The Role of *Guru Penggerak* in Program *Merdeka Belajar* at Junior High School

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ABSTRAK

Banyak guru yang membutuhkan bantuan untuk meningkatkan keterampilan abad 21 pada siswa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran Guru Penggerak dalam pengajaran Program Merdeka Belajar, serta faktor-faktor yang mendukung dan menghambat peran tersebut. Jenis penelitian ini yaitu kualitatif. Metode yang digunakan untuk mengumpulkan data yaitu observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Instrumen pengumpulan data menggunakan kuesioner. Teknik analisis data menggunakan analisis data kualitatif. Hasil penelitian yaitu Program Merdeka Belajar merupakan bagian dari Kurikulum Merdeka (Kurikulum Mandiri) dan Program Guru Penggerak. Kedua, Guru Penggerak menginisiasi Program Merdeka Belajar di kelas dan berkolaborasi dengan sesama guru untuk menyelaraskan program dengan kurikulum. Ketiga, Guru Penggerak sebagai inisiator, fasilitator, inspirator dan mendidik guru-guru lainnya untuk menciptakan program ramah siswa. Keempat, guru memotivasi siswa dengan membangun keyakinan di kelas, memberikan motivasi belajar. Kelima, Guru Penggerak memberikan dukungan kepada siswa dalam mengatasi kesulitan. Keenam, mereka menyesuaikan pembelajaran dengan kebutuhan masing-masing siswa, memanfaatkan sumber daya yang tersedia. Ketujuh, Guru Penggerak mengevaluasi kemajuan siswa melalui refleksi dan umpan balik. Guru mengintegrasikan Program Merdeka Belajar dengan kurikulum sekolah, merancang pembelajaran, dan berkolaborasi dengan pihak lain untuk memastikan keselarasan.

ABSTRACT

Many teachers need help improving 21st-century skills in students. This research aims to analyze the role of the Driving Teacher in teaching the Independent Learning Program, as well as the factors that support and hinder this role. This type of research is qualitative. The methods used to collect data are observation, interviews, and documentation. The data collection instrument uses a questionnaire. The data analysis technique uses qualitative data analysis. The research results show that the Independent Learning Program is part of the Independent Curriculum (Independent Curriculum) and the Teacher Mobilization Program. Second, the Mobilizing Teacher initiates the Independent Learning Program in the classroom and collaborates with fellow teachers to align the program with the curriculum. Third, teachers should be motivated as initiators, facilitators, and inspirers, and other teachers should be educated to create student-friendly programs. Fourth, teachers motivate students by building confidence in the class and providing learning motivation. Fifth, the Activation Teacher provides support to students in overcoming difficulties. Sixth, they adapt learning to each student's needs, utilizing available resources. Seventh, the Driving Teacher evaluates student progress through reflection and feedback. Teachers integrate the Independent Learning Program with the school curriculum, design lessons, and collaborate with other parties to ensure alignment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Twenty-first century learning is the accumulation of knowledge, work habits and soft skills, including digital literacy, critical thinking and problem-solving, that will help students lead successful careers in the modern workplace (Nesri & Kristanto, 2020; Novita et al., 2022). Encouraging students to innovate and fostering creative thinking is crucial for their overall development and for preparing them to thrive in a rapidly changing world. Here are the importance and methods of encouraging innovation and

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creative thinking in students critical life skill development; preparation for future careers consists of entrepreneurial mindset; enhancement of learning experience, promotion of individuality; and methods for encouraging innovation (Montessori et al., 2023; Widodo et al., 2020; Yulianisa et al., 2018). Innovation and creative thinking involve finding novel solutions to challenges (Aditiya & Fatonah, 2023; Cahyono, 2022). By encouraging students to think creatively, they develop effective problem-solving skills that can be applied in various aspects of their lives. Adaptability: In today's dynamic world, adaptability is a key skill. Creative thinking enables students to adapt to new situations, technologies, and environments with ease. Problem-solving is one of the crucial skills in today's era. Problem-solving is a way of learning to develop effectively (Lin et al., 2019; Rizal, 2021). However, the current problem is that many teachers still need help improving 21st-century skills in students. Previous research findings also state that many teachers still do not need help managing learning activities well (Indarta et al., 2022; Santosa, 2018; Sutrisno, 2022). This certainly impacts learning objectives that need to be achieved optimally. Poor classroom management will also impact students' need for more knowledge and skills (Indarta et al., 2022; Widiantono, 2017). This certainly has an impact on graduates who could be more optimal. Other research findings also reveal a crisis in the use of technology in learning activities (Budiarto et al., 2021; Oktarina et al., 2021). Teachers usually only use existing learning media to make learning activities less creative and innovative. Even though teachers can utilize technology to maximize learning activities. Education in the 21st century faces various challenges that need to be overcome. Some of the main problems include the cost of education, the lack of quality educators, the crisis in the use of technology in education, discrimination, digital distractions, low critical thinking skills, and lack of creative thinking skills (Indraswati et al., 2020; R Rahayu et al., 2022). It is essential to develop 21st-century competencies, such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, digital literacy and problem-solving skills, to prepare students to face the demands of the times. An active role is needed from the government, educators, and society to overcome these problems.

Based on these problems, the government implemented a new curriculum, namely the independent curriculum. Merdeka Belajar is an approach that is taken so that students can select the subjects of interest (Handayani et al., 2021; Sagala & Widyastuti, 2022). This is done so that students can optimize their talents and can make the best contribution in working for the nation. Merdeka Belajar policy is often associated with other learner-centered approaches to education, such as personalization, student-centered learning, and student ownership of learning (Indarta et al., 2022; Restu Rahayu et al., 2022). This program has some benefits for the students. *Firstly*, developing students' interests and talents. With this new learning program, students have the opportunity to develop their interests and talents and can explore further all their hidden abilities. *Second*, guaranteeing freedom of expression. During the learning process students are given full opportunity to express their learning experiences. With Merdeka Belajar, students do their own research and ask questions, rather than relying solely on the materials that their teacher or instructor hands them (Handayani et al., 2021; Setiyaningsih & Wiryanto, 2022). Next, *the third* benefit of Merdeka Belajar is reduced student burden. The impact felt by this new learning program is the reduced burden on students. One of them is to master what is not their interest and talent. In other words, students can selected which one they like the most and can master it. *Fourth*, providing widespread opportunities to seek knowledge. This program provides opportunities for students to explore new learning models. So that they can take advantage of any learning source as a source of information and data which will later be processed for self-competence development. The *last* is permitting the widest use of technology. The implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Program has launched the *Guru Penggerak* program to mobilize teachers and support them in fulfilling their roles as teachers in the program. Guru Penggerak are learning leaders who facilitate student growth and development holistically, actively, and proactively (Faiz et al., 2022; Hidayati et al., 2022; Jannati et al., 2023).

They also develop other educators to implement student-centered learning and serve as role models and agents of transformation in the education ecosystem to realize the *Profile Pelajar Pancasila* (Fuadi & Irdalisa, 2022; Jannati et al., 2023). They are also who are used to taking creative, innovative actions, without being asked and without being ordered to provide the best for students (Riowati & Yoenanto, 2022; Sijabat et al., 2022). In line with this, the role of the Guru *Penggerak* has become almost synonymously associated with student centered approaches. Through an exploration of teacher behavior, teacher-student interactions and, discussions around teacher-as-activators, the paper argues that the teacher must play an active role in the classroom and should be considered much more than the 'guide on the side' (Novita et al., 2022; Yuhastina et al., 2020). Previous research findings state that the role of the Driving Teacher is vast; this can encourage the quality of student-centred education and can also encourage the empowerment of other teachers to optimize the same learning model (Aditiya & Fatonah, 2023; Desianti & Rahayuningsih, 2022). The concept of a Driving Teacher has the following positions: first,

it functions to mobilize a professional development community for teachers to share knowledge, collaborate on best practices, and support each other's professional growth, both within schools and across regions (Desianti & Rahayuningsih, 2022; Ningsih et al., 2023). Second, function as a Practicing Teacher for fellow teachers regarding school learning development. Third, improving student leadership at school. Fourth, it functions to open space for positive discussion and collaboration between teachers and stakeholders inside and outside the school to improve the quality of learning. Moreover, finally, the teacher wants to become a learning leader who encourages the welfare of the educational ecosystem in schools (Aditiya & Fatonah, 2023; Sagala & Widyastuti, 2022).

To become a Driving Teacher, teachers must participate in the selection and education process for Driving Teachers for nine months. During the education process, prospective Driving Teachers will be supported by professional Instructors, Facilitators and Mentors. In line with the objectives of the Mobilizing Teacher Program, students must be trained as Pancasila Student Profiles. There are six aspects of the Pancasila Student Profile that students and teachers must have to achieve the goal of Independent Learning (Jannati et al., 2023; Sijabat et al., 2022). This is also the background to the existence of the Teacher Mobilization program because its establishment aims to fulfil these six aspects. The six elements of the Pancasila Student Profile formulated by the Ministry of Education and Culture are devout, noble character, creative, cooperative, global diversity, critical reasoning and independence (Cahyono, 2022; Sihombing et al., 2021). Several related studies have been conducted that are closely aligned with this study. Other research said that the members of the KGB are early adopters of new ideas, and the Guru Penggerak serve as innovators who pave the way for teacher capacity building processes. The Guru Penggerak is one of the agents carrying the mission of Merdeka Belajar who becomes a leader in learning and mobilizes other teacher learning communities to innovate and encourage students to develop according to their talents so that the Student Profile is realized according to the noble values of the Indonesian Nation, namely the Profile Pelajar Pancasila which has a strong character, globally competitive and dignified (Indarta et al., 2022; Zakiyyah et al., 2021).

Those previous related studies have some similarities with the writer's present study. Firstly, among the first study, the second study and the writer's study focus on how the role of Guru Penggerak can run maximally in the education environment. Moreover, those two studies conduct descriptive qualitative study as a methodology. Meanwhile, those previous related studies also have difference with the writer's present study. The first and the second study did not find the enabling and constraining factors that influence the effectiveness of Guru Penggerak in implementing their education yet. The study was done at Junior High School Number 2 Jikumerasa in Maluku province. The study found that there are four factors that affect the process of Guru Penggerak in implement their role, which is principal's endorsement, guru penggerak's clear self-identification in their guru penggerak role, colleague support, and the presence of sufficient school resources and infrastructure. So this research aims to analyze the implementation of its role in teaching the Independent Learning Program at Al-Azhar Middle School in Cairo, Palembang and the factors that support and hinder the role of the Driving Teacher at Al-Azhar Middle School in Cairo, Palembang.

2. METHOD

This study used a qualitative research. The purpose of this method was to gain a deep understanding and present the data collected in the form of how the Guru Penggerak implemented their role in teaching Program Merdeka Belajarin Junior High School of Al-Azhar Cairo Palembang and what factors that support and hinder the role of Guru Penggerak in Junior High School of Al-Azhar Cairo Palembang. The participants of this study were the Guru Penggerak in Junior High School of Al-Azhar Cairo Palembang. The numbers of participant were 2 Guru Penggerak. For the purpose of data collection in this study, the researcher gathered the data by observation, interview, and documentation. First is observation. In this study, the writer was in the school precisely to collect data in detail related to research problems through a process of direct observation in the field and to get the valid evidence needed in this study. Second is interview. This interview was constructed based on the criteria of the role of Guru Penggerak, which is teachers should be able to independently develop their competence while also mobilizing their peers to innovate and improve the quality of educational outcomes. In the Merdeka Belajar program, teachers must be able to center their instruction on the needs of students. Teachers must be able to innovate to improve the quality of their schools. Teachers must have strong personal and professional competencies,, and teachers must be able to manage student-centered learning by building strong relationships with parents. The last is documentation. In this study, the documents were obtained from the research site include documentation data in the form of pictures, regulations, photos and other learning documents that are collected. In addition to answer research question number two which is

about the factors that support and hinder the role of Guru Penggerak in Junior High School of Al-Azhar Cairo Palembang, the writer asked directly to the Guru Penggerak about these two factors, whether or not there is the factor that support and hinder the role of Guru Penggerak in Junior High School of Al-Azhar Cairo Palembang.

Furthermore, the data analysis technique used by the writer in this study is qualitative data analysis. Data analysis in qualitative research is the process of systematically searching for and compiling data obtained from interviews, field notes, and other materials so that it is easier to understand, and the findings can be informed to others. After the data were collected, the writer did data analyses simultaneously with the steps as data reduction, which means summarizing, choosing the main things, focusing on the important things, finding themes and patterns, then remove unnecessary data. Presentation of data, which means the data were organized, arranged in a relationship pattern, so that it will be easier to understand. Then, drawing conclusions/verification, meaning that the data presented at the beginning will be supported by valid evidence during research in the field, then the final conclusion will be a credible conclusion. At last, to test the validity of the conclusion data the writer used triangulation. Data triangulation is a technique of checking data from various sources with various ways and various times. In this study the writer used the source triangulation to test the credibility of the data. This was done by checking the data that had been obtained from various data sources such as result of interviews, archives, and other documents.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The first research question of this study was about how the role as a Guru Penggerak in teaching Program Merdeka Belajar. The result of interview process of the role as a Guru Penggerak in teaching Program Merdeka Belajar showed nine results which were described as below. Firstly, teacher A and teacher B explained about what is meant by Program Merdeka Belajar in Junior High School of A-Azhar Cairo Palembang. They both said that Al-Azhar Cairo Palembang had already implemented the Program Merdeka Belajar which is part of Independent Curriculum at school and it provides a new goal for their students, to create the Pancasila student profile. The Meaning of Program Merdeka Belajar in Junior High School of Al-Azhar Cairo showed in Table 1.

Table 1. *The Meaning of Program Merdeka Belajar in Junior High School of Al-Azhar Cairo*

Respondent	Report
Teacher A and Teacher B	"Program Merdeka Belajar at Al Azhar Cairo Islamic Junior High School Palembang is a program that is part of the implementation of the independent curriculum at school, as well as an Activator School program that will later become an example for other schools in implementing the independent curriculum independently. The Program Merdeka Belajar at Al Azhar Cairo Islamic Junior High School also provides a new face for educational units, especially in various curriculum programs, for example, the strengthening of the Profile Pelajar Pancasila program"

Second, teacher A explained about what they did as a Guru Penggerak in school. She gave the illustration that a Guru Penggerak is such a leader teacher in school, the Guru Penggerak serves as a catalyst for the implementation of the independent learning curriculum, often taking the lead in the classroom. Their role extends beyond personal development; they actively engage with others, including fellow teachers, to foster creativity and innovation in implementing the Program Merdeka Belajar. In essence, the Guru Penggerak is both an initiator and a collaborator, driving positive change and encouraging a creative approach to education among their peers. The Role of the Guru Penggerak in the Program Merdeka Belajar showed in Table 2.

Table 2. *The Role of the Guru Penggerak in the Program Merdeka Belajar*

Respondent	Report
Teacher A	"The Guru Penggerak acts as the driving force for the independent learning curriculum which may start from them when teaching in the classroom. Of course, not only for themselves, but the Guru Penggerak can collaborate with various parties, inviting fellow teachers to be creative together in implementing Program Merdeka Belajar"
Teacher B	"The Guru Penggerak helps provide programs that are in line with the curriculum and takes part in explaining these changes to other teachers".

Meanwhile, teacher B also said the Guru Penggerak plays a significant role in creating programs that align with the school's curriculum. Additionally, they actively participate in communicating and clarifying any changes or updates related to these programs to their fellow teachers. Essentially, the Guru Penggerak contributes to the development and understanding of curriculum-aligned initiatives among the teaching staff. Next, teacher A described the main tasks done by the Guru Penggerak. First, as an initiator: the Guru Penggerak takes the lead in initiating the implementation of the independent curriculum. This involves designing and planning learning activities within the classroom, setting the foundation for the program's execution. Second, as a facilitator: Beyond being an initiator, the Guru Penggerak also serves as a facilitator. They help fellow teachers by providing support and guidance, helping them become more familiar with the Program Merdeka Belajar. This facilitation includes assisting in the learning process and the practical application of the program's principles. And third as an inspirator: the Guru Penggerak inspires others by setting an example through their own successful implementation of the Program Merdeka Belajar. They showcase good practices that have yielded positive results within the program, motivating and guiding fellow teachers towards similar success. The Main Tasks Performed by the Guru Penggerak in the Program Merdeka Belajar showed in Table 3.

Table 3. *The Main Tasks Performed by the Guru Penggerak in the Program Merdeka Belajar*

Resp	Report
Teacher A	"First, Initiator of the implementation of the independent curriculum which begins with designing learning activities in the classroom. Second, Facilitator who can facilitate fellow teachers in getting to know more closely, learning and implementing the Independent Learning Program and third, Inspirator who can provide examples of good practices that have been implemented in the Program Merdeka Belajar".
Teacher B	"Educate other teachers and create student-friendly programs".

Teacher B said simpler than teacher A. She said straightly to the point that the Guru Penggerak is responsible for educating or training other teachers and also they tasked with designing and developing programs that are student-friendly to make learning enjoyable and effective for students within the Program Merdeka Belajar. Fourth, teacher A stated that the Guru Penggerak is expected to motivate the students to learn independently by establishing class beliefs the Guru Penggerak initiates the process of motivating students by establishing "class beliefs" at the beginning of the learning meeting, utilizing social media: the teacher goes beyond the classroom and uses social media platforms to provide additional motivation for students and leading by example: the teacher understands that actions speak louder than words. To motivate students to learn independently, the teacher must be an example of an independent learner themselves. The Guru Penggerak Motivates the Students to Learn Independently in the Program Merdeka Belajar showed in Table 4.

Table 4. *The Guru Penggerak Motivates the Students to Learn Independently in the Program Merdeka Belajar*

Resp	Report
Teacher A	"The Guru Penggerak motivates students to learn independently in the Independent Learning Program, namely through class beliefs which have previously been included in the agreement at the beginning of the learning meeting. In addition, it is also through the provision of learning motivation from teachers through social media posts about the Independent Learning Program given to students as a teacher's approach to the alpha generation students. Teachers will be a good example for students, therefore inspiration or exemplary will be more meaningful than a thousand words, so teachers must also be independent learners so that students are also motivated to learn independently in the Program Merdeka Belajar".
Teacher B	"By working together with students to form a positive discipline that is initially called class beliefs and then in the course of this if there are students who violate this belief, the recrimination triangle and coaching method are used".

Teacher B also added that in motivating the students, the Guru Penggerak can make the formation of positive discipline, which means the teacher actively engages with students to create a sense of positive discipline within the classroom. Do recrimination triangle: if, during the course of the learning process, any students deviate from or violate these agreed-upon class beliefs, the teacher employs a "recrimination triangle." This term suggests a structured approach to addressing and resolving issues or conflicts. It likely

involves a three-step process or method for addressing discipline problems in a fair and constructive manner, and coaching method: in addition to the recrimination triangle, the teacher also utilizes a coaching method. This implies that, instead of solely focusing on punitive measures, the teacher takes on a coaching role. This coaching approach aims to support the students' growth and development rather than simply punishing them.

To provide support for the students, teacher A mentioned how the Guru Penggerak maintains continuous communication and support for students, both inside and outside of traditional classroom hours, using various methods, including social media. The Guru Penggerak employs a direct approach to interact with students, which means they engage with students not only during regular class hours but also outside of these hours. One of the methods used for this extended communication is social media. In this context, social media serves as a platform for educational purposes. Specifically mentioned is the "Social Studies Story Instagram account". The goal of these approaches is to ensure that teachers and students maintain a constant connection. Regardless of the time or place, this connectivity allows students to seek guidance, ask questions, or access resources when needed. The Guru Penggerak Motivates the Students to Learn Independently in the Program Merdeka Belajar showed in Table 5.

Table 5. *The Guru Penggerak Motivates the Students to Learn Independently in the Program Merdeka Belajar*

Resp	Report
Teacher A	"That is through a direct approach in class during learning hours or outside of learning hours and also through social media. So that teachers and students can always be connected wherever and whenever they are. For example, the use of social media specifically for learning, namely the Social Studies Story Instagram account".
Teacher B	"Conduct coaching method by asking students about their difficulties and students are led to find their own solutions that suit them".

While teacher B also stated that the Guru Penggerak must be a coach for the students to address their challenges and find solutions tailored to their individual needs. The Guru Penggerak adopts a coaching approach when students encounter difficulties or obstacles in their learning journey. Instead of providing immediate solutions, the teacher engages the students in a process of self-discovery and problem-solving. It must be a student-centered approach which places the students at the center of their own learning. Next, both teacher A and teacher B said that the Guru Penggerak facilitates the students in choosing their flexible learning methods. The Guru Penggerak utilizes a teaching strategy known as differentiated learning. This approach, known as differentiated instruction, involves tailoring instruction to meet the unique needs of each student. To support differentiated learning, the teacher uses a variety of educational materials and resources. These resources can include textbooks, online content, multimedia, and other tools that can enhance the learning experience. The teacher recognizes the importance of fully utilizing the educational resources available within the school environment. The Guru Penggerak goes beyond traditional classroom boundaries by encouraging students to explore the broader social environment as part of their learning journey, and creating opportunities for students to learn with others, the teacher promotes collaborative learning experiences. The Guru Penggerak Facilitates Students in Choosing Learning Materials and Resources that Suit Their Needs showed in Table 6.

Table 6. *The Guru Penggerak Facilitates Students in Choosing Learning Materials and Resources that Suit Their Needs*

Resp	Report
Teacher A and Teacher B	"Namely through differentiated learning based on analysis and mapping of student learning needs by utilizing a variety of media and learning resources available, maximizing the potential that exists in schools to meet student learning needs. In addition to the classroom, the Guru Penggerak can also provide opportunities for students to explore the surrounding social environment as part of the learning process, so that students can learn anytime, anywhere and with anyone"

Next, teacher A mentioned the Guru Penggerak regularly assesses students' progress in the Program Merdeka Belajar through reflective discussions and feedback sessions, prioritizing students' developmental growth over grades; these evaluations also serve as valuable insights for tailoring future learning experiences to individual student needs. Teacher B also added the assessment of students' abilities is not solely based on their cognitive performance but also on their enthusiasm in embracing the

material and striving to complete tasks to the best of their abilities. From these two opinions it can be concluded that the importance of assessing students' progress through reflective discussions, feedback, and considering their enthusiasm and effort alongside cognitive performance to inform personalized learning experiences. The integration between Program Merdeka Belajar and the School Curriculum is also important. Teacher A said designing lessons and programs that cater to student needs and align with the school environment, starting with an analysis of both student and school requirements. Additionally, collaboration with school leaders and peers plays a vital role in achieving a shared understanding and successful implementation of the Program Merdeka Belajar within the broader school curriculum. Moreover, teacher B gave the example about the programs, which are differentiated teaching and learning activities. It means that these approaches involve tailoring instruction and activities to meet the diverse needs and abilities of students, ensuring a more personalized and effective learning experience. The last one is the uses of technology. Teacher A realized that technology plays important role not only for Guru Penggerak in Program Merdeka Belajar, but also for the students themselves. They aim to utilize technology effectively to create learning experiences that match students' interests and learning styles, which encourages continuous innovation and the exploration of educational concepts that resonate with students while considering socio-cultural aspects. The Guru Penggerak's use of technology is driven by a student-centered approach, implementing differentiated learning based on individual student needs and preferences.

Meanwhile, teacher B gave the real examples of technology that used in AL-Azhar Cairo Palembang, such as quiziz and iPad. In summary, these findings highlight the significant role of technology in the Program Merdeka Belajar at Al-Azhar Cairo Palembang. Teacher A emphasizes the importance of technology for both Guru Penggeraks and students, promoting innovative and student-centered learning experiences that align with individual interests and styles while being sensitive to socio-cultural factors. Furthermore, Teacher B provides concrete examples of technology, including quiziz and iPads, used in the program, illustrating the practical implementation of technology-enhanced learning strategies to support the program's goals. The second research question of this study was about the factors that support and hinder the role of Guru Penggerak in teaching Program Merdeka Belajar. The result of interview showed two results which were described as below. First, *The Supportive Factors.* Firstly, teacher A and teacher B both of them have the similar opinion about the supportive factors for the role of Guru Penggerak in teaching Program Merdeka Belajar. These include the presence of accessible technology facilities and internet access, enabling teachers to access information about the program and design lessons creatively. Additionally, there is active support from school leaders or foundations aimed at enhancing teacher professional development. Lastly, the availability of a diverse range of school activities and programs further bolsters the successful execution of the Program Merdeka Belajar. Second, *the Hindering Factors.* Furthermore, they also found the hindering factors for the role of Guru Penggerak in teaching Program Merdeka Belajar. Factors hindering the effectiveness of the Guru Penggerak's role in implementing the Program Merdeka Belajar include tight time management due to numerous school activities, teachers' tendency to stay within their comfort zones, limited information dissemination about the program, and insufficient support from fellow teachers.

Discussion

There are some points to be discussed based on the findings above. The *first* interpretation is that the Program Merdeka Belajar at Al-Azhar Cairo Islamic Junior High School Palembang is an integral part of the independent curriculum and serves as an Activator School program, providing new opportunities for educational units. In Program Merdeka Belajar students can optimize their talents and can make the best contribution in working for the nation. The Merdeka Belajar program, an alternative approach to addressing the decline in learning quality during the pandemic, empowers those responsible for implementing learning, particularly teachers and school principals, to design, implement, and develop programs (Hidayati et al., 2022; Tesalonika et al., 2022). Other research said that Merdeka Belajar is an educational program that aims to create a positive and engaging learning environment for all students (Gusrianto & Rahmi, 2022; Indarta et al., 2022). Merdeka Belajar students do their own research and ask questions, rather than relying solely on the materials that their teacher or instructor hands them. *Second*, the Guru Penggerak plays a crucial role in driving the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, acting as an initiator, facilitator, and inspirator, collaborating with other teachers to foster creativity in implementing the Merdeka Belajar Program (Jannati et al., 2023; Restu Rahayu et al., 2022). The teacher guides the instruction and curriculum as a facilitator of learning, working with the students' prior knowledge to develop new knowledge. Another research also found that the teacher as initiator, facilitator, and inspirator (Safitri & Ananda, 2023; Sijabat et al., 2022). Teachers as facilitators should be able to work on learning resources that are useful and can support the achievement of goals and teaching

and learning process, whether in the form of resource persons, textbooks, magazines, or newspapers (Riowati & Yoenanto, 2022; Tesalonika et al., 2022). The teacher as an inspiration must be able to provide good inspiration for the progress of learning of students. Learning problems are the main problem of students. The teacher must be able to give instructions (inspiration) on how to learn well. The instructions do not have to be based on a number of good learning theories. The important thing is not the theory, but how to release the problems faced by students (Karmilasari et al., 2023; Riowati & Yoenanto, 2022). Next, the *third* is the Guru Penggerak's main tasks in the Program Merdeka Belajar include being the initiator of the independent curriculum, designing learning activities, facilitating fellow teachers, providing inspiration through good practices, and motivating students to learn independently. *Fourth*, they motivate students to learn independently by establishing class beliefs, using social media to provide learning motivation and connect with students, and providing positive feedback to develop competence and gain control over their own learning (Azwardinsyah et al., 2023; Siagian et al., 2022).

In line with motivate the students, to motivate the students, the teacher created an environment conducive to learning. The teacher's role in encouraging support of students' autonomy, relevance, and relatedness of the material increases motivation to learn (Novita et al., 2022; Sihombing et al., 2021). Additionally, the teacher's ability to develop students' competence, interest in subject taught, and perception of self-efficacy are all important factors that influence students' motivation to learn. As a motivator, teachers should be able to encourage students to be passionate and active in learning. In an effort to provide motivation, teachers can analyze the motives behind students being lazy to learn and declining their performance at school. At all times, the teacher must act as a motivator, because it is not impossible that there are students who are lazy to learn and so on (Aditiya & Fatonah, 2023; Hapsari et al., 2021). Students who use digital learning tools tend to outperform their peers who are taught using traditional methods. Additionally, students who use digital learning tools are more likely to be motivated and engaged in their studies.

After that, the *fifth* the Guru Penggerak provides support to students both during and outside of class hours, utilizing direct approaches in the classroom, engaging with students through social media, and creating differentiated learning experiences based on student needs and available resources. Teacher support can moderate the relationship between student ability and achievement. Specifically, students in low-ability groups who received high levels of teacher support were able to achieve at the same level as students in high-ability groups (Bunga Nabilah et al., 2023; Rizal, 2021). The *sixth* is to evaluate students' progress in the Program Merdeka Belajar through reflection, feedback, and assignments, focusing on the student's development rather than grades. As an evaluator, the teachers are required to be good and honest evaluators, by providing assessments that touch on extrinsic and intrinsic aspects. Assessment of aspects of the student's personality, namely the value aspect (Desianti & Rahayuningsih, 2022; Novita et al., 2022). Based on this, teachers must be able to provide an assessment in a broad dimension. Assessment of students' personalities certainly takes precedence over the assessment of students' answers when given a test. Students who perform well, do not necessarily have a good personality. So, the assessment is essentially directed at changing the personality of students in order to become capable moral human beings. *Seventh*, Guru Penggerak integrated the Program Merdeka Belajar with the school curriculum by aligning lessons and programs with student needs and the school environment, involving collaboration with school leaders and peers. And the *last* the Guru Penggerak utilizes technology to design relevant and engaging learning experiences that align with student interests and learning styles, facilitating differentiated learning based on student needs analysis. Research shows that technology-immersed classrooms lead to an increase in critical thinking skills and achievement in all subject areas. Technology is really important for education (Handayani et al., 2021; Yulianisa et al., 2018). Technology integration in education refers to the meaningful use of technology to achieve learning goals (David & Schwaninger, 2021; Teräs et al., 2020).

The adoption of novel pedagogical approaches and the integration of technology into the learning process can yield numerous benefits. The integration of information and communication technology (ICT) into education has beneficial impacts on both students and teachers, and it can enhance the retention and credibility of the knowledge that students acquire. Furthermore, the writer also found that there are some factors that support and hinder the role of Guru Penggerak in teaching Program Merdeka Belajar at Al-Azhar Cairo Islamic Junior High School Palembang. Next, those findings will be interpreted as factors Supporting the Role of Guru Penggerak Availability of Technology and Internet: The presence of technology facilities and internet access provides opportunities for Guru Penggerak to access information related to the Merdeka Belajar Program. This enables them to be creative in designing lessons and effectively utilize digital resources for Merdeka Belajar. Then, support from school leaders or foundations in enhancing teacher professional development plays a crucial role in supporting the effectiveness of the

Guru Penggerak's role. When leaders prioritize and invest in the development of Guru Penggerak, it creates a conductive environment for successful implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Program.

Variety of School Activities and Programs: The availability of diverse school activities and programs that align with the Program Merdeka Belajar can further support its implementation. Such activities provide opportunities for students to engage in Merdeka Belajar and reinforce the concepts and skills taught by the Guru Penggerak. In relation to *Profile Pelajar Pancasila*, also found supporting factors for the formation of the *Profile Pelajar Pancasila* at school such as Inborn (internal). Human nature that has been owned since he was born in the world. Personality (internal). Personality development is experienced when humans have experienced an event or event that has been passed. Family (external) examples of family as a motivating factor are: paying attention to children about their education, always supporting children's decisions if they are good for them. Teacher/educator (external). Teachers must be able to show good morals in everyday life, because the role and influence of an educator on students is very strong, and Environment (external) supporting factors in the environment, if the environment is positive, directing children to have traits such as Pancasila values (Isnawan & Sudirman, 2022; Ningsih et al., 2023). The factors that shape a teacher's role are both internal and external. Internal factors include those that influence a teacher's self-concept, such as their personal values, beliefs, and attitudes towards teaching. External factors include the views and expectations of the teacher role held by other stakeholders, such as students, parents, colleagues, school leaders, and the wider community (Fuadi & Irdalisa, 2022; Yuhastina et al., 2020).

The busy schedule and various school activities can pose challenges to the effective implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Program. Limited time may limit the opportunities for Guru Penggerak to fully engage with students and provide necessary support during Merdeka Belajar. Some teachers may be hesitant to actively participate in the development and implementation of the Program Merdeka Belajar due to a comfort zone mentality (Abidah et al., 2020; Supriani et al., 2022). This resistance to change or reluctance to explore new teaching methodologies can hinder the role of the Guru Penggerak. The lack of information about the Merdeka Belajar Program, coupled with a dependency on formal socialization sessions, can impede the effectiveness of the Guru Penggerak's role. It is essential for teachers to actively seek information, stay updated, and engage in continuous professional development to enhance their understanding and implementation of the program (Ariani & Zulhawati, 2022; Ningsih et al., 2023). There were some hindering factors of the teacher's role, they are teachers' lack of ability to develop and apply varied learning methods; lack of teacher knowledge about the students at hand such as students' intelligence levels, talents and interests; teachers are less mature in preparing a set of lessons so that it hinders the implementation of learning; and lack of facilities available to support learning. In student's side, hindering factors for the formation of the *Profile Pelajar Pancasila* at school such as the attitude of the lazy character of a small number of students, the inhibiting factor of mutation students who are not accustomed to living in discipline, the limitations of teachers in designing good lesson plans, the limitations of teachers in using media, technology and various learning resources, and the lack of time available for teaching and learning activities (Cahyono, 2022; Sagala & Widyastuti, 2022). Another research also found several factors that support and hinder the role of Guru Penggerak at Junior High School Jikumerasa in Maluku province. There are four factors, which is support of the principal; Guru Penggerak is able to position him/herself as the Guru Penggerak (know their role as a Guru Penggerak); support from fellow teachers; availability of adequate school facilities and infrastructure (Riowati & Yoenanto, 2022; Zakiyyah et al., 2021). Based on the conclusion above, the following are the suggestions. The result of this study is expected to help the teachers to know more about Guru Penggerak. Moreover for those who are not a Guru Penggerak yet, they can learn more about Guru Penggerak, how to be a good Guru Penggerak by knowing what to do as a Guru Penggerak through this study.

4. CONCLUSION

Guru Penggerak optimizes their role in teaching Program Merdeka Belajar in Junior High School of Al-Azhar Cairo Palembang through several ways. The Program Merdeka Belajar is not only an integral part of the independent curriculum but also serves as a model for other schools. The Guru Penggerak acts as a driving force, initiating the implementation of the independent curriculum and collaborating with fellow teachers to foster creativity in the program. Their main tasks encompass being an initiator, facilitator, and inspirator, designing learning activities, supporting colleagues, and providing examples of good practices. Secondly, the study identified several factors that both support and hinder the role of the Guru Penggerak in teaching the Program Merdeka Belajar at Al-Azhar Cairo Islamic Junior High School Palembang. Factors supporting the role include the availability of technology and internet access, which enables teachers to access information and design creative lessons. Support from school leaders or

foundations in enhancing teacher professional development also contributes to the effectiveness of the Guru Penggerak's role.

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