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The Role of the Mover Teacher and Non-Mover Teacher in Realizing Independent Learning in Merdeka Curriculum

Renny Nur Afida*, Haryono, Titi Prihatin

Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia



DOI : <https://doi.org/10.63230/jitse.2.3.211>

Sections Info

Article history:

Submitted: February 17, 2026

Final Revised: April 30, 2026

Accepted: June 18, 2025

First Available Online: July 29, 2026

Published: December 27, 2026

Keywords:

Education;

Independent Learning;

Merdeka Curriculum;

Mover Teacher;

Non-Mover Teacher.

ABSTRACT

Objective: The purpose of this study is to understand teachers' perspectives as spearheads of curriculum actors at the operational level regarding the roles of movers and non-movers in realizing independent learning in the Merdeka Curriculum. **Method:** Through a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) with the help of the ATLAS.ti application. The research was conducted at SD Rapah 02, a non-mover school, and SD Negeri Ungaran 5, a mover school. Data collection was conducted through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies using method and source triangulation and data validation. **Results:** The main role of mover teachers and non-mover teachers is to support independent learning in students. They both act as facilitators and motivators, encourage students to learn actively and creatively, motivate students to want to learn by creating interactive, innovative, and interesting learning experiences so that students are not easily bored, and build a conducive classroom environment. Meanwhile, the difference is that the Mover Teacher has an additional role as an agent of educational transformation, one who reflects, shares, and collaborates. **Novelty:** This study provides new empirical evidence that the Mover Teacher Program's added value extends beyond improving classroom practices. The program strengthens teachers' capacity to lead educational transformation through collaboration, reflective practice, and knowledge dissemination, suggesting that its impact reaches school-wide professional development.

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum change is an innovation designed to help students learn more effectively and in more engaging ways. As an innovation, the Merdeka Curriculum, implemented in stages starting in the 2022/2023 academic year and nationally as of 2024/2025, has elicited various responses and interpretations in its field implementation (Supriyanti et al., 2025). In March 2024, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum increased to 80 percent (Afida & Prihatin, 2024), because it began to be established as a national curriculum in accordance with the Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Permendikbudristek) Number 12 of 2024 concerning the curriculum in Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, and Secondary Education. This means that 20 percent still have not implemented the Merdeka Curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum uses independent learning as the axis of implementation (Hartobi et al., 2024; Rohimah et al., 2024). Independent learning is defined as a way to encourage students to freely maximize their intellectual, moral, and other skills without being bound (Salim, 2023).

Meanwhile, Ndari et al. explained that teachers play a key role in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, including identifying each student's potential, interests, and learning needs (Ndari et al., 2023). Kemendikbudristek explains that Mover Teachers are

learning leaders who encourage student growth and development in a holistic, active, and proactive manner (Hadi et al., 2026). They develop other educators to implement student-centered learning (Bayram-Jacobs et al., 2016). In addition, they become role models and agents of transformation of the education ecosystem to realize the profile of Pancasila students. This also relates to direct evaluation at school.

On the other hand, there are teacher barriers to the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, namely, first, a lack of understanding of how to reduce and translate learning outcomes into learning objectives (Rahmawati et al., 2026; Zahra et al., 2025). The material provided focuses only on the previous curriculum rather than on essential material (Puspita et al., 2020). Secondly, teachers lack reference to learning models that can support differentiated learning. Teachers face challenges in determining the right learning model, resulting in trial and error (Gourlay, 2022). This is a concern that both mover and non-mover teachers need to understand their role in realizing independent learning so that the independent learning process can run smoothly. This research is expected to provide input and advice for teachers to better understand their role by considering the perspectives of moving and non-moving teachers.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is qualitative, using a phenomenological method and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), and is analyzed using the ATLAS. ti application (Jerling, 2023). In IPA, Smith explains that it aims to reveal in detail how a person makes meaning of the world by emphasizing individual perceptions or opinions about objects or events (Biancardi et al., 2023; Eatough, 2011). AFI research was conducted with a small sample size. The research was conducted at SD Rapah 02, a non-mover school, and SD Negeri Ungaran 5, a mover school. Data collection was conducted through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies using method and source triangulation and data validation.

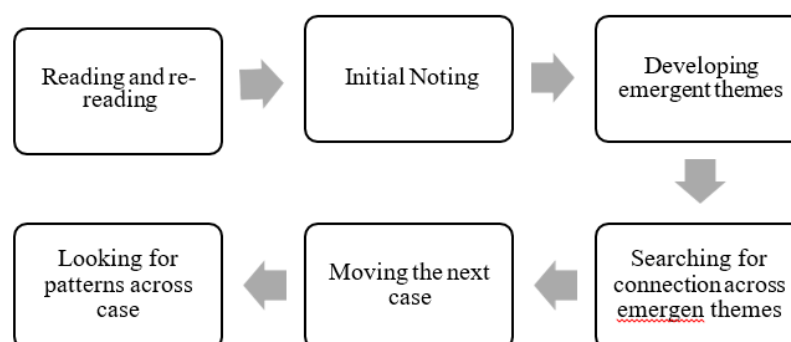


Figure 1. Steps of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)

The figure illustrates the stages of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) for the systematic analysis of qualitative data (Isik, 2026; Monari et al., 2022). The analysis process begins with "reading and re-reading," in which the researcher repeatedly reads interview transcripts to gain a deep understanding of the participants' experiences. The next stage is "initial noting," which involves making preliminary notes on key aspects –

such as descriptions, language usage, and initial interpretations of the data. Subsequently, the researcher proceeds to "developing emergent themes" by identifying themes that arise from these initial notes. This is followed by "searching for connections across emergent themes," a process of linking related themes to form broader categories or concepts. The analysis then moves to "moving to the next case," repeating the entire process with the next participant while remaining attentive to the uniqueness of each case (Aqtam et al., 2026; Wulandari et al., 2026). The final stage is "looking for patterns across cases," which involves comparing results from all participants to identify patterns, similarities, and differences that can explain the research phenomenon more comprehensively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

In implementation, teachers play a crucial role; they need to understand how to realize independent learning within the Merdeka Curriculum. In general, the functions and roles of teachers are inseparable. Teachers play an important role in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, including encouraging the realization of independent learning. Based on the research results, the following networking outcomes were obtained, explaining the roles of mover and non-mover teachers in realizing independent learning. The results of the study mapping are shown in Figure 2 below.

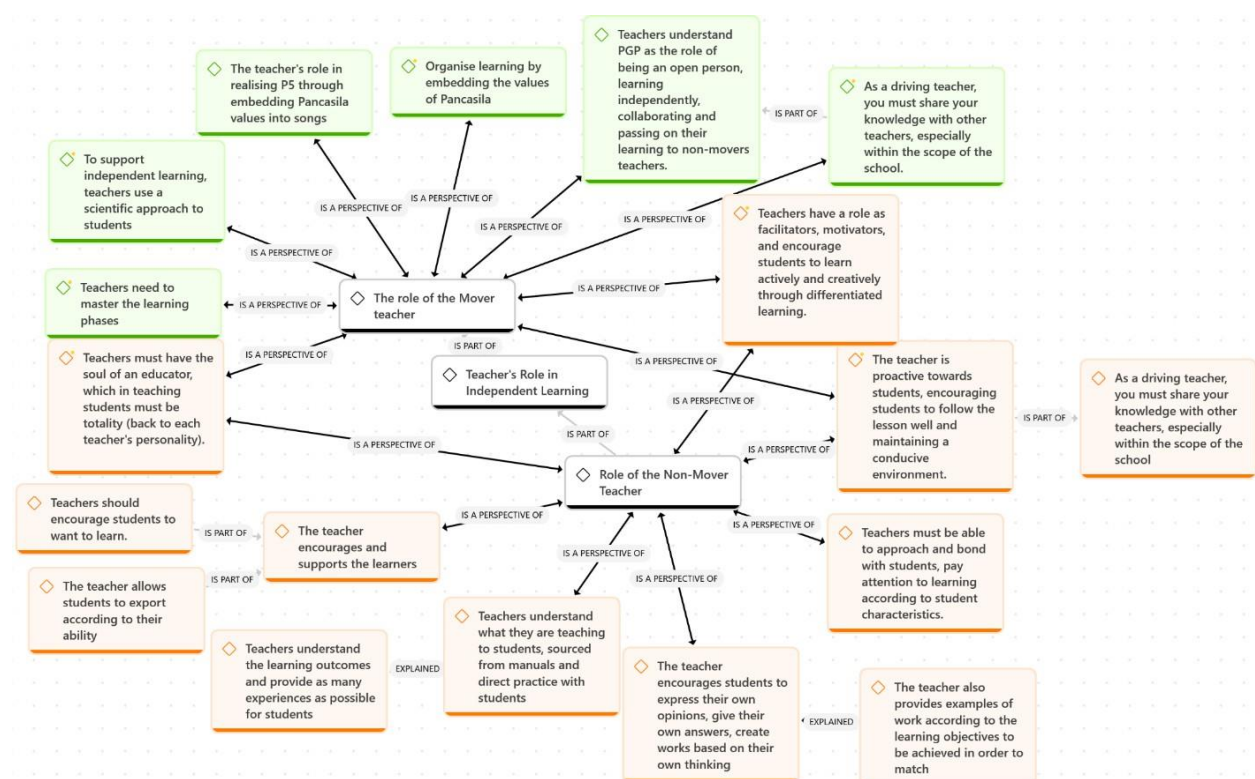


Figure 2. Results of the network on the roles of teacher movers and non-teacher movers

Law No. 14 of 2005, Article 1, Paragraph 1, explains that teachers are professional educators with the main task of educating, teaching, guiding, directing, training, assessing, and evaluating students in early childhood education, formal education

pathways, basic education, and secondary education. The competency standards are set out in the Minister of National Education's regulation on academic qualifications and teacher competencies, which state that professional teachers must have four competencies: pedagogic competence and personality, and professional and social competence (Rusilowati et al., 2019).

In general, the functions and roles of teachers are inseparable. Munawir et al explained that teachers have functions and roles, namely educating, teaching, guiding, and training (Dirsa et al., 2022). As with teachers' duties, these functions have different focuses. Educating focuses on students' moral and personality aspects; guiding focuses on religious norms and everyday norms; teaching focuses on teaching materials and information; while training focuses on life skills.

Discussion

Based on the analysis, the mover teachers (G1 and G2) and non-mover teachers (G3 and G4) share similarities and differences in their roles in supporting students' independent learning. Movers and non-movers both act as facilitators and motivators, encourage students to learn actively and creatively, motivate students to want to learn by creating interactive, innovative, and interesting learning experiences so that students are not easily bored, and build a conducive classroom environment. This can be done by bonding with students or making learning agreements with students. Strong bonding between teachers and students can increase students' motivation to learn. Khoiri & Latipah revealed that when students feel understood and supported by the teacher, they are more likely to be actively involved in the learning process (Al Rawashdeh et al., 2021). In addition, teachers who have good bonding with students can help students develop critical and innovative thinking skills. Students seem more motivated and involved in activities that instill Pancasila values through project-based learning.

Munawir et al. also explained that the teacher is a facilitator, meaning that the teacher plays a role in providing services related to the facilities used for the teaching and learning process to run well (Dirsa et al., 2022). As a motivator, teachers must be able to inspire students to achieve higher learning goals. In addition, teachers must be able to direct students to think critically and innovatively in solving problems. Daga also agrees that teachers must be innovative and creative in designing and implementing the learning process. Teachers must be able to develop relevant and interesting learning experiences to fulfill students' needs, especially to support independent learning (Rasmitadila et al., 2021).

Based on the results of the study, teachers must understand what they are teaching students and master each phase of learning; for grade three and four teachers, they need to master phase B. This is to ensure that the student learning process is effective and meaningful. This is to ensure that students' learning process is effective and meaningful. Teachers must also understand student characteristics to determine learning methods, content, and media that suit students' preferences. To understand students' characteristics, a diagnostic assessment is conducted (Kron et al., 2021).

Non-mover teachers feel that teachers' willingness to learn is very important for their own development as adaptive educators, especially with the Merdeka Curriculum changes. Learning is not only through the moving teacher program, but teachers can also explore themselves through other platforms (Oliveira et al., 2021). Teacher competence and the 'educator's soul' in teachers are considered very important. From the results of this study, it can be interpreted that teachers must be adaptive and willing to improve their competence in line with independent learning. On the other hand, the moving teacher program could be implemented more thoroughly to eliminate competency gaps among teachers. This is because the lead teacher program teaches the Merdeka curriculum in greater detail than teachers who have not participated in it do.

The study's results show that both mover and non-mover teachers have also encouraged students' learning independence, including making work/projects in the classroom. However, elementary school students still tend to play actively, and some children have not carried out learning in accordance with procedures. This shows that despite efforts to improve students' independence in learning, there are still challenges to overcome, such as limited time and resources, as well as students' habits of relying on others. In line with this, Tomlinson added that teachers must take an active role in identifying and fulfilling the unique needs of each student (Tomlinson et al., 2023). Teachers should also provide the necessary resources and support to help students overcome barriers to self-directed learning. This highlights the need to use constructive criticism, feedback, and motivation to encourage continuous improvement.

The interview results also stated that the mover teacher has played an active role in sharing knowledge with other teachers, both among fellow mover and non-mover teachers. This encourages teacher equality by ensuring they gain the same knowledge to become a mover teacher, even if they have not participated in the mover teacher program. Mover teachers are selected from across Indonesia and have graduated from the Mover Teacher Education Program. They are ready to become learning leaders and act as mover agents for the transformation of education in Indonesia. Kemendikbudristek also explained that the mover teachers are expected to become education catalysts in their areas by 1) Moving the learning community for fellow teachers at school and in the region, 2) Becoming a Practice Teacher for other teacher colleagues related to learning development in schools, 3) Encouraging the improvement of student leadership in schools, 4) Opening positive discussion spaces and collaboration spaces between teachers and stakeholders inside and outside schools to improve the quality of learning, 5) Becoming learning leaders who encourage the well-being of the education ecosystem in schools [9]. In addition, the mover teacher programme will also create mover teachers who can develop themselves and other teachers through independent reflection, sharing and collaboration, have the moral, emotional and spiritual maturity to behave according to the code of ethics, plan, run, reflect and evaluate student-centred learning by involving parents, collaborate with parents and communities to develop schools and foster student leadership, and develop and lead efforts to realise a school vision that is pro-student and relevant to the needs of the community around the school (Anwar et al., 2022)

The concept of Independent Learning demands a paradigm shift in teaching. It also shows that teachers play an important role in facilitating student learning and developing students' independence skills through active learning methods, a supportive school environment, and collaboration with peers and external parties to improve the quality of learning (Lavonen et al., 2022).

Given the various roles of teachers in realizing independent learning, it can be concluded that both mover and non-mover teachers share similarities and differences in their roles. Similarities include serving as facilitators and motivators, encouraging students to learn actively and creatively, fostering a desire to learn by creating interactive, innovative, and interesting learning experiences so students are not easily bored, and building a conducive classroom environment. The difference lies in the mover teacher having another role as an agent of educational transformation (Lavonen et al., 2022). Based on the results of the research, the mover teacher has played a role in mobilising a learning community for fellow teachers at school, becoming a Practice Teacher for other teacher colleagues related to learning development at school, encouraging increased student leadership at school, opening positive discussion spaces and collaboration spaces between teachers and stakeholders inside and outside the school to improve the quality of learning, and becoming a learning leader who encourages the well-being of the educational ecosystem at school. Of course, it cannot be separated from the help of other stakeholders, including the principal, students, guardians, and even the local environment (Sulthani et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Findings: This study found that both Mover Teachers and non-Mover Teachers play equally important roles in supporting independent learning by serving as facilitators, motivators, and learning designers who create active, creative, and student-centered learning environments. However, the distinguishing characteristic of Mover Teachers lies in their additional role as agents of educational transformation by promoting reflective practice, professional collaboration, knowledge sharing, and instructional leadership. These findings indicate that the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum depends not only on teachers' pedagogical competence but also on continuous professional development and collaboration among teachers and other educational stakeholders. **Implication:** The findings imply that improving teachers' pedagogical competence and adaptive teaching practices is essential for achieving the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum. The Mover Teacher Program should be expanded to enable more teachers to acquire the competencies needed to support independent learning and reduce competency gaps between Mover and non-Mover Teachers. Furthermore, schools and policymakers should strengthen collaborative learning communities involving teachers, school leaders, parents, and other stakeholders to create a sustainable educational ecosystem that supports independent learning. **Limitation:** This study has several limitations. First, the findings were based on a small sample size, which may limit their generalizability to other educational contexts. Second, the

qualitative approach relied primarily on interview data, making the results dependent on participants' perceptions and experiences. Finally, the study focused on comparing the roles of Mover Teachers and non-Mover Teachers without examining how these roles directly influence students' learning outcomes or academic achievement. **Future Research:** It is recommended to include a larger, more diverse sample across different regions and educational levels to improve the generalizability of the findings. Researchers are also encouraged to employ quantitative or mixed-method approaches to examine the relationship between teachers' roles and students' independent learning outcomes. In addition, future studies should explore other factors, such as school leadership, organizational culture, digital competence, parental involvement, and teacher professional development, that may influence the successful implementation of independent learning within the Merdeka Curriculum.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The study was supported funded by BIMA 2024 Research Grant Programme.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Renny Nur Afida conceived the study, developed the conceptual framework. **Haryono** contributed to the conceptual framework, literature review, and validation of the research instruments. **Titi Prihatin** contributed to statistical analysis, data visualization, and interpretation of the results. All authors reviewed, revised, and approved the final version of the manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors confirm that there are no conflicts of interest, either financial or personal, that may have influenced the content or outcome of this study.

ETHICAL COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

This manuscript complies with research and publication ethics. The authors affirm that the work is original, conducted with academic integrity, and free from any unethical practices, including plagiarism.

STATEMENT ON THE USE OF AI OR DIGITAL TOOLS IN WRITING

The authors acknowledge the use of digital tools, including AI-based technologies, as support in the research and writing stages of this article. Specifically, Grammarly was employed for correcting writing and grammar errors. All outputs generated with digital assistance were critically evaluated and revised to ensure academic rigor and ethical standards were upheld. The final responsibility for the manuscript rests entirely with the authors.

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***Renny Nur Afida (Corresponding Author)**

Department of Education and Psychology, Universitas Negeri Semarang
 Sekaran, Gunungpati District, Semarang City, 50229, Indonesia
 Email: rennynurafida@students.unnes.ac.id

Haryono

Department of Education and Psychology, Universitas Negeri Semarang
 Sekaran, Gunungpati District, Semarang City, 50229, Indonesia
 Email: fransharyono@mail.unnes.ac.id

Titi Prihatin

Department of Education and Psychology, Universitas Negeri Semarang
 Sekaran, Gunungpati District, Semarang City, 50229, Indonesia
 Email: tutiprihatin@mail.unnes.ac.id
