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Perceptions of junior high school science teachers in the implementation of the independent curriculum: A qualitative study in South Dampal District, Toli-Toli Regency

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ABSTRACT

The Merdeka Curriculum is the latest educational curriculum implemented in Indonesia to improve learning outcomes. This study aims to describe the perceptions of junior high school science teachers regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum: a qualitative study in South Dampal District, Toli-Toli Regency. The method used in this study was descriptive and qualitative. The research instruments used questionnaires and interviews, and the data collection techniques included questionnaires, interviews, and documentation. The data were analyzed descriptively. The results show that junior high school science teachers' perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum in South Dampal District are generally positive. This is demonstrated by indicators of absorption of external stimuli (80%), understanding (80%), assessment, and evaluation (80%). These findings indicate that teachers have a fairly good understanding of the concept, objectives, and implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. With this understanding, teachers can implement the Merdeka Curriculum more effectively in the learning process, thereby improving the quality of education in junior high schools in South Dampal District. In addition, teachers from schools that have implemented the Independent Curriculum and those that have not fully implemented it showed positive perceptions.

Keywords: perception; science teachers; independent curriculum.

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1. INTRODUCTION

As part of the educational transformation efforts in Indonesia, the Independent Curriculum has been officially socialized and implemented in all educational units (Damayanti et al., 2023; Damiati et al., 2024). The curriculum is a learning plan containing materials and lessons that are systematically arranged, planned, and programmed, and related to various activities and social interactions in the teaching and learning process to achieve educational goals. More broadly, the curriculum can be understood as a collection of values designed to be instilled in students (Akhmadi, 2023; Triatna et al., 2022).

The curriculum has a very strategic position in achieving educational goals (Windayanti et al., 2023). In general, there are three main functions that emphasize the importance of chronicles. First, the conservative function, namely synchronization that acts as an instrument to transmit and preserve past cultural values that are still considered relevant to contemporary conditions to the younger generation, especially students. Second, the critical or evaluative function, where the curriculum functions as a social control and filtering mechanism by selecting values that are no longer in accordance with current developments, then making changes or improvements to be more adaptive to actual needs. Third, the creative function, namely the curriculum that is required to be able to initiate and develop new things that are in line with the dynamics of change and the demands of society today and in the future (Maulida, 2022).

Continuous curriculum changes are carried out by the government as an effort to improve the quality of the national education system (Fauzia & Ramadan, 2023; Triatna et al., 2022). Basically, curriculum development is a planning process that includes determining the content and learning materials that need to be studied, as well as developing appropriate strategies or methods in the learning process (Lestari et al., 2023; Riyadi & Budiman, 2023).

Indonesia's national education curriculum has undergone five major revisions. First, a simple curriculum was implemented from 1947 to 1964. Second, curriculum updates were made in 1968 and 1975. Third, a process-skills-based curriculum emerged in 1984 and 1994, respectively. Fourth, a competency-based curriculum was implemented in 2004 and updated in 2006. Finally, a major transformation was undertaken through the 2013 Curriculum, which prioritizes competency and character, and is currently in the trial phase of the Merdeka Curriculum as the latest alternative (Salsabilla et al., 2023; Rahayu et al., 2022).

The Independent Curriculum is a refinement and simplification of the 2013 Curriculum, born during the Covid-19 pandemic and launched in 2021. Its implementation is now being intensively promoted, aiming to answer the challenges of the 21st century and encourage the realization of a smarter, more creative, and more independent society (Alimuddin, 2023).

The Independent Curriculum is a new curriculum launched by the Indonesian Government through the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2022 (Nasution et al., 2023; Vhalery et al., 2022). The presence of this curriculum is intended to provide flexibility to educational units in designing curriculum according to the needs and characteristics of each region (Ardiansyah et al., 2023). Through its implementation, students are encouraged to be more active, creative, and have a strong character in the learning process (Salsabilla et al., 2023; Windayanti et al., 2023). The basic principle of the Independent Curriculum emphasizes character formation and strengthening basic literacy, while providing equality to schools in determining subjects (Jannah et al., 2022; Marsela et al., 2022). The curriculum preparation process is carried out by educational units involving the school committee. The assessment system uses an authentic, project-based and portfolio approach (Yunita et al., 2023). The previous National Examination (UN) is no longer used, replaced by minimum competency assessment and character monitoring. The Independent Curriculum will be implemented in stages, starting in the 2022/2023 academic year.

The Independent Curriculum (Merdeka Curriculum) was gradually implemented in the 2022/2023 academic year. However, its implementation has not been uniform across all schools. Teachers' responses to the curriculum have also varied. This situation was evident in five junior high schools in the South Dampal District. Observations revealed that not all junior high schools in the South Dampal District have fully implemented the Independent Curriculum.

Of the five junior high schools in South Dampal District, namely SMP Negeri 1 Damsel, SMP Negeri 2 Damsel, SMP Negeri 3 Damsel, SMP Negeri 4 Damsel, and SMP Negeri Satap Buluminung, only one school, SMP Negeri 1 Damsel, has piloted the Merdeka curriculum, targeting seventh-grade students. The reasons for not implementing the Merdeka curriculum in the other four schools are the lack of adequate teacher training, inadequate school infrastructure, and poor internet access in some schools. The fact that four out of five schools are junior high schools that have not fully implemented the independent curriculum means that there are still science teachers who do not fully understand what the independent curriculum is and how to implement it. Teachers also play a crucial role in the process of curriculum development and implementation in schools. The success of curriculum implementation depends greatly on how intensively teachers implement it in the classroom. Addressing this condition requires data on junior high school science teachers' perceptions of the independent curriculum. Unfortunately, this data is not yet available, leading to research on the importance of junior high school science teachers' perceptions in the implementation of the independent curriculum: a qualitative study in South Dampal District, Toli-Toli Regency.

2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method (Sugiyono, 2019). The location of this study was conducted in the South Dampal District. The research time will be carried out in March-May 2025. The types of data in this study are primary data and secondary data. This research instrument is in the form of a questionnaire and interview. While data collection techniques include questionnaires, interviews and documentation. The data analysis technique in this study uses a descriptive analysis technique with the following formula: 1) Questionnaire, this study uses an instrument, namely a questionnaire used in this study using three indicators and a Likert scale as a level of perception measurement. The Likert scale is a scale used to measure the attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of a person or group of people about social events or symptoms. For the scores in the Likert scale used in each alternative answer is given a weight with a value of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5; 2) Interview guideline, The interview guide sheet is used to conduct structured interviews from the principal and vice principal sources. Questions are arranged based on three perception indicators. According to Salsabilla et al. (2023), descriptive analysis of the level of perception assessment categorization is divided into 5, namely very good, good, sufficient, less and very less.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study contain the perceptions of junior high school science teachers in South Dampal District regarding the independent curriculum using perception indicators according to (Damiati et al., 2024), which include (1) absorption of external stimuli, (2) understanding and comprehension, and (3) assessment and evaluation. Based on the questionnaire results, the analysis of the indicators for Junior High School Science Teachers' Perceptions in the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum: A Qualitative Study in South Dampal District, Toli-Toli Regency, obtained from five respondents. The summary of the questionnaire results based on the indicator for absorption of external stimuli or objects is presented in Table 1, the indicator for understanding and comprehension in Table 2, and the indicator for assessment or evaluation in Table 3.

Table 1. Absorption of External Stimuli or Objects

No	Statement Items	Respondents' Responses				
		S.S	S	K.S	T.S	S.T.S
1	The independent curriculum was created so that education can adapt to the demands of the times	5	0	0	0	0
2	The provision of effective and inclusive teaching materials in the independent curriculum aims to improve the quality of education and increase learning opportunities for all students.	5	0	0	0	0

3	The independent curriculum encourages the use of open teaching materials that can be accessed freely	5	0	0	0	0
4	The independent curriculum is easily accepted by teachers and can be implemented	2	3	0	0	0
5	The Pancasila profile is applied to shape the character of Pancasila students.	2	3	0	0	0
6	The independent curriculum reflects national values and accommodates rapid technological developments and social change.	5	0	0	0	0
7	Project-based learning aims to make it easier for students to understand a concept through practice.	4	1	0	0	0
8	The independent curriculum gives teachers more freedom in choosing teaching methods that best suit students' needs and interests.	4	1	0	0	0
9	Teacher creativity in teaching is very much needed for learning that is relevant to local and global realities.	4	1	0	0	0
10	School culture is needed as a form of implementing the Pancasila student profile.	1	4	0	0	0
11	The independent curriculum can reflect the government's commitment to making Pancasila values the basis for formulating education policies.	0	5	0	0	0

Source: Results of a questionnaire of junior high school science teachers in South Dampal District

Based on the data in [Table 1](#), it can be seen that the independent curriculum received a positive response from respondents. Almost all statements related to the independent curriculum, such as adapting to the demands of the times, improving the quality of education, encouraging the use of open teaching materials, reflecting national values, and accommodating technological developments and social change, received a response of "Strongly Agree" from all respondents. This indicates that the main objectives of the independent curriculum are well appreciated by respondents. The question item regarding the ease of implementing the independent curriculum by teachers and the application of the Pancasila student profile in the field was responded to "strongly agree" by two teachers and three teachers answered "agree". This shows that most respondents tended to provide more moderate support (agree) compared to very strong support (strongly agree), this is because some respondents have not had experience in implementing the independent curriculum. The aspect of the independent curriculum regarding school culture is needed as a form of implementing the Pancasila student profile received a response of one "strongly agree" and four "agree". The independent curriculum about being able to reflect the government's commitment received a response of "agree" from all respondents and this shows that no teacher was very confident that the independent curriculum can reflect the government's commitment.

Table 2. Definition and Understanding

No	Statement Items	Respondents' Responses				
		S.S	S	K.S	T.S	S.T.S
1	The independent curriculum implements teaching according to the students' ability level.	4	1	0	0	0
2	The profile of a Pancasila student is the character and abilities that are built in the daily life of each individual student.	0	5	0	0	0
3	Bhineka Tunggal Ika aims to help students develop characters who appreciate cultural differences.	3	2	0	0	0
4	The independent curriculum creates more relevant, student-centered education and develops students' skills and character.	5	0	0	0	0
5	The independent curriculum is a curriculum that reflects local culture, values, and context in learning.	1	4	0	0	0

6	The Pancasila student profile is a graduate profile that aims to show the noble values of Pancasila students.	5	0	0	0	0
7	The focus on students in the independent curriculum is an approach that emphasizes student-centered learning, respecting their interests and potential.	4	1	0	0	0
8	The independent curriculum encourages the provision of a variety of teaching materials, including digital resources, textbooks, audiovisual materials, and other learning resources.	5	0	0	0	0

Source: Results of a questionnaire of Middle School Science Teachers in South Dampal District.

Based on [Table 2](#), there are varied responses from respondents to various aspects of the Merdeka curriculum. Respondents strongly agree that the Merdeka curriculum creates more relevant education, the Pancasila student profile aims to demonstrate the noble values of Pancasila, and the provision of diverse teaching materials. Aspects of the Merdeka curriculum related to implementing teaching according to the level of student ability and student-centered learning were also positively assessed by respondents, with four teachers responding "strongly agree" and one teacher responding "agree." Similarly, the statement that Bhineka Tunggal Ika in the Merdeka curriculum aims to help shape the character of students who respect cultural differences received a response of "strongly agree" from three teachers and two teachers responded "agree." The aspect of the Merdeka curriculum related to the Pancasila student profile, namely the character and abilities developed in the daily lives of each individual student, received a response of "agree" from all respondents. The aspect of the Merdeka curriculum, namely the curriculum that reflects local culture, values, and context in learning, received a response of "agree" from four respondents.

Table 3. assessment or evaluation

No	Statement Items	Respondents' Responses				
		S.S	S	K.S	T.S	S.T.S
1	The independent curriculum helps students to use their learning experiences	4	1	0	0	0
2	The independent curriculum assesses students not only based on academic achievement but also values their social, emotional, and skills development.	4	1	0	0	0
3	Formative assessment of the independent curriculum plays a role in continuous assessment to support learning improvements.	5	0	0	0	0
4	The independent curriculum is designed to improve the character of students to be better.	3	2	0	0	0
5	The independent curriculum provides the training and support necessary for teachers to become effective learning facilitators.	5	0	0	0	0
6	In the independent curriculum, assessments are carried out through practical tests to assess students' skills in carrying out activities or behavior according to competency requirements.	1	4	0	0	0
7	Project-based learning can enhance a new atmosphere in the learning process.	5	0	0	0	0

8	The independent curriculum assessment does not only focus on memorizing facts but also critical thinking skills.	4	1	0	0	0
9	The application of the Pancasila profile can improve students' knowledge and skills.	0	5	0	0	0
10	Project assessment or project-based assignments in the independent curriculum allow students to apply their knowledge and skills in real contexts.	4	1	0	0	0
11	Maximum training for teachers can help in implementing the independence curriculum in schools.	5	0	0	0	0

Source: Results of a questionnaire of junior high school science teachers in South Dampal District

Based on [Table 3](#), it can be seen that the Merdeka curriculum received a positive response from respondents regarding various aspects of the Merdeka curriculum implementation, such as the role of formative assessment, teacher training to become facilitators, project-based learning, and providing maximum training to teachers, received a response of "strongly agree" from all respondents. This indicates their support and trust in the potential of the Merdeka curriculum in improving the quality of education. Aspects of the Merdeka curriculum regarding the use of student learning experiences, academic assessment integrated with social-emotional development and skills, development of critical thinking skills and also the application of knowledge in real contexts received a response of "strongly agree" from four teachers and a response of "agree" from one teacher and the aspect of the Merdeka curriculum is designed to improve the character of students received a response of "strongly agree" from three teachers and two "agree". The results obtained indicate that the majority of respondents strongly support several of these aspects because teachers recognize that these aspects are important for developing students' skills and competencies as a whole as well as developing character and Pancasila values in students. Although not all respondents strongly agreed, some respondents agreed that the independent curriculum can improve students' character for the better. The curriculum aspect regarding conducting assessments through practical tests received a response of "strongly agree" from one teacher and a response of "agree" from four teachers. The aspect of implementing the Pancasila profile can improve knowledge and skills received a response of "agree" from all respondents. This indicates that there is not yet a strong belief from teachers that the implementation of the Pancasila profile can improve students' knowledge and skills and that the Pancasila profile test can be a tool to determine the increase in students' knowledge.

Science teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Dampal Selatan, SMP Negeri 2 Tampiala, SMP Negeri 3 Mimbal, SMP Negeri 4 Pekkasalo, and SMP Negeri Satap Buluminung showed varying perceptions of the Merdeka curriculum. Based on the analysis of the research data, it can be concluded that science teachers are familiar with the Merdeka curriculum, although most have never implemented it.

Information obtained from interviews with science teachers at SMPN SATAP BULUMINUNG and SMPN 1 DAMSEL regarding the independent curriculum shows that the teachers here have implemented the independent curriculum and they get information about the independent curriculum from various sources, namely by attending training, seminars, sharing knowledge from fellow teachers, principals, and even finding out for themselves through the internet. This proves how great the curiosity and enthusiasm of teachers at this school are to increase their knowledge about the independent curriculum. The discussion about the perceptions of science teachers at SMP in South Dampal District about the independent curriculum related to the three indicators is described below.

3.1. Absorption of Stimuli or Objects from Outside the Individual

The perceptions of junior high school science teachers regarding the independent curriculum in schools that have implemented the independent curriculum and those that have not, regarding the indicator of absorption of stimuli or objects from outside the individual, have a percentage (90%) in the very good category, particularly in the aspects of the independent curriculum being tailored to current demands, providing effective teaching materials, using open teaching materials, reflecting national values, project-based learning, giving teachers freedom in choosing teaching methods, and teacher creativity.

Teacher perceptions of these seven aspects reflect their belief that the independent curriculum is more flexible than the Curriculum 13 (K13). These results are also in line with the results of an interview with a science teacher at SMP 1 DAMSEL, Ms. Fitriani, who stated that the independent curriculum allows for the adaptation of learning content to the latest developments in science and technology so that students acquire relevant knowledge and skills. Science teachers can also select and develop the most effective teaching materials and use open learning resources such as applications or online materials to enrich learning. Mr. Wardi, a science teacher at SMP Satap Buluminung, stated that the independent curriculum also provides space for teachers to integrate national values, such as local wisdom, into science learning. This fosters a sense of patriotism in students. Furthermore, science teachers can also implement project-based learning that hones critical thinking, collaboration, and real-world problem-solving skills. This curriculum gives teachers the freedom to choose the most appropriate teaching methods, such as experiments, discussions, or field studies, according to students' learning styles. This is in line with Government Regulation Number 57 of 2021 concerning National Education Standards (Salsabilla et al., 2023). In Article 37, it is stated that a flexible curriculum will provide flexibility to educational units and educators to adapt, add richness to learning materials, and align the curriculum with the characteristics of students, the vision and mission of educational units, and local culture and wisdom (Nasution et al., 2023).

Aspects related to the independent curriculum are easily accepted by teachers and can be implemented, aspects of the application of the Pancasila profile to shape student character, aspects of school culture are needed as a form of implementation of the Pancasila student profile and aspects of the independent curriculum can reflect the government's commitment to having a percentage (60%) or getting a fairly good perception by respondents. Teachers did not respond very well to these aspects due to several reasons, as in the results of an interview with a science teacher at SMP 2 DAMSEL, namely Mrs. Hasnawiyah, who said that although the independent curriculum is considered easy to accept, in its implementation there are still challenges such as adjustments to learning methods, changes in learning culture and also inadequate school infrastructure. Regarding school culture, a teacher at SMPN 1 DAMSEL, namely Mrs. Fitriani, said that school culture is important in implementing the Pancasila student profile, however, teachers feel that the current school culture does not fully support the values for implementing the Pancasila student profile. The independent curriculum can reflect the government's efforts to make Pancasila values the basis of educational policy. Mrs. Fitriani also said that she agreed with the statement, but there are still challenges between the policies made and the implementation of the independent curriculum in schools. This is in line with the results of (Windayanti et al., 2023) study, which found that strengthening the Pancasila student profile has been implemented, but has not been optimal, especially in terms of developing learning plans. This lack of optimality lies in, among other things, the learning objectives that are still not fully aligned with basic competencies, diagnostic assessments that still tend to focus solely on cognitive aspects, the provision of biology materials that have not been adapted to the conditions of students, the selection of learning methods that are not yet appropriate, changes in school culture that have not been fully implemented, and numeracy and literacy activities that are still very lacking.

3.2. Understanding and Comprehension.

Junior high school science teachers' perceptions of the independent curriculum, both in schools that have implemented it and those that have not, showed a very good perception (67.5%), particularly regarding the aspects of the independent curriculum implementing teaching according to students' ability levels, the independent curriculum creating more relevant education, the Pancasila profile, which aims to demonstrate students' noble Pancasila values, the emphasis on student-centered learning, and the independent curriculum encouraging the provision of diverse teaching materials. Teachers' perceptions of these five aspects were very good because they recognize that each student has different abilities and learning styles, requiring tailored instruction. According to an interview with a science teacher at SMP 4 DAMSEL, Mr. Kardi, we can provide a better approach or exercises tailored to individual student needs. This enables students to learn more effectively and improve their understanding. Regarding more relevant education, Mr. Wardi, a science teacher at Satap Buluminung Middle School, said that the independent curriculum provides more relevant education because learning is not just about transferring knowledge,

but must be able to provide skills needed in the future. Regarding the profile of Pancasila students, as stated by Mrs. Fitriani, instilling the noble values of Pancasila in students is crucial to developing students who are not only academically intelligent but also possess good character. Mrs. Fitriani also stated that student-centered learning is beneficial because it is more effective in increasing student motivation to play an active role in the learning process. This is supported by research by [Maulida \(2022\)](#), which states that the independent curriculum requires students to be independent and active, as well as able to understand and utilize their knowledge. Students learn to actively acquire information, but teachers must be able to select and use appropriate strategies to actively engage students in learning. Education must be relevant to developing abilities and shaping character, creativity, and independence.

Aspects related to the profile of Pancasila students are the characters and abilities built in the daily lives of each individual student, the aspect of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika aims to help students' characters who appreciate cultural differences and the aspect of implementing the Pancasila profile can improve students' knowledge and skills to get a fairly good perception (65%). Teachers did not respond very well to this aspect due to several reasons related to the characters and abilities built in daily life, the science teacher of SMP 3 DAMSEL, namely Mr. Ilham, said that character formation and ability development require time and a consistent process in daily life, and also the differences in family backgrounds and social environments of students that can influence the formation of their characters. Respecting cultural differences (Bhinneka Tunggal Ika) according to the results of the interview with Mrs. Hasnawiyah said that understanding of cultural diversity in society is still lacking, and also the lack of experience and direct interaction with cultural diversity in the surrounding environment, so that learning is still less effective. Regarding improving knowledge and skills, Mr. Wardi stated that the quality and learning methods in improving students' knowledge and skills are not optimal due to the lack of facilities and learning resources that support active knowledge and skills development. This is supported by the results of [Akhmadi \(2023\)](#), which states that in order to build good character in students and strengthen Indonesia's national identity, educational institutions or schools should implement a school culture to shape good character by respecting differences or diversity based on Pancasila.

3.3. Assessment or Evaluation

The perceptions of junior high school science teachers regarding the independent curriculum in schools that have implemented the independent curriculum and those that have not, based on assessment or evaluation indicators, were very good (72.7%), particularly regarding the aspects of the independent curriculum helping students utilize learning experiences, the aspect of the independent curriculum assessing students not only based on academic achievement but also valuing their social, emotional, and skills development, the aspect of formative assessment, the aspect of providing necessary training and support for teachers to become learning facilitators, the aspect of project-based learning, the aspect of independent curriculum assessment not only focusing on memorizing facts but also on critical thinking skills, the aspect of project assessment or project-based assignments, and the aspect of maximizing teacher training can assist in implementing the independent curriculum in schools. The findings are supported by an interview with a science teacher at SMP 1 DAMSEL, Ms. Fitriani, who stated that the independent curriculum helps students learn through real-world experiences, as learning experiences can help students understand concepts more deeply and develop skills needed in the real world. This is supported by research by [Lestari et al \(2023\)](#), which found that involving students in life-related projects allows them to experience deeper learning experiences. Learning is no longer just about understanding concepts, but also about developing critical and creative skills essential for facing real-world challenges.

The independent curriculum assesses students not only based on academic achievement but also values their social, emotional, and skills development. The results of an interview with a teacher at SMP Satap Buluminung, namely Mr. Wardi, said that the assessment is not only based on academic achievement but also values the social, emotional, and skills development of students. This is very good because it can help teachers understand students more comprehensively and also teachers can support their overall development. Formative assessment is also very good because it helps teachers monitor student progress. This is in line with the results of research by [Ardiansyah et al \(2023\)](#) that holistic and formative assessments

seek to appreciate the diversity of individual development, by accommodating non-academic aspects that contribute to the formation of character and personality of students as a whole. In practice, this approach reflects the concept of contextual and holistic learning in the Independent Curriculum which focuses on the balanced personal development of students.

The results of interviews with all science teachers strongly agreed that training and support were needed to become effective learning facilitators because this new curriculum requires changes in the role of teachers, and adequate training and support are crucial to ensure its successful implementation in schools. Project-based learning, from the results of interviews with all science teachers, supported this project-based learning. They said that with this project-based learning, it can increase a new and more interesting atmosphere in the learning process and allow students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in a more authentic and real context. This is supported by the results of research by [Marsela et al., \(2022\)](#), that this project-based learning activity creates a pleasant classroom atmosphere, and makes students and educators enjoy the learning process.

Assessment in the independent curriculum, which focuses not only on memorizing facts but also on critical thinking skills, is supported by teacher opinions, as seen in an interview with Mr. Kardi, a teacher at SMP 4 DAMSEL. He stated that this type of assessment is beneficial because it encourages students to develop higher-order thinking skills and, most importantly, fosters their creativity. According to the interview results, all science teachers strongly agreed that there should be maximum training to help them implement the independent curriculum in their schools. This aligns with research by [Jannah et al. \(2022\)](#), which found that the independent curriculum assessment approach accommodates students' developmental journeys and provides space for them to develop competencies over time. Assessment is not only conducted at specific points but also occurs continuously. In this context, assessment is not only a marker of final results but also a tool that helps students, teachers, and parents understand the development process and progress of individual students.

Aspects related to the independent curriculum are designed to improve the character of students to be better, conducting assessments through practical tests and the application of the Pancasila profile can improve the knowledge and skills of students getting a fairly good perception (60%) by respondents. Teachers did not respond very well to this aspect due to several reasons regarding the improvement of student character, according to the results of the interview with the science teacher of SMP 3 DAMSEL, namely Mr. Ilham, who said that teachers at this school still have a less comprehensive understanding of the importance of character education so that we still need training from all related parties, so that we can implement the independent curriculum in schools. Assessment through practical tests, according to the results of the interview with the science teacher of SMP Satap Buluminung, namely Mr. Wardi, said that there are still challenges in designing valid practical tests, and in accordance with competency standards and it takes time and effort to build teacher skills in designing and conducting assessments through these practical tests well. This is supported by [Yunita et al. \(2023\)](#), which states that optimal training is crucial for teachers to effectively implement the "Merdeka Belajar" (independent learning curriculum) in schools. With the implementation of a learning system that emphasizes student character development, the assessment process goes beyond ranking. The "Merdeka Belajar" (independent learning curriculum) policy also emphasizes the talents and intelligence of each student. This is because students have varying abilities in their respective fields.

Based on the results of the data analysis in this study, it shows that the perception of junior high school science teachers regarding the independent curriculum is generally 80%, or in the good category. These results are consistent with the questionnaire given to science teachers and also interviews conducted by the author with junior high school science teachers during the implementation of the independent curriculum. Training and socialization of the implementation of the independent curriculum are essential for teachers to have a positive perception as educators. Teachers require training in aspects of material, skills, and expertise that will be used as provisions before implementing the independent curriculum. This is in line with the results of research by [Rahayu et al. \(2022\)](#), which states that the curriculum is a crucial element in the Indonesian education system, playing a role in the success of an educational process and

one element that can make a significant contribution to realizing the process of developing the quality of student potential.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it was found that the Perception of Junior High School Science Teachers in the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum: A Qualitative Study in South Dampal District, Toli-Toli Regency as a whole was in the good category with the acquisition of indicators of absorption of stimuli or objects from outside the individual having a percentage of 80%, indicators of understanding or comprehension having a percentage of 80%, indicators of assessment and evaluation having a percentage of 80%. This shows that teachers have an understanding of the concept, objectives, and implementation of the independent curriculum. With this understanding, teachers can effectively implement the independent curriculum in the learning process so that it can contribute to improving the quality of education in Junior High Schools in South Dampal District.

Ethical Approval

Not Applicable.

Informed Consent Statement

Not Applicable

Authors' Contributions

E contributed in conceptualization, writing original draft preparation. E and AK collaborated in doing methodology, formal analysis, investigation, and data curation. AK contributed in writing review and editing.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author due to privacy reasons.

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