Evaluative study: Strengthening teacher competence through utilization of the *Merdeka Mengajar* platform

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Abstract. The evaluation of the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform Program at SMP Brawijaya Smart School aimed to determine the improvement of teacher competence, using the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) evaluation model. The survey indicates that the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform increases teachers' digital workload, necessitating an evaluation of the program's effectiveness in supporting the four teacher competencies. This program evaluation employs a qualitative approach, utilizing Miles et al.'s (2014) interactive model through interviews, observations, and documentation involving the principal, vice principal, and teachers. The results showed that: (1) in terms of context, the platform is in line with government policies and supports improving teacher competencies; (2) in terms of inputs, human and physical resources are adequate; (3) in the process dimension, performance monitoring is conducted systematically; and (4) in terms of products, the platform has contributed to improving the four teacher competencies effectively. However, there are challenges related to time. This application remains feasible with adjustments, including simplifying the appearance and adding scheduling features, reminders, and estimated learning duration to accommodate teachers' limited time.

Introduction

Afendi & Farihatun (2022) state that a teacher should ensure that the educational process runs effectively. This statement is supported by Uno & Lamatenggo (2016), who previously asserted that teachers have the responsibility to guide and direct students in improving their abilities for the progress of the nation. Article 8 of Law Number 14 of 2005 (Undang-Undang Nomor 14 Tahun 2005) states that "teachers must have academic qualifications, competence, educator certificates, physical and mental health, and the ability to achieve the national education goals". These aspects form a unity of requirements that every teacher must possess.

Teachers can improve their competencies through various efforts, including certification, national and local curriculum development, and attending training programs (Santoso, 2022; Widana et al., 2023). Teacher competence, as stated in Article 10 Undang-Undang Nomor 14 Tahun 2005, reads, "pedagogical competence, personal competence, social competence, and professional competence, which are obtained through professional education". Furthermore, Article 14 paragraph (1) of the same law states that one of the rights and obligations of teachers is to "obtain opportunities to improve competence" (Undang-Undang Nomor 14 Tahun 2005). In response to this regulation,

the Minister of Education and Culture has previously introduced the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform to improve teacher competence. This application was created to assist teachers in obtaining references, guidelines, and interpretations related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The *Merdeka Mengajar* platform is an application designed to assist teachers in understanding, accessing reference materials, and implementing the Merdeka Curriculum (Kementerian Pendidikan, 2022; Purnadewi & Widana, 2023). This application can be accessed easily through digital devices. Its features include inspirational videos that serve as a reference source and support the development of teacher competencies, training modules that teachers can complete independently, and a portfolio feature to demonstrate teachers' professional achievements. Through these features, the platform enables teachers to improve their competencies and provide better education services to students (Kementerian Pendidikan, 2022).

The *Merdeka Mengajar* platform was developed to improve teacher competence through the materials provided (Merdeka Mengajar, 2022). The platform offers several comprehensive self-development features. In addition to the three main features previously mentioned, the platform also has a learning community that allows teachers across Indonesia to share knowledge and collaborate in the learning process (Merdeka Mengajar, 2022). The platform is also equipped with a Learning Management System (LMS) that allows teachers to participate in official training programs provided by the Ministry of Education. This platform is deliberately designed to support the development of teacher competencies in line with the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Under its purpose, *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform is here to improve teacher competence, and this can be proven through research conducted by Uluwiyah et al. (2024). The study's findings revealed that teachers can gain insight into providing creative, innovative, and in-depth teaching by using this application. The teachers showed high enthusiasm to continue learning and understanding all the features provided in the app. Through this platform, teachers get guidance on how to conduct engaging lessons. In addition, teachers also continue to strive to develop their competence.

In depth, the improvement in the four teacher competencies expected from the use of *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform consists of pedagogical competence, namely "the ability to manage students' learning which includes understanding students, designing and implementing learning, evaluating learning outcomes, and developing students to actualize their various potentials" (Peraturan Pemerintah Nomor 19 Tahun 2005). Furthermore, personality competence requires teachers to have "the ability to have a steady, stable, mature, wise, and authoritative personality, to be a role model for students, and to have noble character" (Peraturan Pemerintah Nomor 19 Tahun 2005). Teachers must also have professional competence to demonstrate "the ability to master the subject matter broadly and deeply" (Undang-Undang Nomor 14 Tahun 2005). Finally, teacher relationships are regulated by social competence to be able to "communicate and interact effectively and efficiently with students, fellow teachers, parents/guardians of students, and the surrounding community" (Undang-Undang Nomor 14 Tahun 2005).

However, various other problems arise in using the *Merdeka Mengajar* platform. Haeri & Afriansyah (2024) conducted a survey of 211 teachers from 27 provinces in Indonesia. Teachers participate in webinars and create learning reports, which creates a digital administrative burden for them. This situation requires evaluation activities to determine the effectiveness of using the *Merdeka Mengajar* platform in supporting the strengthening of the four teacher competencies. Program evaluation is important for continuous improvement, but its implementation is limited. In addition, the evaluation results will also provide an overview of the sustainability of using the *Merdeka Mengajar*

Platform in the future. This can be in the form of continuing, replacing, adjusting, and stopping the program.

Currently, *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform is used by every school that has implemented Merdeka Curriculum. SMP Brawijaya Smart School (BSS) is one of the schools that welcomes *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform, as evidenced by the article published on the school website. This article was uploaded before the Merdeka Curriculum companion application was officially launched. This response is intended to encourage teachers to actively explore and familiarize themselves with the features available in the application. The hope is that teacher competence will increase after teachers become familiar with the Merdeka Teaching Platform. This application aims to have a positive impact on teachers, students, and schools. The selection of SMP BSS as a research location is based on the fact that this school has a high readiness to implement the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform. This research can provide a more in-depth picture of the positive response of SMP BSS to the use of applications in supporting the improvement of the four teacher competencies.

Program evaluation is critical to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the application on teacher competence. The *Merdeka Mengajar* platform is a program that has been running for the past three years. Therefore, the evaluation is carried out while this program is still being implemented at SMP Brawijaya Smart School. The evaluation will use the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, and Product) model introduced by Guba & Stufflebeam (1970). The evaluation of this model is conducted to assess the planning that has been set previously, the inputs in the program, the evaluation process, and the decisions made based on the evaluation results (Guba & Stufflebeam, 1970). In the CIPP evaluation model, Guba and Stufflebeam (1970) explain that context refers to the examination of actual conditions, including needs and problems that justify the implementation of a program. Input involves evaluating resources and strategies. The process focuses on assessing the implemented program, including its procedures and activities. Finally, the product emphasizes outcomes and measures the extent to which the program has achieved the desired goals or standards.

Arifin (2019) also added various benefits of using CIPP evaluation. Through this evaluation, information will be obtained that can guide the decision-making process. Then, stakeholders can understand the benefits of using the program. Finally, the evaluation results can serve as a guideline for developing the program. The CIPP evaluation was chosen based on its advantages in evaluating education programs as a whole. This evaluation not only focuses on the final results, but also pays attention to the context of needs, the suitability of inputs, the suitability of the implementation process, and the real impact of the program. CIPP evaluation can reflect the real conditions in the field as a whole regarding its strengths and weaknesses. This makes the evaluation more objective, systematic, and useful as a basis for decision-making for the continued use of *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform in the future (Sumandya et al., 2022).

The formulation of the problem discussed is how to evaluate the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform program in improving four teacher competencies at SMP Brawijaya Smart School. The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform program in terms of context, input, process, and product aspects at SMP Brawijaya Smart School. This evaluation aims to provide an overview of the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform's background, including the various resources that support the program, its implementation, and the results of its use in improving the four teacher competencies.

Method

This evaluation was carried out with a qualitative descriptive approach to assess the utilization program of the *Merdeka Mengajar* platform by teachers at SMP Brawijaya Smart School. This program evaluation utilized a range of data collection instruments, including evaluators, interview guidelines, and tools such as mobile phones for recording, as well as notebooks and pens for note-taking. The evaluation took place over two months, from January to February 2025, at SMP Brawijaya Smart School.

Evaluation indicators refer to the four components in the CIPP model (Context, Input, Process, and Product), with detailed indicators developed based on the theories of Guba & Stufflebeam (1970) and Stufflebeam & Coryn (2014). Context will examine the background of the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform, its beneficiaries, and the objectives to be achieved through its use. Input focuses on the various resources used and strategies to achieve the target of using the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform. The process discusses the suitability of implementing or controlling predetermined targets. The product will describe the positive impact related to the four competencies of educators, the negative impact felt from using the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform, and the follow-up of the program in the future. From the previous explanation, the criteria in each component of the CIPP evaluation can be simplified in the table below.

Table 1. Criteria of the CIPP Evaluation Indicator

Indicator of the CIPP	Component Criteria
Context	1. According to needs 2. Clear program objectives
Input	1. Human resources 2. Supporting resources 3. Implementation strategy
Process	1. Program implementation as planned
Product	1. Achievement of goals 2. Positive impact 3. Follow-up program

Source: Processed by Evaluator (2025)

The validity of data in this evaluation is tested through source and method triangulation. Analysis of the results of the evaluation of the Merdeka Teaching Platform program is carried out using an interactive model of Miles et al. (2014), focusing on four aspects. First, evaluation data were collected through interviews with six informants, observing learning and assessment innovations, and collecting documents from school archives and social media. Second, data condensation involves selecting data relevant to the program evaluation's purpose. Third, data display is achieved by simplifying the evaluation results into a narrative. Fourth, conclusion drawing or verification, which is the result of an evaluation that has been verified. In simple terms, these four aspects can be seen in the figure below.
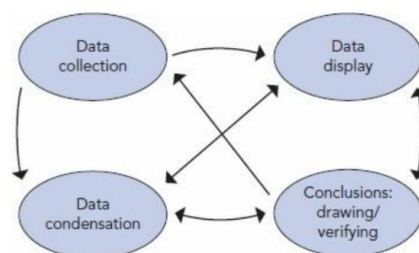
Image 1. Analysis Method

Results and Discussion

Context

The background of this program is based on the government's policy to implement the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform. As a private school, SMP Brawijaya Smart School was not required to follow the Minister of Education's decision at that time. However, through its partner, the Education Office, it conducted socialization and invited all school principals, both public and private, to adopt the Merdeka Teaching Platform. Seeing this, SMP Brawijaya Smart School, which has currently implemented Merdeka Curriculum, decided to follow the government's recommendation.

From the findings, it is evident that the Merdeka Mengajar Platform was implemented not due to a specific issue. Arifin (2019) states that context can arise from factors such as politics, social, policy, environment, and culture. SMP Brawijaya Smart School implements the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform based on government policy. The policy to implement this platform is evidenced by the issuance of Circular Letter Number 0559/B.B1/GT.02.00/2024. In the official announcement, there is a point that reads as follows, "...As a supporting tool, existing features in PMM such as Independent Practice, Competency Reflection, Proof of Work, and Community are not mandatory...". The Ministry of Education and Culture expects teachers and principals to get added value from PMM in carrying out their daily tasks." (Ditjen GTK Kemendikbudristek, 2024).

The content of the letter outlines the purpose of the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform and explains the supporting features available in the application. In addition, the letter also contains an appeal stating that the use of these features is not mandatory. However, teachers and principals are encouraged to activate and utilize PMM in carrying out their duties. This encouragement prompted SMP Brawijaya Smart School to respond positively to the government's recommendation and adopt the platform.

According to Agustino (2020) one of the characteristics of policy is that it comes from laws and regulations and has a control function. Based on this understanding, there is a clear relationship between educational institutions and policy implementation, such as the use of the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform. This phenomenon arises because policies function as implicitly binding directives that institutions are expected to follow. As stated in the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform Guidebook prepared by the Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan (2022) this platform is designed to support self-development and assist teachers in the teaching and learning process. The teaching and training materials available within the application are intended to help teachers and school principals innovate, develop competencies, and enhance performance (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2022). According to SMP Brawijaya Smart School, teachers can participate in several activities included in the government's program, such as supervision activities. Furthermore, supervision activities can provide data on performance. In addition, teachers can attend workshops, search for and practice teaching resources, and upload evidence of their work. By participating in these activities, teachers will stay current with the development of the education world, enabling them to serve students according to current education trends.

In addition to complying with government policies, teachers also have specific goals when accessing the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform. Many teachers aim to enhance the quality of learning by developing innovative, meaningful, and student-centered practices. This effort is realized through improving four teacher competencies. This objective aligns with the expectations outlined in Circular Letter Number 0559/B.B1/GT.02.00/2024. The letter reads, "...The Merdeka Teaching Platform (PMM) is a tool provided for teachers and principals to improve the quality of performance and competence on an ongoing basis..." (Ditjen GTK Kemendikbudristek, 2024).

Input

Field findings show that several key individuals are involved in supporting the implementation of the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform. Principals play an important role in monitoring teachers' engagement with the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform through supervisory activities. As stated by the Directorate General of Higher Education Dirjendikti (2022), one of the responsibilities of the principal is to supervise educators and education personnel. In this context, the principal's supervision of teacher involvement and performance on the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform can be considered as part of fulfilling this primary responsibility.

In addition, teachers at SMP Brawijaya Smart School acknowledged the importance of coordination between the principal and the vice principal for curriculum affairs in maximizing the use of the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform. Collaboration between these two key figures led to the formation of a learning community involving all teachers. This learning community is a school strategy to improve teachers' understanding of the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform.

Within the learning community, teachers are updated on current issues related to the Merdeka Teaching Platform. The principal invites qualified speakers to share valuable knowledge with the teachers. In addition, teachers are also allowed to attend paid seminars to develop their skills in utilizing the platform. This initiative is supported by the vice principal, who facilitates the communication of teachers' needs to the principal.

In a study conducted by Kurniati et al. (2024) it was found that the vice principal of SMK Negeri 2 Depok demonstrated strong managerial skills, especially in terms of communication. The vice principals at Brawijaya Smart School also demonstrated similar skills. One of their main contributions is to act as a liaison between teachers and principals, especially in facilitating access to paid workshops and seminars. This initiative provides strategic input to support teachers in gaining a deeper understanding of the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform.

In addition, within the learning community, teachers are encouraged to share and exchange knowledge they gain from various sources. Most of the information shared comes from teachers who have achieved the status of teacher leaders (guru penggerak). These individuals frequently share concepts and practices that can be applied in classroom instruction. Teacher leaders (guru penggerak) at SMP Brawijaya Smart School play an important role in improving the understanding of other teachers, both within and outside the school. One example of this contribution is evidenced by an educational video shared by one of the lead teachers on the YouTube platform, as shown in the image below.

Koneksi Antar materi Modul 1.4

**Image 2.** The Active Participation of Teacher leaders (*Guru Penggerak*) at SMP BSS

The term teacher leaders (guru penggerak) is defined as a learning leader who promotes holistic student development, actively and proactively supports the professional growth of fellow educators in implementing student-centered learning, and serves as a role model and transformation agent in the educational ecosystem to help realize the profile of a Pancasila learner (Hasbi et al., 2022). The Guru Penggerak Program (PGP) was established to improve the competencies of participating teachers and other educators through reflection, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing (Hasbi et al., 2022). This goal is realized through the dissemination of knowledge, information, and insights gained by teacher leaders (guru penggerak), which are shared with fellow teachers to support the development of effective learning practices. In addition, teacher leaders (guru penggerak) also play a role in overcoming the challenges faced by teachers related to the Merdeka Mengajar Platform.

Technology resources are another important component that schools must provide to support the effective use of the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform. As stated by the Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan (2022), the platform enables teachers to understand better, access reference materials for, and implement the Merdeka Curriculum. As the platform is application-based, effective implementation relies heavily on the availability of stable internet connectivity and adequate electronic devices. SMP Brawijaya Smart School has many laptops, computers, and internet connectivity that facilitate access to the *Merdeka Mengajar* platform at school.

Process

At SMP Brawijaya Smart School, the strategy for understanding the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform through learning community (komunitas belajar) is routinely held every Monday at 2:00 PM. Each teacher takes turns to share the knowledge they have gained through the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform. Discussions related to the platform have included topics such as instructional implementation and the use of teaching media. Arifin (2019) also discusses resources that influence the implementation of the evaluation process. Teacher leaders (guru penggerak) frequently serve as resource persons during these learning community sessions. The agenda is designed to be interactive; in addition to receiving new knowledge, teachers are encouraged to engage in discussions and direct practice. These activities foster shared experiences and a uniform understanding of the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform among all teachers.

The control measures implemented by SMP Brawijaya Smart School are an integral part of the evaluation process. At SMP Brawijaya Smart School, monitoring is implemented gradually. The principal oversees and approves the competency development programs selected by teachers to enhance their competencies each semester. Furthermore, the achievement levels of the activities selected by the teachers are carefully evaluated. If teachers demonstrate low engagement with the platform, the principal will issue reminders to encourage their active participation. This aligns with Arifin (2019) assertion that process evaluation provides an overview of the program's sustainability under the predetermined plan. One of the targets achieved and monitored by the principal can be seen in the picture below.
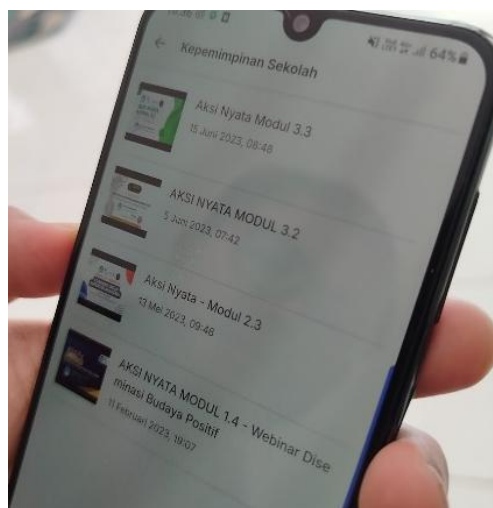
Image 3. The target that the Teachers at SMP BSS have accomplished
Source: SMP Brawijaya Smart School Document (2025)

The evaluation of the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform conducted by the principal is consistent with research conducted by Rahayu et al. (2024) at SMA Al-Ma'moen. The study found that the principal conducted several monitoring activities to assess the use of the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform. The initial activity involved checking the attendance of teachers during scheduled sessions for accessing the platform. Once teachers were logged into their accounts, the principal focused on evaluating the improvement in teacher competencies before and after participating in activities. Finally, the principal assessed the alignment of the evaluation results with the targets chosen by the teachers on the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform (Rahayu et al., 2024).

Product

As discussed in the context evaluation, the target to be achieved in using the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform is to improve teacher competence. Teachers and deputy principals for curriculum affairs stated that all targets related to improving four teacher competencies were fully achieved. Prior to the use of the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform, improving teacher competence was generally carried out through offline training or workshops. However, since the implementation of the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform, various innovations have emerged that can make it easier for teachers to access materials, participate in independent training, and develop competencies more flexibly and sustainably.

The two indicators studied in pedagogical competence are related to innovation in learning design and implementation, as well as the evaluation actions taken. Learning innovation is closely linked to the methods of assessment that teachers use to evaluate students' progress. An example of this innovation at SMP Brawijaya Smart School is the use of game-based learning through barcodes, which serves as both a learning tool and an assessment method.

Teachers at SMP Brawijaya Smart School frequently accessed the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform to study materials available in the learning video and teaching media features. The teachers employed the observe, imitate, and modify approach to create attractive and relevant teaching media tailored to students' needs. One of the innovations in instructional design and implementation carried out by the teachers was game-based learning, which was packaged through the use of barcodes. This game-based learning approach also introduced innovations in the assessment of students. Further illustration of Game-Based Learning can be seen in the figure below.

Image 4. Innovation in Learning and Assessment at SMP BSS

Source: Researcher's Documentation (2025)

As previously mentioned, the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform has the potential to improve educators' pedagogical competencies. More specifically, the platform supports activities that enhance teachers' abilities in designing and implementing learning experiences. Designing and implementing effective learning requires teachers to prioritize the characteristics of students and create a conducive learning environment (Suyanto & Jihad, 2013). Furthermore, learning evaluation must be carried out through various methods to accurately describe student understanding and provide direction for future learning improvements (Suyanto & Jihad, 2013). There is a precise alignment between the actions taken by the teachers and the concepts outlined above.

A teacher must demonstrate and possess a strong personality to serve as a role model for students. This personality trait can manifest in the teacher's fairness in ensuring that all students receive the same learning material. Such actions are part of applying the values of noble character. Differentiated learning is a method employed by teachers to ensure fairness and meet the diverse needs of all students.

Differentiated learning is a teaching and learning approach tailored to meet students' abilities and needs (Khristiani et al., 2021). This approach is divided into three key components: learning content, the learning process, and the final product presented (Khristiani et al., 2021). Manzis (2024) emphasized that in planning, designing, and implementing differentiated learning, teachers access and understand these concepts through the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform. Additionally, to ensure fairness in the learning process, reflection activities must be conducted. Reflection involves reviewing the learning activities that have been carried out to improve the quality of future learning (Alhayat & Johan, 2025). Through the act of reflection, teachers gain insights into the level of student understanding regarding the material delivered. According to Suyanto & Jihad (2013), teachers are expected to act under religious values, such as faith, piety, honesty, sincerity, helpfulness, and exemplary behavior, which students can use as a model. The principle of fairness is implicitly embedded in these values, which teachers are expected to uphold.

The class must experience minor disturbances during the teaching and learning process, which students often cause. In such situations, the authority of the teacher, as part of personality competency, must be emphasized. To prevent this from happening, teachers have adopted the concept learned through the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform, namely the class agreement. This

agreement outlines prohibited behavior along with the appropriate consequences for the violation. For example, students are prohibited from making noise. In cases where noise occurs, the teacher prefers to give a verbal warning rather than give punishment. An example of a class agreement can be seen in the picture below.

Image 5. Class Agreement at SMP BSS
Source: SMP Brawijaya Smart School Document (2025)

This agreement serves as a form of positive discipline, aiming to regulate students' behavior in the classroom and instill respect and responsibility for themselves (Ardiantoro et al., 2021). Research conducted by Ardiantoro et al. (2021) in Mojokerto revealed that the Merdeka Mengajar Platform inspired teacher leaders in implementing class agreements. Rather than resorting to punishment, teachers emphasize giving constructive reprimands, which reinforces their authority. By respecting the class agreement, students demonstrate their respect for the teacher and avoid potential reprimands. As Suyanto & Jihad (2013) assert, the authority held by teachers fosters respect from students.

Teachers must have proficiency in the knowledge they impart to students. One form of proficiency in mastering the material is the ability to employ strategies for delivering complex content in a way that is accessible to students. With a deep understanding of the concepts, teachers can simplify difficult material for students to grasp.

In the professional competency of teachers, they are expected to possess the skills necessary to master and effectively communicate material that students may find difficult to understand. With a deep understanding of the concepts, teachers can simplify complex material for students. According to SMP Brawijaya Smart School, every teacher should have strategies or methods to make complex topics easier to grasp. In addition to providing repeated explanations, teachers must also cater to students' preferences by implementing differentiated instruction. For example, if a class enjoys Game-Based Learning, this method will be applied. Practical activities, if necessary, will also be conducted. If students prefer reading, PowerPoint presentations will be shown, and if they are more inclined to watch and listen, a video will be played. The Merdeka Mengajar Platform supports this teaching strategy. Manzis et al. (2024) found that teachers plan, design, and implement differentiated learning through the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform.

Differentiated learning is a method used by teachers to ensure that students understand difficult material. This practice reflects the teacher's professional competence. According to Suyanto &

Jihad (2013), teachers are required to master the learning materials under the curriculum used by the school, ensuring they understand both the structure, concepts, and scientific approaches taught (Suhardita et al., 2024).

At SMP Brawijaya Smart School, teachers build rapport with students by moving around the classroom during teaching. When approaching each student, the teacher tries to communicate with them, asking about their understanding of the lesson or engaging in casual conversation to create a more relaxed classroom atmosphere. Teachers understand which students grasp the material and which do not, as well as those who prefer informal communication versus formal exchanges. All students need to be approached without exception. Interaction with students is an embodiment of the teacher's social competency.

Through the learning community (komunitas belajar), teachers at SMP Brawijaya Smart School regularly engage in interactions. All teachers collaborate and work together to address any issues regarding access to the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform. During learning community activities, teachers share experiences gained through the platform. Every step and phase of the platform usage is discussed, ensuring that all teachers acquire the same knowledge, even if they do not directly access the application. Interaction with fellow teachers serves as an application of the teacher's social competency.

Febriana (2019); Suyanto & Jihad (2013) suggest that interacting with students involves understanding and empathizing with their conditions and needs. Teachers at SMP Brawijaya Smart School have practiced this. Although there is no direct connection to the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform based on the interview results, understanding students' needs is reflected in the teaching methods that align with students' preferences, as described in the pedagogical, behavioral, and professional competencies. The other three competencies, however, are directly inspired by the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform. Thus, it can be inferred that the positive impact of *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform on social competence is indeed tangible.

Febriana (2019) and Suyanto & Jihad (2013) further explain that communicating with peers is essential for discussing and solving issues related to students and for enhancing professional abilities. This practice has also been implemented at SMP Brawijaya Smart School. Any knowledge gained from the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform is shared among colleagues. The insights exchanged contribute to the improvement of professional skills, ultimately benefiting students. In this way, the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform fosters an increase in social competence among teachers.

An evaluation of teacher competence was also conducted in Heves County, Hungary by Ida (2017). The study revealed that teachers made deliberate efforts to ensure that students understood the material delivered. The attention provided by each teacher made students feel respected and treated fairly. This finding closely aligns with the development of the four core competencies among teachers at SMP Brawijaya Smart School (Indonesia) through the use of the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform.

In addition to the various positive impacts gained, there is one inseparable issue. Negative impacts were also felt in the use of the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform. Despite denying the existence of negative impacts, teachers at SMP Brawijaya Smart School encountered time-related challenges. Finding time to open and study the PMM had to be done in between teaching and other school duties. A similar experience was found in the research by Anrichal & Pramono (2023) at SMA Kesatrian 2 Semarang. The research results indicated that the time that teachers should have used for rest was being drained. However, this issue has been minimized through effective time management.

SMP Brawijaya Smart School believes that utilizing the Merdeka Mengajar Platform offers numerous benefits in enhancing competence. The school chose to continue using the application because the government has not provided a follow-up on the program's future use. Of course, the school will fully follow instructions from the government regarding the continued use of the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform.

Based on various considerations, including the effectiveness of the Merdeka Mengajar platform, its contribution to improving four teacher competencies, achieving success criteria, and informing school decisions, the evaluator recommended that the platform be continued with several adjustments. These adjustments include simplifying the display, as well as adding scheduling features, reminders, and more accurate estimation of learning duration to better suit the needs and time constraints of teachers. These recommendations refer to the indicators in the CIPP evaluation model, especially in the aspects of context, input, process, and product. If adjustments are made optimally, this platform has the potential to provide a more significant impact in supporting the strengthening of teacher competencies on an ongoing basis (Liska & Suastra, 2024).

Conclusion

The background of SMP Brawijaya Smart School's use of the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform is driven by government policy. The primary beneficiaries of using PMM are the teachers, who aim to improve their competencies. In the input evaluation, SMP Brawijaya Smart School relies on three primary human resources: the principal, the head of curriculum, and the teacher leaders (guru penggerak). Other supporting resources include a reliable internet connection, laptops, and computers. From the process evaluation, it is evident that every Monday, SMP Brawijaya Smart School holds routine discussions and sharing sessions about the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform. The principal closely monitors teachers' usage of the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform. Findings from the product evaluation showed that the improvement of pedagogical competence, personality competence, professional competence, and social competence was effectively achieved with a percentage of 100 percent. However, time constraints remain a challenge due to the need to balance professional development with teaching and administrative duties.

Based on the evaluation findings, the evaluators suggested that teachers should allocate 1-2 hours per week in a structured manner to access the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform, accompanied by adequate rest periods to avoid fatigue. Schools are also advised to periodically evaluate teachers' workloads and help adjust them if there is an imbalance that has the potential to cause stress or fatigue. This application remains feasible for continued use with adjustments, such as simplifying the display to enhance accessibility, practicality, and alignment with teachers' limited time. In addition, *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform can be equipped with scheduling features, reminders, and estimated learning duration for each teacher competency improvement module.

Acknowledgements

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