

Pedagogical beliefs of student teachers and school-based mentor teachers in the kurikulum merdeka context

Maida Azra Widowati^{1*}, Iris Athamaica Lopez Palacios²

¹Program Program Studi Pendidikan Guru Sekolah Dasar, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan, Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia

²Program Educational Department, Universidad Simón Bolívar, Caracas 1080-A, Venezuela

*Correspondence: 

Abstract

Purpose: This study evaluates pedagogical belief disparities between PPG Prajabatan student teachers and school-based mentor teachers regarding cognitive goals (mechanical acquisition vs. higher-order reasoning) and social goals (compliance vs. agency) under Indonesia's *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

Method: Utilizing a quantitative comparative cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from $N = 630$ participants (315 candidate-mentor dyads) across clinical placement sites using the validated *Pedagogical Beliefs Inventory for Kurikulum Merdeka*. Data were analyzed using independent-samples t -tests and two-way MANOVA.

Findings: Student teachers exhibited significantly higher endorsement for higher-order reasoning and social agency compared to mentors ($p < .001$). Conversely, school-based mentors prioritized mechanical acquisition and behavioral compliance. Mentoring tenure significantly moderated mentor mindsets ($p < .001$), with veteran mentors (>5 years) demonstrating high alignment with student-centered reform principles.

Practical implications: Teacher Training Institutions (LPTKs) and educational policymakers must institute structured mentor training frameworks to harmonize academic coursework with clinical placements, ensuring sustainable student-centered instruction.

Originality/value: This investigation provides unique empirical evidence by adapting sociocultural belief frameworks to an active national curriculum overhaul within a Global South teacher education setting.

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Introduction

Teacher education programs globally rely on field-based practicums where school-based mentor teachers play a pivotal role in shaping student teachers' professional development (Butler & Cuenca, 2012; Orland-Barak & Wang, 2020; Peiser et al., 2019). Grounded in sociocultural theory (Lampert-Shepel & Zimmerman, 2024; Soysal & Radmard, 2017), pedagogical beliefs regarding educational goals and instructional practices are deeply situated within specific social, institutional, and historical environments (Ahn, 2009; Yunus, 2022). These beliefs fundamentally dictate how educators navigate the interplay between cognitive development—ranging from mechanical knowledge acquisition to higher-order problem-solving—and social development, which encompasses interpersonal collaboration, self-regulation, and behavioral competence (Alghamdi & Ernest, 2019; Dizon, 2026; Wang et al., 2020).

Understanding pedagogical beliefs is essential because beliefs serve as the primary cognitive filter for instructional decision-making, curriculum interpretation, and classroom practice (Ennis, 1994; Habte et al., 2021; Voet & De Wever, 2018). In teacher education, the degree of alignment or divergence between student teachers' implicit perspectives and school-based mentors' established mindsets significantly impacts the success of clinical field experiences (Chaaban et al., 2019; Hollingsworth, 1989; Jita & Munje, 2021). When prospective teachers enter schools with beliefs leaning toward passive knowledge transmission, the guidance of mentor teachers becomes decisive in either perpetuating legacy rote-learning habits or cultivating holistic, student-centered practices (Fairbanks et al., 2009; Kolman et al., 2017; Wang & Odell, 2003).

While existing literature has examined belief disparities between pre-service candidates and experienced educators in European and Western contexts (Li & Huang, 2023; Scortescu et al., 2024), a critical empirical gap remains regarding how these dynamics operate during system-wide educational transformations in Southeast Asia. Specifically, within Indonesia's current educational landscape, there is a lack of

empirical research examining how student teachers in the reformed Teacher Professional Education (Pendidikan Profesi Guru or PPG Prajabatan) program and their school-based mentor teachers conceptualize cognitive versus social goals under the newly implemented Kurikulum Merdeka (Chang et al., 2024; Eddraoui et al., 2023; Johaness & Agustina, 2026).

This study offers significant novelty by adapting the sociocultural framework of teacher beliefs to the non-Western context of Indonesia's national curriculum overhaul (Asrifan et al., 2025; Tatik et al., 2025). Unlike previous studies that examined teacher beliefs within static curricular settings, this research uniquely investigates how mentoring experience among school-based educators influences their preference for intrapersonal cognitive practices versus interpersonal social development practices during the active national rollout of Kurikulum Merdeka (Kang et al., 2025; Kuswandono, 2017; Tanjung et al., 2021).

The primary objective of this research is to evaluate differences in pedagogical beliefs between PPG Prajabatan student teachers and school-based mentor teachers regarding cognitive development goals (mechanical acquisition versus higher-order reasoning) and social development goals (independence, reflexive skills, and social competence). Furthermore, the study aims to analyze the extent to which school-based mentor teachers' specific mentoring experiences affect their endorsement of intrapersonal and interpersonal teaching practices (Purwasih et al., 2025; Smith et al., 2024; Sulisworo et al., 2024).

This investigation is highly urgent given Indonesia's systemic shift toward Kurikulum Merdeka, which explicitly mandates a departure from content-heavy, exam-centric instruction toward character formation (Profil Pelajar Pancasila), student agency, and collaborative learning (Fitriyah & Wardani, 2022; Ndari et al., 2023; Rifaldi et al., 2026; Sipayung & Hsu, 2023). As Teacher Training Institutions (LPTKs) rapidly expand PPG Prajabatan clinical placements, ensuring that school-based mentor

teachers actively model and scaffold social-constructivist practices rather than reinforcing legacy transmission models is vital to the reform's long-term sustainability (Kusumawati et al., 2025; Mirkabil, 2025; Putra et al., 2026).

The findings of this study offer meaningful theoretical and practical contributions to the field of teacher education. Theoretically, it advances the cross-cultural validity of sociocultural belief models by demonstrating how mentoring roles shape pedagogical mindsets within a rapidly reforming Global South nation. Practically, it provides LPTKs and policymakers with empirical evidence to design structured mentor training programs, ensuring school-based educators are equipped to cultivate both the cognitive and social-emotional pedagogical competencies of future teachers (Parker et al., 2021).

Research Method

This study employed a quantitative comparative cross-sectional survey design grounded in Vygotskian sociocultural theory. A quantitative approach was selected because it provides a rigorous empirical mechanism to systematically evaluate pedagogical belief structures across distinct educator groups operating within Indonesia's nationwide educational reform. Specifically, this design directly addresses the primary objective of comparing how prospective teachers in the reformed Teacher Professional Education (*Pendidikan Profesi Guru* or PPG Prajabatan) program and their school-based mentor teachers conceptualize cognitive development goals (mechanical knowledge acquisition versus higher-order reasoning) and social development goals (independence, reflexive skills, and social competence) under *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

A comparative cross-sectional framework is methodologically appropriate because pedagogical beliefs act as primary cognitive filters for instructional decision-making, curriculum interpretation, and classroom practice within specific social, institutional, and historical environments. Capturing belief structures across both pre-

service candidates and practicing mentor teachers during active clinical field placements allows for an empirical assessment of belief alignment without manipulating the practicum context. Furthermore, this design provides the structural basis to evaluate how mentor teachers' cumulative mentoring experience influences their preference for intrapersonal cognitive practices versus interpersonal social development practices during a major curriculum transition.

Research Participants, Subjects, or Samples

The study sample comprised $N = 630$ educators, consisting of $n = 315$ PPG Prajabatan student teachers and $n = 315$ school-based mentor teachers paired in active clinical placement dyads across partner schools associated with Teacher Training Institutions (*LPTKs*) in West Java, Indonesia. Participants were selected using a criterion-based, purposive sampling technique to ensure alignment with the specific research context. To be eligible, student teachers had to be actively enrolled in the reformed PPG Prajabatan field practicum under *Kurikulum Merdeka*, while mentor teachers were required to be officially assigned by their host institutions to supervise PPG candidates and deliver instruction under the new national curriculum framework.

To analyze how mentoring experience shapes pedagogical orientations, school-based mentor teachers were stratified into three specific experience tiers: Novice Mentors (<3 years of mentoring), Mid-Career Mentors (3–5 years of mentoring), and Veteran Mentors (>5 years of mentoring). This stratification provided a structured basis for testing whether extended mentoring tenure shifts educators away from passive transmission models toward scaffolding holistic, student-centered practices aligned with *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Research Participants ($N = 630$)

Demographic Variable	Sub-Group Category	Student Teachers (n=315)	Mentor Teachers (n=315)	Combined Sample (N=630)
Gender	Female	218 (69.2%)	194 (61.6%)	412 (65.4%)
	Male	97 (30.8%)	121 (38.4%)	218 (34.6%)
Institutional Level	Primary School (<i>SD</i>)	162 (51.4%)	162 (51.4%)	324 (51.4%)
	Secondary School (<i>SMP/SMA</i>)	153 (48.6%)	153 (48.6%)	306 (48.6%)
Mentoring Tenure Tier	Pre-Service Candidate (0 years)	315 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	315 (50.0%)
	Novice Mentor (<3 years)	—	98 (31.1%)	98 (15.6%)
	Mid-Career Mentor (3–5 years)	—	112 (35.6%)	112 (17.8%)
	Veteran Mentor (>5 years)	—	105 (33.3%)	105 (16.6%)
Curriculum Orientation	PPG Prajabatan Reform Coursework	315 (100.0%)	142 (45.1%)	457 (72.5%)
	School-Level <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i> Workshop	84 (26.7%)	288 (91.4%)	372 (59.0%)

Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Data were collected using the *Pedagogical Beliefs Inventory for Kurikulum Merdeka* (PBI-KM), a structured survey instrument adapted specifically to operationalize the theoretical constructs defined in this study. The instrument contains 24 items scored

on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). Items are organized into four distinct operational subscales:

- **Cognitive Goals:** Mechanical Knowledge Acquisition (6 items; e.g., rote retention, exam-centric preparation) versus Higher-Order Reasoning (6 items; e.g., inquiry-based problem solving, critical thinking).
- **Social Goals:** Behavioral Compliance (6 items; e.g., direct control, passive compliance) versus Interpersonal Social Agency (6 items; e.g., student independence, reflexive skills, collaborative competence).

Psychometric evaluation confirmed strong construct validity and internal reliability for the instrument. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) demonstrated good model fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.08$, $CFI = .965$, $TLI = .958$, $RMSEA = .046$). Internal consistency reliability across all four subscales was established with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging between $\alpha = .85$ and $\alpha = .92$.

Data collection was executed during the mid-point of the clinical practicum semester through a secure digital platform coordinated in partnership with participating LPTK field placement offices. Electronic informed consent was obtained from all participants, and paired alphanumeric identifiers were assigned to candidate-mentor dyads to maintain strict confidentiality. A total response rate of 94.2% was achieved through bi-weekly automated follow-up reminders over a four-week administration window.

Data Analysis

Raw survey data were exported into IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 28.0) for cleaning, verification, and analysis. Data screening procedures verified that missing values were below 1.5% and confirmed that univariate distribution parameters met assumptions for parametric testing, with skewness and kurtosis indices well within ± 1.0 . Composite mean scores (M) and standard deviations (SD) were calculated for each participant

across the cognitive (mechanical acquisition vs. higher-order reasoning) and social (compliance vs. independence, reflexive skills, and social competence) sub-dimensions.

Statistical testing proceeded in two sequential phases directly tied to the research objectives:

1. Independent-samples *t*-tests were conducted to evaluate quantitative differences between PPG Prajabatan student teachers and school-based mentor teachers across cognitive and social goal endorsements, with Cohen's *d* calculated to quantify effect sizes.
2. A two-way Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was executed on the mentor teacher dataset ($n = 315$) to determine the extent to which mentoring experience tiers (<3 years, 3–5 years, >5 years) significantly affect mentor teachers' endorsement of intrapersonal cognitive practices versus interpersonal social development practices under *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Multivariate significance was evaluated using Wilks' Lambda (Λ), followed by univariate *F*-tests and Tukey's *HSD* post-hoc comparisons at an alpha level of $\alpha = .05$.

Result and Discussion

Quantitative Disparities in Cognitive and Social Goal Endorsement

This study highlights empirical novelty by isolating the cognitive and social pedagogical belief disparities between PPG Prajabatan student teachers and school-based mentor teachers during the active national implementation of Indonesia's *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Asrifan et al., 2025; Chang et al., 2024). While prior scholarship primarily evaluates teacher beliefs within static curricular environments or Western contexts, this investigation provides a fresh perspective by examining how candidate-mentor belief alignment functions as a dynamic cognitive filter within a major educational reform in the Global South (Tatik et al., 2025; Yunus, 2022). By evaluating preferences for higher-order reasoning versus mechanical knowledge acquisition

alongside social agency versus behavioral compliance, this study fills an empirical gap in contemporary teacher education literature.

The empirical analysis reveals a significant pedagogical divide between pre-service candidates and school-based educators across both cognitive and social dimensions (see Table 1). PPG Prajabatan student teachers reported consistently higher mean endorsement for higher-order cognitive reasoning ($M = 4.42, SD = 0.38$) and interpersonal social agency ($M = 4.36, SD = 0.35$) compared to mentor teachers ($M = 3.85, SD = 0.52$ and $M = 3.72, SD = 0.50$, respectively). Student teachers favored inquiry-based problem solving and collaborative self-regulation aligned with *Kurikulum Merdeka* goals (Dizon, 2026; Fitriyah & Wardani, 2022). Conversely, as detailed in Table 1, school-based mentors demonstrated significantly stronger adherence to mechanical knowledge acquisition ($M = 4.15, SD = 0.48, p < .001$) and prioritized behavioral compliance ($M = 4.22, SD = 0.46, p < .001$) over reflexive social competence (Habte et al., 2021; Sipayung & Hsu, 2023). This outcome underscores a core institutional friction: pre-service candidates arrive from university coursework equipped with progressive constructivist frameworks, yet encounter established transmissional habits maintained by practicing mentor teachers (Johanes & Agustina, 2026).

Table 2 *Comparative Analysis of Pedagogical Belief Endorsements Between PPG Prajabatan Student Teachers and School-Based Mentor Teachers (N = 315)*

Pedagogical Belief Dimension	Focal Dimension	Sub-Dimension	Student Teachers (M±SD)	Mentor Teachers (M±SD)	Inferential Test value	Significance (t- (p-value))
Cognitive Goals	Higher-Order Reasoning	& Inquiry	4.42 ± 0.38	3.85 ± 0.52	$t(313) = 11.24$	$p < .001$

	Mechanical Knowledge Acquisition	2.91 ± 0.44	4.15 ± 0.48	$t(313)$ = -23.18	$p < .001$
Social Goals	Interpersonal Social Agency & Reflexivity	4.36 ± 0.35	3.72 ± 0.50	$t(313)$ = 13.06	$p < .001$
	Behavioral Compliance & Direct Control	2.84 ± 0.41	4.22 ± 0.46	$t(313)$ = -28.12	$p < .001$

These findings closely align with and expand upon global research examining preservice teacher belief trajectories during clinical field experiences (Ahn, 2009; Chaaban et al., 2019; Hollingsworth, 1989; Jita & Munje, 2021). The observed gap between student teachers' progressive orientations and mentors' traditional habits mirrors results from international studies where practicum environments often act as conservative filters rather than incubators for reform (Alghamdi & Ernest, 2019; Li & Huang, 2023; Scorțescu et al., 2024). Furthermore, the mentor teachers' tendency to emphasize mechanical skill acquisition over problem-solving corroborates prior studies showing that experienced educators often default to direct instruction under institutional pressure (Ennis, 1994; Voet & De Wever, 2018; Wang & Odell, 2003).

The consistencies between this study and prior literature can be attributed to deep-rooted institutional histories, where legacy high-stakes assessment cultures and rote-learning traditions continue to shape classroom routines (Ahn, 2009; Habte et al., 2021). However, the pronounced divergence between student teachers and mentors highlighted in Table 1 stems directly from the ongoing implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka*. While student teachers receive intensive training in character formation (*Profil Pelajar Pancasila*) and learner agency within reformed PPG Prajabatan coursework, practicing mentors often face systemic implementation challenges and lack formal professional development tailored to student-centered mentoring (Ndari et al., 2023; Rifaldi et al., 2026). Consequently, mentors filter reform directives through

legacy practices, creating a structural disconnect between university preparation and school site realities (Eddraoui et al., 2023; Mirkabil, 2025).

Theoretically, this study advances Vygotskian sociocultural belief models by demonstrating that pedagogical mindsets are continuously negotiated across macro-level policy shifts, institutional histories, and interpersonal mentor-mentee interactions (Lampert-Shepel & Zimmerman, 2024; Soysal & Radmard, 2017). By proving that student teachers' constructivist beliefs risk regression when paired with transmission-oriented mentors, this research enriches understanding of how cognitive filters dictate curriculum interpretation (Fairbanks et al., 2009; Kolman et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2020). It offers a nuanced model of how mentorship dynamics either accelerate or hinder systemic educational reform in developing nations.

Practically and politically, these results demonstrate that Teacher Training Institutions (LPTKs) and policymakers must look beyond placing student teachers in clinical settings without evaluating mentor alignment. LPTKs must design structured, learner-centered mentor training frameworks to equip school-based educators with constructivist scaffolding competencies (Butler & Cuenca, 2012; Orland-Barak & Wang, 2020; Parker et al., 2021; Peiser et al., 2019). Establishing collaborative mentor-mentee learning communities will help bridge the gap between academic coursework and clinical practice, ensuring the long-term sustainability of *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Kusumawati et al., 2025; Purwasih et al., 2025; Putra et al., 2026; Smith et al., 2024; Sulisworo et al., 2024; Tanjung et al., 2021). Future research should employ longitudinal mixed-method designs and classroom observations to track how candidate-mentor belief interactions evolve across full academic years.

Moderating Impact of Mentoring Experience on Pedagogical Beliefs

A two-way MANOVA indicates that mentor teachers' years of clinical mentoring experience significantly moderate their pedagogical alignment ($F(4,312) = 8.74, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .11$).

Table 3 mentor teachers' years of clinical mentoring experience

Mentoring Experience Tier	Primary Cognitive Focus (M±SD)	Primary Social Focus (M±SD)	Kurikulum Merdeka Alignment (M±SD)	Qualitative Pedagogical Profile
Novice Mentors (<3 years, $n = 98$)	3.24 ± 0.51 (Rote retention & exam prep)	3.12 ± 0.48 (Direct supervision & compliance)	3.18 ± 0.45 (Low / Legacy transmission)	Transmissional: Prioritizes content coverage, behavioral control, and high-stakes test readiness.
Mid-Career Mentors (3–5 years, $n = 112$)	3.85 ± 0.42 (Guided problem-solving)	3.76 ± 0.40 (Structured group interaction)	3.81 ± 0.39 (Moderate / Transitional)	Transitional: Balances foundational skill drills with emerging student-centered inquiry.
Veteran Mentors (>5 years, $n = 105$)	4.41 ± 0.35 (Higher-Order Thinking / HOTS)	4.38 ± 0.36 (Learner autonomy & reflexivity)	4.40 ± 0.32 (High / Constructivist)	Transformational: Actively scaffolds agency, co-construction of knowledge, and <i>Profil Pelajar Pancasila</i> .
MANOVA Statistics	$F(2,312) = 18.64, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .107$	$F(2,312) = 22.15, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .124$	$F(2,312) = 26.80, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .146$	Wilks' $\Lambda = 0.782, F(6,620) = 13.42, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .115$

Mentors with extended clinical experience demonstrated greater receptivity to social-constructivist practices, actively modeling *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* competencies (Kuswandono, 2017; Tanjung et al., 2021). Structured mentor professional development shifts veteran educators from supervisory managers to co-constructors of pedagogical knowledge (Butler & Cuenca, 2012; Parker et al., 2021).

Sociocultural Dynamics and Policy Realities Under Kurikulum Merdeka

This study provides distinct empirical novelty by extending sociocultural teacher belief frameworks into the active national rollout of Indonesia's major curriculum overhaul (*Kurikulum Merdeka*) within the reformed *Pendidikan Profesi Guru* (PPG Prajabatan) program (Asrifan et al., 2025; Chang et al., 2024). Unlike previous studies conducted in static curricular settings or Western educational systems, this research uniquely captures the complex cognitive and social belief dynamics between student teachers and school-based mentors in a rapidly transforming Global South context (Tatik et al., 2025; Yunus, 2022). By examining how mentoring experience directly shapes educators' endorsement of intrapersonal cognitive practices versus interpersonal social development goals, this investigation fills a vital gap in contemporary teacher education literature.

The primary findings demonstrate a significant pedagogical divide between PPG Prajabatan student teachers and their school-based mentor teachers. Pre-service candidates consistently exhibited stronger alignment with progressive, student-centered goals—prioritizing higher-order problem-solving, learner agency, and reflexive social competence—in direct agreement with *Kurikulum Merdeka* mandates (Dizon, 2026; Fitriyah & Wardani, 2022). Conversely, mentor teachers displayed a stronger orientation toward legacy transmission models, focusing on mechanical knowledge retention and classroom compliance (Sipayung & Hsu, 2023). Crucially, the data reveals that extended mentoring experience acts as a key moderating factor, as senior mentors demonstrated greater receptivity to constructivist social development practices than their less experienced peers (Johanes & Agustina, 2026).

These outcomes both corroborate and expand upon existing global research regarding pre-service teacher belief evolution and clinical practicum dynamics (Ahn, 2009; Chaaban et al., 2019; Hollingsworth, 1989). The observed friction between prospective teachers' progressive mindsets and school-based mentors' traditional practices echoes findings from diverse international settings, where clinical field

experiences frequently act as conservative filters rather than catalysts for change (Alghamdi & Ernest, 2019; Li & Huang, 2023; Scortescu et al., 2024). Furthermore, the tendency of student teachers to risk pedagogical regression when placed under traditional supervision aligns directly with broader initial teacher education research in both Global North and Global South contexts (Jita & Munje, 2021; Wang & Odell, 2003).

The consistencies observed across these studies stem from deeply entrenched institutional histories, where legacy high-stakes assessment cultures continue to incentivize surface-level content delivery over holistic skill cultivation (Habte et al., 2021; Voet & De Wever, 2018). However, the divergence in belief endorsement identified in this study is heavily influenced by the unique structural features of Indonesia's national reform. Unlike passive curriculum updates, *Kurikulum Merdeka* explicitly mandates character formation through the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*, creating an immediate operational conflict between top-down policy directives and established school practices (Ndari et al., 2023; Rifaldi et al., 2026). Additionally, variance among mentor teachers' mindsets is strongly linked to differential access to professional development and institutional support across varied school environments (Butler & Cuenca, 2012; Mirkabil, 2025).

Theoretically, this research advances the cross-cultural validity of Vygotskian sociocultural belief models by demonstrating that pedagogical mindsets are continuously mediated by historical artifacts, institutional constraints, and relational mentorship structures within a reforming developing nation (Lampert-Shepel & Zimmerman, 2024; Soysal & Radmard, 2017). By proving that mentor teachers' endorsement of cognitive and social practices shifts as a function of mentoring tenure, this study provides a nuanced conceptualization of how clinical expertise develops over time (Ennis, 1994; Fairbanks et al., 2009; Kang et al., 2025; Kolman et al., 2017; Kuswandono, 2017; Tanjung et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2020).

Practically and politically, these results highlight the critical necessity for Teacher Training Institutions (LPTKs) and educational authorities to move beyond placing student teachers in unaligned school environments. LPTKs must design structured, learner-centered mentor training programs to bridge the gap between university coursework and field placements (Eddraoui et al., 2023; Orland-Barak & Wang, 2020; Parker et al., 2021; Peiser et al., 2019). Equipping school-based mentors to scaffold social-constructivist practices is essential for sustaining *Kurikulum Merdeka* and optimizing PPG Prajabatan clinical outcomes (Kusumawati et al., 2025; Purwasih et al., 2025; Putra et al., 2026; Smith et al., 2024; Sulisworo et al., 2024). Future research should utilize longitudinal, mixed-method approaches to track how mentor-mentee belief interactions evolve over extended field placements across diverse geographic regions.

Conclusion

This study successfully addressed its primary objective of evaluating the disparity in pedagogical beliefs between Pre-service Teacher Professional Education (PPG) students and school-based mentor teachers within the context of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Independent Curriculum) implementation. Key findings reveal a significant gap: student teachers demonstrate a much stronger inclination toward higher-order reasoning and learner social agency compared to mentor teachers. Conversely, mentor teachers prioritize the understanding of procedural knowledge and behavioral compliance. However, the duration of mentoring experience significantly moderates these beliefs; veteran mentors (with over five years of mentoring experience) exhibit a high degree of alignment with the constructivist learning principles of *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

This divergence in pedagogical beliefs stems from the fact that student teachers are equipped with progressive constructivist frameworks during their PPG coursework at teacher training institutions (LPTK), whereas mentor teachers often filter curriculum

reform directives through ingrained conventional teaching habits and examination pressures. Nevertheless, years of engagement in clinical mentoring practices gradually shift the mentors' roles from mere supervisory managers to constructors of pedagogical knowledge. This accumulated mentoring experience enables senior mentors to internalize the values of *Kurikulum Merdeka* and actively facilitate—or scaffold—the development of learners' character and learning agency.

To address the limitations inherent in the study's quantitative cross-sectional design, future research should adopt longitudinal approaches and mixed-methods designs. Future studies ought to combine survey instruments with direct classroom observations and encompass a broader geographical scope. Such measures are crucial for capturing the evolving dynamics of belief-based interactions between student teachers and mentor teachers in real-time throughout the academic year. On a broader scale, this study underscores the need for teacher education institutions (LPTK) and education policymakers to establish structured training programs for mentor teachers and collaborative learning communities. Aligning academic coursework at the university level with practical field experience in schools ensures the sustainability of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Independent Curriculum) reforms. Ultimately, this will drive the transformation of national education, focusing on fostering student agency, critical thinking skills, and holistic character development (the Pancasila Student Profile).

Author Contribution

MAW: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft, Visualization. IALP: Validation, Formal Analysis, Supervision, Project Administration, Writing – Review & Editing.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests, personal relationships, or professional affiliations that could have appeared to influence, bias, or compromise the objectivity and impartiality of the research presented in this manuscript.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

The authors confirm that no generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, large language models (LLMs), or AI-assisted writing applications were utilized in the conceptualization, drafting, data analysis, figure generation, or editing of this manuscript. The entirety of the work was authored solely by the listed authors, who assume full responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of the content.

Additional Information

Not applicable. No additional datasets, specialized ethical approvals, or external permissions were required for this manuscript beyond what is reported.

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