic synthesis, and the proposed alignment perspective. The final section summarises the conclusions, limitations, and directions for future research.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative systematic literature review with narrative thematic synthesis. The review followed the reporting principles of the PRISMA 2020 statement (Page et al., 2021), adapted to a focused, qualitative synthesis. A systematic approach was chosen because the research questions require comparing findings across diverse contexts, and because transparent selection procedures increase the credibility of the resulting themes.

Records were obtained from two sources. The first consisted of two bibliographic exports in RIS format, one with English-language titles and one with Indonesian-language titles, which together contained 40 records. The second consisted of supplementary searches conducted in October 2026 using combinations of the terms “Merdeka Curriculum”, “Merdeka Mengajar Platform”, “teacher challenges”, “digital competence”, and “technology integration”, which yielded four additional records. These supplementary records were selected because they addressed technological support, the dimension least represented in the exported records.

Records were eligible if they (a) examined the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian schools, (b) addressed teacher readiness, implementation challenges, or technological support, (c) were published between 2023 and 2026 in a peer-reviewed journal or conference series, and (d) carried a traceable digital object identifier (DOI). Records were excluded if their bibliographic details could not be verified, if they concerned early-childhood, vocational, or religious-subject-specific settings that would limit comparability, if their primary focus was on learning outcomes, strategies, or community service rather than readiness, challenges, or technology, or if they overlapped substantially with included studies and their abstracts could not be verified.

After merging the 44 records and removing eight duplicates, 36 unique records were screened. Twelve were excluded, leaving 24 studies for synthesis (Figure 1). For each study, the author, year, context, and focus were extracted into a matrix. Findings were then coded inductively, with the two analytical dimensions of teacher readiness and technological support used as sensitising concepts. Codes were grouped into themes through repeated comparison across studies, and the themes were refined until they accounted for the main challenges reported. Findings were compared across educational levels and subjects to identify patterns that were shared or context-specific.

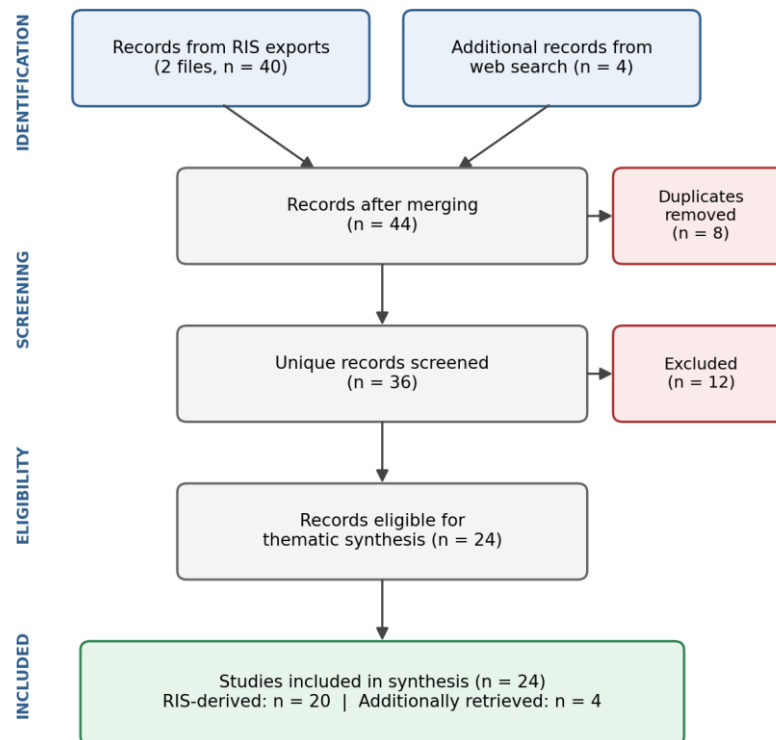


Figure 1. Study selection flow diagram (adapted from PRISMA 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section first describes the included studies and then presents the five themes that emerged from the synthesis. It closes with a discussion of how readiness and technological support interact and with the proposed alignment perspective.

Characteristics of the Included Studies

The 24 included studies were published between 2023 and 2026 and were drawn from journals and one conference series. Table 1 summarises their context and focus. Primary and elementary schools are the most frequently studied setting, followed by madrasah ibtidaiyah, secondary schools, and subject-specific contexts, particularly English language teaching. Several studies adopt a regional perspective, such as those in Kerinci Regency and Pekanbaru, while two reviews synthesise earlier literature. Technology-oriented studies, including those on the Merdeka Mengajar Platform, form a smaller but growing group. This distribution indicates that evidence on primary education is comparatively dense, whereas evidence on secondary, rural, and subject-specific settings, and on the technological dimension, remains thinner.

Table 1. Characteristics of the included studies (n = 24)

No.	Study	Context	Focus
1	Ndari et al. (2023)	Primary education	Implementation and challenges
2	Aliyyah et al. (2023)	Elementary schools	Teachers' perceptions during COVID-19
3	Sephiawardani & Bektiningsih (2023)	Public elementary schools	Teacher readiness review
4	Nurzen (2023)	Kerinci Regency	Teacher readiness

5	Bastian et al. (2023)	Pekanbaru	School readiness; teacher and student views
6	Yunitasari et al. (2023)	Primary schools	Review of 47 articles on challenges
7	Asmahasanah et al. (2023)	First grade, primary	Teacher challenges and strategies
8	Syofyan et al. (2024)	Elementary schools	Teacher readiness factors
9	Sutinah et al. (2024)	Elementary schools	Readiness and implementation challenges
10	'Azah et al. (2024)	School management	Management challenges
11	Nasir (2024)	Schools (general)	Teacher readiness
12	Putri & Pranata (2024)	Secondary schools	Science teachers' perspective
13	Retnowati et al. (2024a)	Elementary schools	Challenges and readiness (conference)
14	Retnowati et al. (2024b)	Elementary schools	Key factors; teacher readiness
15	Hasibuan & Kardena (2024)	English teachers	Implementation challenges
16	Mulabbiyah et al. (2024)	Madrasah ibtidaiah	Readiness and challenges
17	Labib et al. (2024)	New curricula (review)	Problems of teacher readiness (SLR)
18	Pratiwi et al. (2024)	Platform use	Merdeka Mengajar Platform (literature study)
19	Kusuma (2024)	Guru Penggerak	Platform use and impact (evaluative)
20	Nuraeni (2024)	Elementary schools	Platform use by teachers (survey)
21	Rustanto & Supriyadi (2025)	Teacher competence	Technology integration
22	Jannah et al. (2025)	Novice English teachers	Adaptation and challenges
23	Tohamba & Ansyar (2025)	English instruction	Teacher readiness
24	Rifaldi et al. (2026)	Primary education	Teachers' understanding

Theme 1: Conceptual Understanding of Curriculum Components

The first theme concerns teachers' understanding of what the curriculum asks them to do. The review of 47 articles identified teacher comprehension of the curriculum as one of the principal obstacles in primary schools (Yunitasari et al., 2023), and research devoted specifically to teachers' understanding of the curriculum continues to appear in 2026 (Rifaldi et al., 2026). At classroom level, first-grade teachers reported unfamiliarity with the terminology of learning outcomes, learning objectives, lesson plans, and teaching modules, and with project modules linked to the Pancasila Student Profile (Asmahasanah et al., 2023). Such findings suggest that difficulties are often rooted in the vocabulary and structure of the new curriculum before they reach questions of pedagogy.

The practical consequence is a form of conceptual overload. Teachers must translate learning outcomes into objectives and teaching flows, design modules, and plan projects, tasks that were previously supported by more prescriptive documents. Studies of teacher readiness commonly treat understanding as a core component of readiness alongside attitudes and skills (Sephiawardani & Bektiningsih, 2023; Nasir, 2024; Retnowati et al., 2024b). The pattern across these studies is consistent: where understanding is partial, implementation tends toward formal compliance, with documents completed but classroom practice changing little.

Theme 2: Professional Development and Training

Training is the second recurring theme. Teachers responding to unfamiliar requirements have turned to official information from the Ministry of Education and Culture, webinars, and discussions with colleagues, and the authors of the first-grade study recommend continuous training and resource sharing as ongoing support mechanisms (Asmahasanah et al., 2023). The review of problems in teachers' readiness for new curricula similarly positions training and preparation as central to readiness (Labib et al., 2024).

Studies in primary and Islamic primary schools examine readiness and its determinants (Mulabbiyah et al., 2024; Sutinah et al., 2024; Syofyan et al., 2024), and a conference study by Retnowati et al. (2024a) links challenges and readiness among elementary teachers.

An important nuance is that training formats matter. Short, one-off socialisation sessions are unlikely to produce the deep understanding that curriculum design requires, whereas sustained programmes, peer learning, and communities of practice offer opportunities for reflection and adaptation. The evidence on teachers' self-directed use of webinars and colleague networks indicates that teachers are already creating informal learning pathways. The policy question is how to connect these informal efforts with structured, school-based development so that readiness is not left to individual initiative.

Theme 3: Pedagogical and Assessment Adaptation

The third theme concerns the translation of curriculum principles into classroom practice. The curriculum's emphasis on differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and flexible assessment requires pedagogical repertoires that many teachers have yet to develop. Studies of English teachers illustrate how this plays out in specific subjects: novice teachers must adapt to the curriculum framework while still developing their professional identity (Jannah et al., 2025), experienced teachers face challenges in implementation (Hasibuan & Kardenia, 2024), and readiness for English instruction is shaped by subject-specific demands (Tohamba & Ansyar, 2025). Research on science teachers in secondary schools likewise approaches the curriculum from a subject teacher's perspective (Putri & Pranata, 2024), and studies of elementary teachers' perceptions during the COVID-19 period show that the curriculum was introduced while teachers were also adjusting to pandemic-era teaching (Aliyyah et al., 2023).

What emerges is a picture in which pedagogical adaptation is both the goal and the hardest part of the reform. The task is not only to know the curriculum but to change habits, and the review of primary-school challenges names habituation among the obstacles (Yunitasari et al., 2023). Subject-specific evidence suggests that generic training is insufficient, because the meaning of differentiation, projects, and assessment varies across disciplines.

Theme 4: Institutional and Management Support

A fourth theme is that readiness is shaped by the school as an organisation. Management challenges in implementing the curriculum have been documented ('Azah et al., 2024), and studies of school readiness incorporate the perspectives of both teachers and students, indicating that readiness is a property of the school and not only of individuals (Bastian et al., 2023). Research on key factors for successful implementation likewise frames teacher readiness within a wider set of enabling conditions (Retnowati et al., 2024b). Kusuma (2024) found that schools supported platform use through dedicated teams and infrastructure, and Nuraeni (2024) identified encouragement from school administrators as a means of increasing platform utilisation.

These findings point to the role of school leaders as brokers between policy and practice. Leaders allocate time, organise learning communities, and signal expectations. The same evidence also reveals a tension: administrative duties accompanying the curriculum can consume the time teachers need for learning and planning (Kusuma, 2024). Management support that adds documentation burdens without creating protected time for development may therefore undermine the readiness it intends to build.

Theme 5: Technological Competence, Platform Use, and Infrastructure

The fifth theme addresses the technological dimension. The Merdeka Mengajar Platform is the main digital support instrument, and the evidence on it is generally encouraging but conditional. A literature-based study concluded that using the platform supports curriculum implementation and teacher development (Pratiwi et al., 2024).

Kusuma (2024) found that Guru Penggerak teachers understood the platform firmly, that its key features were implemented effectively, and that it positively affected teachers' skills and self-development, but that time constraints linked to administrative work posed challenges. Among elementary teachers in Arjawinangun, platform use was quite high and varied, and the study suggested that technological support, intensive training, and encouragement from school administrators could increase it (Nuraeni, 2024). Rustanto and Supriyadi (2025) place the broader question of technology integration and teacher competence at the centre of curriculum implementation.

Two cautions follow. First, usage is not the same as effective integration. Variation in use, even where average use is high, implies that some teachers draw far more from the platform than others, which risks widening existing gaps. Second, the evidence base on infrastructure and digital competence in diverse regions is still limited. While regional readiness studies document differences between locations (Bastian et al., 2023; Nurzen, 2023), the corpus contains few studies that examine connectivity, devices, and digital skills systematically alongside curricular understanding. This is a notable gap, given that the curriculum's flexibility depends increasingly on access to digital resources.

Table 2. Thematic synthesis of challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

Theme	Key challenges reported	Representative studies
1. Conceptual understanding	Unfamiliar terminology; difficulty with learning outcomes, objectives, modules, and project modules; limited comprehension of the curriculum	Yunitasari et al. (2023); Asmahasanah et al. (2023); Rifaldi et al. (2026)
2. Professional development	Need for continuous training; reliance on webinars, official information, and peers; readiness varies by setting	Asmahasanah et al. (2023); Labib et al. (2024); Syofyan et al. (2024)
3. Pedagogical and assessment adaptation	Habituation to new practices; subject-specific adaptation, especially in English; novice teachers' adjustment	Yunitasari et al. (2023); Jannah et al. (2025); Tohamba & Ansyar (2025)
4. Institutional and management support	Management challenges; school-level readiness; administrative duties competing for time	'Azah et al. (2024); Bastian et al. (2023); Kusuma (2024)
5. Technological competence and infrastructure	Varied platform use; need for technological support and training; limited evidence on infrastructure and digital skills	Pratiwi et al. (2024); Nuraeni (2024); Kusuma (2024); Rustanto & Supriyadi (2025)

Discussion: A Readiness-Technology Alignment Perspective

Reading the five themes together shows that they are interdependent. Conceptual understanding determines whether teachers can use platform resources purposefully, since a teacher who does not grasp learning outcomes cannot readily select or adapt a teaching module. Training determines whether teachers can navigate the platform and integrate its resources into pedagogy. Institutional support determines whether teachers have the time and facilities to do either. Technology, in turn, can extend training and resource sharing to teachers who would otherwise be isolated. The relationship is therefore reciprocal, and weakness in one component limits the returns on the others.

The comparison across settings adds a further layer. Evidence from primary schools is relatively dense and tends to emphasise understanding and training, whereas evidence from English teaching and from science teachers in secondary schools emphasises the fit between the curriculum and disciplinary demands. Regional studies, in turn, highlight that the same curriculum meets different conditions in different places. These differences suggest that readiness profiles are not uniform, and that a support package that works for a well-connected urban primary school may be poorly matched to a remote school or to a subject with specialised pedagogical needs.

This reciprocity motivates the Readiness-Technology Alignment perspective proposed here. It holds that implementation quality depends on the degree of alignment between what the curriculum demands of teachers, what teachers are prepared to do, and what technological and institutional support makes possible. Table 3 summarises the perspective in terms of four alignment points. We present it as an analytical synthesis derived from the reviewed studies rather than as an empirically tested model, and it should be examined in future research.

Table 3. The Readiness-Technology Alignment perspective

Alignment point	Question for diagnosis	Implication for support
Curriculum demand and teacher understanding	Do teachers understand learning outcomes, objectives, and modules well enough to use resources purposefully?	Pair curricular concepts with hands-on module design using platform resources
Teacher skills and digital competence	Can teachers navigate and integrate digital resources into pedagogy, not merely access them?	Integrate digital and pedagogical training; measure quality of integration, not only frequency of use
Institutional time and facilitation	Do schools provide protected time, teams, and learning communities?	Support leaders to reduce documentation burdens and organise peer learning
Context and infrastructure	Do connectivity, devices, and regional conditions permit effective use?	Differentiate support by region and school type; collect infrastructure data alongside readiness data

The perspective has several practical implications. First, training should integrate curricular and digital content instead of offering them separately, for example by teaching teachers to build modules using platform resources. Second, indicators of platform success should go beyond usage frequency to include the quality of integration in classroom practice, because the studies reviewed report variation in use. Third, school leaders should be supported to protect time for professional learning and to reduce documentation burdens that compete with it. Fourth, policy should recognise that readiness varies across regions and subjects, which calls for differentiated support, as differentiation is itself a principle of the curriculum.

Several limitations should be noted. The review covers a limited number of studies, with the synthesis relying primarily on the findings reported in abstracts and accessible summaries; some included studies were characterised mainly by their context and focus. Most included studies are small-scale, qualitative or descriptive, and concentrated on primary education, which limits generalisation. The search was not exhaustive across all databases, and publication bias toward reports of challenges cannot be excluded. These limitations suggest that the themes should be read as well-supported patterns and not as definitive estimates.

Future research should address the gaps identified. Mixed-methods studies that measure readiness, digital competence, and infrastructure within the same sample would test the alignment perspective directly. Longitudinal designs could track how readiness develops as teachers gain experience with the curriculum and the platform. Studies in rural, remote, and under-resourced schools, and in secondary and subject-specific settings, are needed to balance a literature that is currently concentrated in primary education. Finally, evaluations of training models that combine curricular and digital competence would provide evidence on which approaches work.

CONCLUSIONS

This review examined 24 studies published between 2023 and 2026 to understand how teacher readiness and technological support have been treated in research on the Merdeka Curriculum. The synthesis identified five themes: conceptual understanding, professional development, pedagogical and assessment adaptation, institutional and management support, and technological competence and infrastructure. Across them, readiness emerges as uneven and context-dependent, and technological support, led by the Merdeka Mengajar Platform, as promising but conditional on teachers' skills, available time, and school facilitation.

The main conclusion is that readiness and technological support are interdependent and should be planned together. The proposed Readiness-Technology Alignment perspective offers a way to diagnose where support is most needed and to avoid assuming that the availability of a platform guarantees effective use. In practice, this means integrating curricular and digital training, evaluating platform success through the quality of classroom integration, protecting teachers' time for professional learning, and differentiating support across regions and subjects.

The review is limited by its small corpus, its reliance on reported findings and abstracts for some studies, and its concentration on primary education. Future studies should test the alignment perspective empirically, examine infrastructure and digital competence in rural and under-resourced schools, and evaluate training models that combine curricular and technological content.

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