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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Driving Educational Transformation: How Transformational Leadership and Knowledge Sharing Behavior Teachers' Readiness for Indonesia's Merdeka Belajar

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	In 2022, the Indonesian government launched the Merdeka Belajar program aimed at helping teachers cope with the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, not all teachers were equipped to successfully implement this program in schools, primarily due to their unpreparedness for change. This study seeks to explore the difficulties and challenges faced by teachers in Indonesia when trying to implement the Merdeka Belajar program. It also offers suggestions for teachers to better prepare themselves for evolving curricula and adapt to changes more efficiently. Insights from this study could contribute to the improvement of the Merdeka Belajar program or inform the creation of new educational initiatives tailored to the needs of Indonesia's educational system. This study uses a quantitative associative approach, involving 648 teachers from public and private schools across Indonesia, who had implemented the Merdeka Belajar program for at least one semester. The sampling method applied was convenience sampling, and data was collected using online questionnaires distributed nationwide. The results of this research found that transformational leadership and knowledge sharing behavior have a significant effect on the readiness to change among teachers in Indonesia. This means that leaders who are willing to be directly involved and provide direct support to teachers can increase teachers' readiness to change. Teachers who are able to share knowledge with other teachers can also increase teachers' readiness to change. The results of this research can have a positive impact on schools if they are implemented properly, such as teachers being better prepared to face the changes that occur in schools. Each school is also expected to have leaders who are able to engage directly with teachers and create a work culture of sharing knowledge in the school.

INTRODUCTION

The development of a new curriculum is a tool to enhance educational standards, serving as a guideline for organizing educational activities to achieve national educational goals. In 2022, the Indonesian government introduced **Kurikulum Merdeka**, mandating its implementation across all schools. **Kurikulum Merdeka** is a policy designed by the government to make a significant leap in the quality of education, with the aim of producing students and graduates who are well-prepared to face the complex challenges of the future. In the implementation of **Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar**, learning is student-centered, focusing on the individual learner's experiences, background, and other personal factors. However, by the 2021/2022 academic year, not all schools were able to implement this curriculum, leading to limited references on its application. The main reasons schools failed to implement the curriculum included the lack of available learning media and the unpreparedness of both schools and teachers.

Based on interviews with eight teachers in Jakarta, some teachers were still unable to leave their comfort zones and were struggling to adapt to the new curriculum. Furthermore, one of the main

challenges faced by teachers in implementing **Kurikulum Merdeka** was the lack of training and professional development opportunities. Many teachers, upon starting their roles in schools, lacked the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively implement the new curriculum. There is a need for continuous support and training to ensure that teachers can adapt to the new demands, which is believed to be closely related to teachers' readiness for curriculum change.

According to Bass and Avolio (1994), transformational leadership motivates followers to go beyond their personal interests for the sake of collective interests through the dimensions of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. This theory also suggests that transformational leaders can increase commitment to change through their influence on shared vision and values. Knowledge sharing is an important element in knowledge management, which supports collaboration and innovation in organizations (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Factors such as trust, organizational culture, and leadership play an important role in driving knowledge sharing behavior.

Research by Herold et al., (2008) and Hmieleski et al., (2012) shows a positive relationship between transformational leadership and readiness to change. However, the focus is more on direct relationships without exploring mediation mechanisms. Research such as that conducted by Srivastava et al. (2006) show that transformational leadership can increase knowledge sharing behavior, but this effect can be influenced by factors such as organizational structure and culture. Other research shows that knowledge sharing behavior influences individual and team readiness to change (Yang, 2007). Most research has been conducted in countries with individualistic cultures, while countries with collectivist cultures (such as Indonesia) have not been widely studied. According to House et al. (2004), cultural context influences how transformational leaders and knowledge sharing behavior work, especially in organizations that have hierarchical structures and high collectivity norms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Readiness to change

Readiness for change is a concept referring to an individual's capacity and willingness to adapt to shifts in working conditions, technology, and organizational culture (Holt et al., 1993). This concept addresses how ready individuals, groups, or organizations are to accept and implement change. It encompasses aspects such as attitudes, motivation, and the ability to adapt to changes. Readiness for change is also seen as a critical factor in the success of organizational initiatives (Engida et al., 2022; Rismansyah et al., 2021). Kotter (1996) emphasized that readiness for change is essential for organizational success, highlighting the importance of creating urgency, forming leadership coalitions, and building a vision for change.

Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership is widely recognized as a leadership style that can bring significant changes to organizations. Transformational leaders work to gain the cooperation of their followers by offering incentives, which encourages followers to accept the leader's authority (Gomes, 2018; Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016). This leadership style aims to motivate and inspire followers to reach their full potential and exceed basic expectations. Transformational leaders emphasize positive change and innovation, encouraging personal and professional development among followers. It is believed that transformational leadership plays a key role in increasing employees' readiness for change, including that of teachers. Teachers who receive support from their leaders are more likely to successfully navigate the changes in their schools (Maria et al., 2022).

Knowledge sharing behavior

Knowledge sharing behavior refers to the process of transferring both implicit and explicit knowledge within an organization (Khan et al., 2022). Individuals who actively engage in knowledge sharing are generally better prepared for change because this process encourages them to learn and gain a deeper understanding of the changes within their organization (Mutika et al., 2022). However, not all school leaders actively engage with their teachers, which negatively affects their readiness for change. Furthermore, teachers who possess valuable knowledge do not always feel inclined to share

it with others, leaving less-informed colleagues to fend for themselves. In the worst cases, teachers may not be able to adapt to changes due to a lack of support from both school leadership and peers, leading to delays in program implementation.

Merdeka belajar

According to Indonesia's Minister of Education and Culture, Nadiem Makarim, *Merdeka Belajar* represents the freedom to think. This freedom of thought must first be embraced by teachers before it can be passed on to students. In other words, teachers must first achieve intellectual freedom themselves. This is unlikely to happen if they are still overwhelmed by administrative duties and various other responsibilities, which prevent them from focusing on designing independent, enjoyable, and pressure-free learning environments.

The *Kurikulum Merdeka* is a re-evaluation of the previous curriculum, *Kurikulum 13*. It was officially launched by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology under the leadership of Nadiem Makarim in February 2022, with its full implementation starting in the 2022/2023 academic year. Nadiem explained that the *Kurikulum Merdeka* was introduced to address the educational setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The *Kurikulum Merdeka* presents challenges for all stakeholders because many teachers remain bound by traditional methods of teaching dictated solely by the curriculum. In contrast, *Merdeka Belajar* demands that both teachers and students exercise creativity in determining learning objectives and methods, thereby fostering hope and producing meaningful outcomes.

The *Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar* offers schools, teachers, and students the opportunity to innovate, improvise, and negotiate learning in a free, independent, and creative manner. *Merdeka Belajar* is a condition that entrusts teachers and students with full autonomy in the learning process, allowing students to develop optimally under the guidance of their teachers. Based on the above, *Merdeka Belajar* can be understood as a concept that embodies freedom of thought, creativity, innovation, and improvisation for both teachers and students, leading to more meaningful results. Therefore, teachers must be creative and innovative in designing their lessons to achieve the educational goals of shaping students' character in alignment with the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*.

Hypotheses research

- Is there an influence of transformational leadership on readiness to change in teachers who practice *merdeka belajar*?
- Is there an influence of knowledge sharing behavior on readiness to change in teachers who practice *merdeka belajar*?
- Is there an influence of transformational leadership and knowledge sharing behavior on readiness to change in teachers who practice *merdeka belajar*?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Participants

This study employed a quantitative, survey-based approach. The sample included 648 teachers from across Indonesia who had implemented the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum for at least one semester. A convenience sampling method was used, prioritizing the availability of respondents who were willing to voluntarily participate in the study.

Procedure

The study made use of a survey created using Google Forms. The survey link was distributed online through various social media platforms, including LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp. The survey consisted of several sections: an introductory segment explaining the research objectives, an informed consent form to gain participant agreement, a section on participant characteristics, and research scales measuring variables such as Readiness to Change, Transformational Leadership, and Knowledge Sharing Behavior.

Instruments

The instruments employed in this study were based on a Likert scale, with four response options ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The research scales included the Readiness to Change Scale, the Transformational Leadership Scale, and the Knowledge Sharing Behavior Scale. These scales were adapted into Indonesian using a back-translation process. Validity testing was carried out through expert judgment, and a pilot test was conducted with 30 teachers. The results indicated that all items in the three scales had item-total correlation values above 0.3, signifying that the items consistently and accurately measured their respective variables. The Readiness to Change Scale had 41 items with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.963, the Transformational Leadership Scale had 15 items with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.954, and the Knowledge Sharing Behavior Scale contained 6 items with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.942.

Data analysis

For data analysis, descriptive statistics were used to provide an overview of the respondents, including mean and standard deviation values. Hypothesis testing was conducted using multiple linear regression analysis through JASP software version 22 to assess the influence of Transformational Leadership and Knowledge Sharing Behavior on teachers' readiness for change in Indonesia.

Demographic analysis

Gender of respondents

The majority of the respondents were female, accounting for 61.11%, while 38.89% were male. The gender distribution of respondents is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Gender of respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Comulative Percent
Valid	Male	252	38,89	38,89
	Female	396	61,11	61,11
	Total	648	100,00	100,00

Age of the respondents

Age is a critical factor in determining an individual's capacity to embrace and execute changes, particularly regarding the adoption of new technology in schools. Most respondents were between the ages of 24 and 29, representing 43.98%, followed by the 30-35 age group, which accounted for 38.27%. The smallest proportion of respondents, just 2.47%, were aged over 40 years. Age distribution is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Age group of respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Comulative Percent
Valid	19-23	36	5,56	5,56
	24-29	285	43,98	43,98
	30-35	248	38,27	38,27
	36-40	63	9,72	9,72
	Above 40	16	2,47	2,47
	Total	648	100,00	100,00

Teaching category of respondents

The study revealed that most respondents were teachers from public schools, representing 58.18% of the sample, while private school teachers accounted for 41.82%. The teaching category distribution is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Teaching category of respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Comulative Percent
Valid	Private School Teacher	271	41,82	41,82
	Public School Teacher	377	58,18	58,18
	Total	648	100,00	100,00

Income levels

The study also assessed the income levels of teachers, as this factor plays a significant role in determining their ability to implement changes in schools. The data in Table 4 show that 45.99% of teachers earned between 1 to 3 million rupiah per month, while 36.27% earned between 3.1 to 5 million rupiah. Furthermore, 9.26% of teachers earned over 5 million rupiah, while 8.49% earned less than 1 million rupiah per month.

Table 4: Income levels of respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Comulative Percent
Valid	<1 million	55	8,49	8,49
	1-3 million	298	45,99	45,99
	3,1 – 5 million	235	36,27	36,27
	>5 million	60	9,26	9,26
	Total	648	100,00	100,00

Hypothesis testing results

The regression analysis confirmed that all hypotheses were supported, indicating that both Transformational Leadership and Knowledge Sharing Behavior significantly influenced teachers' readiness to change. The analysis showed a significance level of less than 0.001, confirming the positive impact of these two factors on teachers' readiness for change. The results of the hypothesis testing are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5: Hypothesis testing results

Model	t	p	Results
Transformational Leadership →Readiness to Change	7.122	< .001	Accepted
Knowledge Sharing Behavior →Readiness to Change	3.342	< .001	Accepted
Transformational Leadership & Knowledge Sharing Behavior →Readiness to Change	31.907	< .001	Accepted

DISCUSSION

Transformational leadership and knowledge-sharing behavior synergize to enhance teachers' readiness for change. Transformational leadership provides vision, motivation, and essential support, while knowledge-sharing behavior ensures practical tools and information flow among educators. When combined, these elements create a solid foundation that prepares teachers to embrace and implement educational changes. Such leadership and collaboration cultivate an environment that supports transformation and increases the effectiveness of the overall change process in educational settings (Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Leaders employing a transformational style communicate a clear vision for change, while knowledge sharing equips teachers with the necessary skills and information to realize this vision. This dynamic ensures that teachers not only understand the objectives but also possess the tools and knowledge required for successful execution. Additionally, transformational leadership fosters motivation, and knowledge sharing reinforces social support among teachers. Together, emotional support from leadership and practical guidance from peers create a favorable atmosphere for change (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Chiang & Hsu, 2014).

Resistance to change can often arise from uncertainty and fear, but transformational leadership helps to mitigate these barriers by offering clear explanations and inspirational guidance. At the same time, knowledge sharing reduces ambiguity, enabling teachers to feel more confident about the changes ahead. This combination of factors enhances teachers' readiness to adopt new teaching methods and practices. Transformational leadership also builds confidence and competence, while knowledge sharing improves teachers' practical skills. Together, these elements create a culture that encourages innovation and continuous adaptation, facilitating an environment where change is not only accepted but embraced (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Rahman et al., 2015).

Transformational leadership plays an essential role in improving teachers' readiness to change, as it focuses on motivating and inspiring individuals to reach their full potential (Iqbal & Khan, 2016). Such leaders help teachers grasp and support the vision behind *Merdeka Belajar* by clearly explaining the program's benefits and objectives. Once teachers understand this vision, they are more likely to feel motivated and ready for change. Leaders who provide strong emotional support and encouragement help teachers build confidence, which reduces resistance to new teaching approaches.

Transformational leadership also empowers teachers to take initiative and innovate. In the context of *Merdeka Belajar*, this empowerment translates into giving teachers the autonomy to design and implement creative teaching methods that meet the specific needs of their students. As a result, teachers are more prepared to adapt to changes. Transformational leaders also prioritize professional development, supporting teachers in gaining new skills and knowledge. This ongoing training enhances teachers' ability to manage changes introduced by the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. In addition, transformational leadership fosters a positive and adaptive organizational culture, which makes it easier for teachers to accept and implement changes effectively (Thomas & Hossain, 2019).

In the context of *Merdeka Belajar*, transformational leadership provides the necessary vision, motivation, empowerment, and professional development that are critical for facilitating change. Teachers feel more prepared to adapt to flexible, student-centered teaching approaches with the right leadership support. Readiness for change, in this case, refers to teachers' willingness and ability to accept and implement shifts in their educational practices, particularly as they transition toward a more flexible, student-focused model (Bryk et al., 2010).

Similarly, knowledge-sharing behavior contributes significantly to readiness for change (McGivern & Hackett, 2015; Olsson & Johansson, 2020). Knowledge sharing allows teachers to acquire relevant information and skills, helping them feel more confident and prepared to implement changes. In educational contexts, teachers who actively share teaching methods and evaluation techniques with their colleagues are better equipped to adopt and implement new curriculum changes or teaching strategies. Knowledge sharing reduces the uncertainty that often accompanies change (Kim & Lee, 2019). When teachers have access to clear, comprehensive information, they feel more confident and ready to face challenges associated with change. Furthermore, knowledge sharing fosters collaboration and positive social interactions. Support from colleagues enhances teachers' readiness for change, as they feel backed by a supportive network (Lee & Park, 2018; Al-Jabri & Al-Madhoun, 2017).

Knowledge sharing is also crucial in cultivating a culture that embraces change. When sharing knowledge becomes a regular practice, individuals are more likely to approach changes positively. Knowledge sharing stimulates innovation and creativity, facilitating the adoption of new ideas and solutions within the teaching environment (Chang & Lee, 2018; Williams & Clark, 2016; Choi & Ahn, 2021).

Research conducted by Chuang, et al., (2013) found that transformational leaders influence readiness to change through increasing vision communication and employee empowerment. Research by Fong et al. (2011) also show that knowledge sharing behavior increases organizational flexibility in responding to change. Research conducted by Gracia-Morales et al. (2012) found that transformational leadership supports knowledge sharing and readiness for innovation, which are considered part of readiness for change and Oreg et al. (2011) explained based on the theory of resistance to change to explain how transformational leadership can reduce resistance to change. In contrast to the research of Ahmad et al. (2020) research results show that knowledge sharing

behavior mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and readiness to change. The results of this research and the results of previous research can be used as reference material for future research to test different models such as testing an integrative model that measures direct, mediation and moderation relationships to understand how these three variables influence each other

CONCLUSION

The curriculum changes introduced in Indonesia in 2022, aimed at helping students recover from the educational setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, have had varied impacts on teachers and schools. Both teachers and schools are expected to support the government in implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* program, although the transition has not always proceeded as smoothly as anticipated. This study examined the impact of teachers' readiness for change in the context of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum and explored the roles of transformational leadership and knowledge-sharing behavior.

The results of this research indicate that transformational leadership, characterized by direct involvement in the field, and the provision of direction, support, and motivation, positively influence teachers' readiness for change. Furthermore, teachers are encouraged to actively share knowledge with their colleagues, as knowledge sharing enables them to exchange ideas and strategies to tackle common challenges.

The findings of this study provide valuable insights for schools, teachers, and the government, offering a reference for engaging all stakeholders in future curriculum changes. Ensuring the successful implementation of these changes requires effective leadership and a collaborative, knowledge-sharing culture among educators. By fostering these conditions, future educational reforms can be more smoothly integrated, aligning with the evolving needs of Indonesia's education system.

This research has limitations in that the number of respondents is not evenly distributed in each province due to the limitations of researchers in reaching each province, such as the Papua Pegunungan province. It is recommended that further research conduct research in one or two provinces to obtain a balanced number of respondents and it is also recommended that future researchers use different models or different variables to dig deeper into readiness for change. Readiness to change is not only in the curriculum but readiness to change in many things that happen at school.

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