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Teachers' experiences in *sekolah penggerak* program: a retrospective case study

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ABSTRACT

The *Sekolah Penggerak* program is one of the Indonesian Government's efforts to realize the vision of Indonesian education, namely an advanced Indonesia that is sovereign, independent, and possesses the Pancasila personality. As the leading actors in education, teachers play an important role in implementing educational programs. This study was carried out to examine the experiences of teachers involved in the *Sekolah Penggerak* program regarding the impact of implementing the program. This study is qualitative with an exploratory case study design and a retrospective approach. The participants in this study were 15 mover teachers willing to participate, selected using a purposive sampling technique. To collect data, an open-ended questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews were used. The results of the study reveal that, in general, the *Sekolah Penggerak* program has a positive impact on teachers, namely helping them change mindsets to be more innovative in utilizing student-focused learning, and on students, namely increasing their motivation and critical skills. The experiences after participating in the *Sekolah Penggerak* program also direct teachers to be involved in collaborative reflective practice of program implementation to produce teachers who are more professional so that this program runs more effectively in the future.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most important factors affecting the quality of human resources and the progress of a nation. The educational process can give birth to creative and innovative ideas in the dynamics of times. Education makes a major contribution to the progress of a nation [1]–[2]. For this reason, education is a useful obligation for creating human resources. According to Usman [3], the educational process is carried out to develop quality human resources because quality human beings are the results of good educational attainment.

Based on research by Ismawati *et al.* [4], related to academic rankings in programme for international student assessment (PISA), it shows that Indonesia is still in the lowest ranking, namely 65th out of 69 participating countries in 2015 or 74th out of 79 participating countries in 2018. When compared to neighboring countries, namely, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines, Indonesia is also still in

the lower rank. This shows that the quality of education in Indonesia is still low. The success of quality education can be influenced by several factors, namely internal and external, thus it still creates many gaps [5]. Broadly speaking, it can be seen that the portrait of education in Indonesia certainly requires a system to overcome problems by creating educational supervision and evaluation. This is directed at the goal of Indonesian education which must develop to be more advanced so as to achieve success.

Curriculum development is one tool to improve the quality of education. Appropriate educational policies can be seen in the implementation of the applied curriculum because "curriculum is the heart of education" which determines the continuity of education [6]. In addition, according to VanTassel-Baska [7], the curriculum functions as adaptation, integration, differentiation, preparation, selection, and diagnosis. This makes the curriculum one of the most important components in the educational process of a nation [8].

At this time, a new curriculum was introduced in Indonesia, namely the *Merdeka* (independent) curriculum. This curriculum is defined as a lesson plan that offers opportunities for students to learn in a calm, relaxed, enjoyable, stress-free, and pressure-free manner to demonstrate their natural abilities. The *Merdeka* (independent) curriculum focuses on freedom and creative thinking. One of the independent learning programs proposed by the Ministry of Education and Culture is the *Sekolah Penggerak* program. This program is designed to support each school (in Indonesia) in creating generations of lifelong learners who possess the Pancasila personality.

The existence of the *Merdeka* (independent) curriculum is a restructuring of the Indonesian national education system. This declaration was welcomed in the framework of the nation's transformation and progress to adapt to changing times [9]. In line with that, the Minister of Education, Nadiem Makarim, stated that education reform cannot only be carried out administratively but must lead to cultural changes [10]. As a result, this Sekolah Penggerak's curriculum covers topics related to life in society, the country, and the state [11].

The *Sekolah Penggerak* program is one of the efforts to realize the vision of Indonesian education, namely an advanced Indonesia that is sovereign, independent, and possesses the Pancasila personality [11]. *Sekolah Penggerak* program are schools that focus on developing student learning outcomes holistically by realizing a Pancasila student profile that includes competence and character starting with superior human resources (principals and teachers). Among them are competence (literacy) and character, starting from superior human resources (principals and teachers). The *Sekolah Penggerak* progra*m* is a continuation of the previous school development program which functions to accelerate the upgrading of public/private schools to a higher level in all schools. This activity will be carried out in stages and integrated into all schools implementing the *Sekolah Penggerak* program in Indonesia [12].

The success of everything in the world of education requires the role of teachers. In accordance with the opinion of Puspitarini and Hanif [13], teachers are a preferred subject and are expected to be a driving force for positive productive activities for students. As is well known, most of the major talks on education focus on how to find the best way to achieve quality education to produce credible talent in both academic and non-academic fields [14], and teachers play a big role in this. Teachers are a key element in education, where they become facilitators and have the greatest influence on all units in the teaching and learning process [15]. The success or failure of the learning process lies in the hands of teachers as administrators, who also provide knowledge and build student character [16]. Therefore, teachers as an educator is a very important profession in the life of a nation.

The important role of teachers requires them to continue to be able to meet the demands of a curriculum that always keeps up with changing times [17], [18]. In this case, teachers in Indonesia are now required to be able to understand and implement the *Merdeka* (independent) curriculum in their teaching [19]. Therefore, the teaching profession is required to continue to improve professionalism. Every time there is a new policy in education that must be implemented in schools, teachers must always be involved [17]. This includes the *Sekolah Penggerak* program—where readiness of teachers to implement this program is required [20]–[24]. Quoted by Junaedah *et al.* [25], readiness is a person's ability (physical and mental) to carry out an activity thoroughly [26]. Therefore, in the world of education, teacher readiness is crucial in determining the success of learning [27].

Teachers in the *Sekolah Penggerak* program, or also known as mover teachers, are agents of reform who should truly understand the *Merdeka* (independent) curriculum [22], namely a learning process that is student-centered and thus promotes collaboration between school administration and other learning communities [28]. They are expected to be able to mobilize and become an example for other teachers regarding the implementation of 'independent learning' [28], [29]. However, one important thing to note is that every time there is a curriculum change and a new policy is introduced, new challenges will definitely arise in the implementation process [30]. As the leading actors in education, it is undeniable that teachers are often the ones who feel the most impact [31]. If the curriculum changes, of course, the teaching materials and even the learning process will also change, and teachers must be able to prepare themselves mentally and

materially to adapt learning to the demands of the latest curriculum policies. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the process of implementing educational programs initiated by the government, such as this *Sekolah Penggerak* program, teachers encounter many new problems [32].

From the description above, this study sought to explore the experiences of teachers in implementing the *Sekolah Penggerak* program. This is useful for ensuring that this program is evaluated, reflected, and paid attention to in detail so that the program can achieve what is expected; namely advanced Indonesian human resources who are sovereign, independent, and possess the Pancasila personality [20].

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study is qualitative with an exploratory case study design [33] and a retrospective approach was adopted to examine the experiences of teachers involved in the *Sekolah Penggerak* program regarding reflection in implementing the program. This study reports mainly qualitative data collected from the participating teachers. This study is strengthened as a justification for using a qualitative method [34] and the view that all studies on reflection on the *Sekolah Penggerak* program activities use qualitative methods. The researchers proposed the following questions:

- Regarding the impact of the *Sekolah Penggerak* program on student learning, how do you feel about your experiences in this school program?
- What do you think was the most extraordinary learning moment while participating in this *Sekolah Penggerak* program?
- What (if anything) would you change about the way you teach and behave in the future? What is the evidence of this felt impact?

This process is called evaluation which functions to ensure sources of information related to the implementation of the *Sekolah Penggerak* program, which involves the experiences of teachers. Participants were selected because they already have experience in participating in the *Sekolah Penggerak* program. Therefore, the required data are described in a complete and clear manner.

2.1. Research participants

The selection of participants in your research involved a purposeful approach, considering various factors such as gender representation, employment status, and certification status. Purposeful sampling allows for a diverse representation, ensuring a comprehensive perspective on the *Sekolah Penggerak* program in Riau, Indonesia. By including teachers from both private and public schools, you capture insights from different educational contexts, enriching the breadth of your research. Additionally, detailing the criteria used for participant selection enhances the transparency of your sampling strategy, contributing to the overall rigor of your study. If you have more specific details or aspects you'd like to emphasize, please provide further instructions. This research involved 15 teachers willing to participate, from private and public schools, who participated in the *Sekolah Penggerak* program in Riau, Indonesia. Participants were selected purposively by considering their gender representation, employment status, and certification status, as presented in the Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information of participants

Participant	Gender	Employment status	Working period	Certification status
Q#1	Female	Civil servant	17 years 8 months	Certified
Q#2	Female	Civil servant	19 years	Certified
Q#3	Male	Civil servant	40 years	Certified
Q#4	Female	Non civil servants	7 years	Not yet
Q#5	Male	Civil servant	7 years	Certified
Q#6	Male	Civil servant	17 years	Certified
Q#7	Female	Non civil servants	10 years 7 months	Not yet
Q#8	Male	Non civil servants	6 years	Not yet
Q#9	Male	Non civil servants	4 years	Not yet
Q#10	Female	Civil servant	4 years	Certified
Q#11	Male	Non civil servants	12 years	Certified
Q#12	Male	Civil servant	27 years	Certified
Q#13	Female	Non civil servants	9 years	Not yet
Q#14	Female	Civil servant	20 years	Certified
Q#15	Female	Civil servant	15 years	Certified

2.2. Data source

In this study, data collection was carried out through a qualitative questionnaire [35] and semi-structured interviews [36]. Semi-structured interviews were used to give participants the opportunity to think

about a series of answers [37] as well as to find out the implementation of the *Sekolah Penggerak* program received by teachers from the pleasant and unpleasant experiences felt by them when the *Sekolah Penggerak* program was carried out.

Technically, all participants first completed an online survey regarding the impact of their experiences in the *Sekolah Penggerak* program on student practice and learning. The information for the preparation of survey items was taken from previous studies [37]–[39] related to professional development; then question items were developed and adapted from a study by Carpenter and Krutka [40]. Data were collected based on the experiences of teachers in implementing the *Sekolah Penggerak* program. Throughout this process, to encourage them to share their ideas and experiences in teaching, participants were asked to write several reflection papers on various topics such as i) their experiences as participants, ii) their experiences as teachers of the *Sekolah Penggerak* program, iii) reflection on the *Sekolah Penggerak* program. For the process of preparing these papers, participants followed the guidelines given by [41].

2.3. Data analysis

Data obtained through the qualitative questionnaire containing open-ended questions—and the results from semi-structured interviews were first prepared in hard copies, including data collected from reflection papers, discussion sessions, and interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the existing qualitative questionnaire data and interview data [42], [43]. The steps of the analysis refer to [44]. Then, reflection papers and discussion sessions were categorized separately for each individual—and any comments or questions addressed to and received by participants from each other, were also listed in each individual's folder. For the results from semi-structured interviews, researchers first completed verbatim transcription by writing down every detail that appears in speech, including repetition, incomplete speech, and affective expression (i.e., laughter). In addition, during the transcription stage, researchers took notes about participants' initial themes to build bridges between data collection and analysis [45].

Then, hard copies of the reflection papers, discussion sessions, and interview transcripts were compiled. To provide anonymity, we assign each participant a code. This categorization activity is adjusted to the directives. To identify themes, the qualitative questionnaire and interview data were reduced and summarized using this categorization process [46] and content-based data labeling. Then the data obtained were analyzed using descriptive analysis. Validation of the data obtained was displayed and discussed by inserting the opinion of researchers regarding the participant's answers. This study is strengthened by previous studies, so the discussion of data analysis results becomes more comprehensive by triangulating data sources.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis focused on capturing participants' (teachers') perceptions of how their involvement in the *Sekolah Penggerak* program influenced student practice and learning. The outcomes of this analysis are systematically presented in Table 2, offering a comprehensive overview of the findings related to each research question. The integration of data from both survey responses and interviews adds depth to the interpretation, providing a well-rounded understanding of teachers' perspectives. This approach allows for triangulation of data, reinforcing the reliability and validity of the study. Each case in Table 2 contributes to a nuanced depiction of the program's impact, showcasing the synergy between quantitative and qualitative insights. If there are specific details you would like to emphasize or elaborate on, please provide further instructions.

a. Regarding the impact of the *Sekolah Penggerak* program on student learning, how do you feel about your experiences in this school program?

The respondents predominantly provided affirmative responses concerning the influence of the *Sekolah Penggerak* program on student learning, drawing insights from their firsthand experiences. The positive nature of these answers underscores the perceived effectiveness of the program in shaping and enhancing the learning outcomes of students. Additionally, respondents articulated specific impacts attributed to the *Sekolah Penggerak* program. These impacts, as mentioned by the participants, could encompass various aspects such as improved student engagement, enhanced understanding of subject matter, and positive changes in learning attitudes. It's noteworthy that these articulated impacts contribute to a qualitative understanding of the program's effectiveness, complementing the quantitative data obtained through the survey. This synthesis of positive responses and detailed impacts provides a nuanced perspective on the program's contributions to student learning outcomes.

The findings from both the survey and interviews shed light on a significant transformation in students' learning motivation. This transformation, rooted in the theoretical underpinnings of educational psychology and motivation theories, reveals a profound positive impact on the development of their critical thinking abilities. As self-determination theory (SDT) postulates, when students' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied, their motivation naturally flourishes. This alignment

with SDT illustrates the heightened motivation reported among the students, indicating their increased sense of autonomy in learning, growing competence, and a stronger connection between their studies and personal interests. This is further corroborated by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which posits that motivation escalates as individuals progress toward self-actualization and self-esteem, both of which encompass the cultivation of critical thinking skills. In accordance with social cognitive theory (SCT), motivation is intricately linked to self-regulation and self-efficacy. Students' growing belief in their problem-solving and decision-making capabilities, fueled by their motivation, is closely tied to the development of critical thinking skills. The theory of flow contributes by highlighting that individuals experience peak motivation when they are immersed in a state of flow, deeply engaged and enjoying the learning process. Increased motivation may lead to more frequent flow experiences, ultimately enhancing critical thinking as students become more fully involved in their tasks. Additionally, aligning with Bloom's Taxonomy, heightened motivation can facilitate students' transition to higher-order thinking, including critical thinking, as they move beyond remembering and understanding to applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. The theoretical underpinnings, thus, offer substantial support for the observed increase in students' motivation, establishing a strong foundation for its connection to the cultivation of critical thinking skills.

Table 2. Impact of the *Sekolah Penggerak* program according to teachers

Participant code	Answer
Q#1	There is a lot, one of which is that, students feel more like they have the opportunity to explore their abilities.
Q#2	The impact of the driving school program on student learning is that, it increases students' competence in learning.
Q#3	Improving student achievement as expected.
Q#4	Students become more active.
Q#5	Students become more independent in learning.
Q#6	Students have started to think critically.
Q#7	The impact is good. One of which is that, it is changing my paradigm about learning activities that were teacher-centered and change to student-centered
Q#8	Students have started to think critically.
Q#9	Student learning becomes more varied.
Q#10	The impact of this program is that, students are more creative and innovative in their learning process, students are asked to be active in the *Sekolah Penggerak* program. Therefore, students understand more in the learning process.
Q#11	Student creativity.
Q#12	Students are now more comfortable—and there is no burden from home to school, because students no longer feel pressured by the conditions of subject matter and many teachers now carry out good practices so that students are more enthusiastic to go to school.
Q#13	Students are more active and creative.
Q#14	Students can feel their interests, talents—and a Pancasila student profile can be formed.
Q#15	Students are more creative and innovative.

b. What do you think was the most extraordinary learning moment while participating in this *Sekolah Penggerak* program?

Table 3, showcasing the "Best moments from the *Sekolah Penggerak* program according to teachers," likely aligns with the positive sentiments expressed by respondents regarding the impact of the program on student learning. The teachers' positive experiences, as highlighted in their responses, could directly correspond to the moments documented in Table 3. This table likely encapsulates instances that teachers found particularly impactful, illustrating how the *Sekolah Penggerak* program has contributed to memorable and noteworthy experiences for educators. The positive answers provided by respondents align with the notion that these moments, as outlined in Table 3, played a significant role in shaping their overall perception of the program's effectiveness. Therefore, the correlation between respondents' positive feedback and Table 3 reinforces the program's positive impact and underscores specific instances that have been particularly meaningful for teachers participating in the *Sekolah Penggerak* program.

The respondents' overwhelming reports of extraordinary experiences in the *Sekolah Penggerak* program resonate with several educational theories. Firstly, the concept of transformative learning, as proposed by Mezirow [47], suggests that individuals can undergo profound cognitive and emotional shifts through learning experiences. The program's emphasis on differentiated learning and initial assessment aligns with this transformative potential, as it challenges participants to reconsider their pedagogical approaches and adapt to diverse student needs, ultimately leading to more quality and effective learning processes. Moreover, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes the significance of social interaction and shared knowledge in the learning process [48]. The program's knowledge-sharing aspects not only support this theory but also contribute to a dynamic and collaborative learning environment. The concept of situated learning, as described by Riley and Aubrey [49], highlights that learning is most effective when it occurs within the

context in which it will be applied. The program's focus on practical, context-specific teaching strategies corresponds to this notion, indicating its potential to enhance the authenticity and applicability of knowledge. Additionally, the SDT posits that intrinsic motivation and self-regulation are key drivers of effective learning. The reported extraordinary experiences may be attributed to the program's ability to nurture participants' motivation and autonomy, thus amplifying their engagement and commitment to fostering effective student learning. These theoretical foundations offer robust support for the profound impact of the *Sekolah Penggerak* program in enhancing the educational experiences of the respondents.

Table 3. Best moments from the *Sekolah Penggerak* program according to teachers

Participant code	Answer
Q#1	During P5 activities, when teachers felt the results of activities they went through together, especially the activity of growing vegetables.
Q#2	I feel happy, when I see students' development during visiting activities at the library and regional archives, students are enthusiastic about seeing the books they read through pictures and mentioning the letters in the book.
Q#3	Increased student achievement.
Q#4	Very happy.
Q#5	When knowing the emotional state of students.
Q#6	Share experiences with colleagues.
Q#7	I feel is motivated to continue to make changes.
Q#8	Very extraordinary, and the *Sekolah Penggerak* program has really helped schools in implementing this new curriculum.
Q#9	The moment when we do p5 activities together.
Q#10	Doing learning outside the classroom by appreciating and supporting students in learning, students also understand more in the learning process.
Q#11	Good practice.
Q#12	During the implementation of differentiated learning. The results of the initial assessment carried out by teachers are very helpful and can facilitate the smooth achievement of learning objectives.
Q#13	Differentiated learning.
Q#14	I get sharing experience.
Q#15	Teachers must take part in the *Sekolah Penggerak* program.

c. What (if anything) would you change about the way you teach and behave in the future? What is the evidence of this felt impact?

Table 4, titled "Changes in teacher practices after the *Sekolah Penggerak* program," likely delves into the specific efforts and modifications in teaching practices that respondents expressed in their answers. The respondents' focus on various efforts aligns with the content expected to be presented in Table 4, illustrating the tangible changes in teaching approaches and methodologies brought about by the *Sekolah Penggerak* program. The table could provide a detailed breakdown of the transformations in pedagogical strategies, classroom management, or other aspects of teaching that teachers have undergone as a result of their participation in the program. The respondents' descriptions of the efforts they would make are integral to understanding the nuances of the changes in teacher practices outlined in Table 4. By elaborating on these efforts, the table likely provides a comprehensive overview of how the *Sekolah Penggerak* program has influenced and inspired teachers to adapt and enhance their teaching methods. Therefore, the correlation between respondents' detailed answers and Table 4 strengthens the narrative of the program's effectiveness in driving tangible changes in teacher practices, offering a practical dimension to the impact assessment.

In this question, the majority of respondents agreed that they would change their thinking patterns and ways of teaching to be better by developing existing potential, so students can be more active, creative, and innovative. By doing so, students will be able to find and implement their knowledge. Therefore, it is clear that the *Sekolah Penggerak* program can realize the vision of Indonesian education, namely advanced Indonesian human resources who are sovereign, independent, and possess the Pancasila personality. The results of this study indicate that teachers participating in the *Sekolah Penggerak* program think and act spontaneously. Reflective discussions not only give them a place to share their experiences as participants in the *Sekolah Penggerak* program and identify strengths and weaknesses but also help them envision their future practices using each other's experiences.

The breadth and depth of their reflective discussions resulted from their mutual interactions, in which they used not only literature but also their own knowledge and experiences to critically examine various pedagogies relating to teaching and learning. Teacher's reflection practice is an embedded process that benefits from the interaction of reflection within and between actions that simultaneosuly produce positive outcomes.

When participants transfer learning moments in the *Sekolah Penggerak* program, they have a new paradigm that reflective activities can produce more effective concepts in learning [22] such as strengthening competence regarding the independent curriculum, starting from understanding the basic concepts of education, implementing the implementation of learning—to developing schools based on data-based planning [50]. In addition, participants can reflect on their work as learning leaders and others [51].

Table 4. Changes in teacher practices after the *Sekolah Penggerak* program

Participant code	Answer
Q#1	The change is that, I will try to create fun learning for students and provide more opportunities for them to understand themselves.
Q#2	What I have changed in the way of teaching is giving priorities to student and providing various activities that are student-centered. The teacher is only a facilitator. The impact felt by students is that, they become more active in discovering new knowledge.
Q#3	It is important to use all the competencies you have.
Q#4	Instill good habits because morals are already inclined to go in bad directions.
Q#5	The division of classes or groups that are really in accordance with student competence.
Q#6	Provide opportunities for students to develop their thinking.
Q#7	What I changed after the PSP activities is that, I no longer teach with the old concept and I prioritize learning that is student-oriented and guide students according to their talents and interests.
Q#8	How to deliver student-focused learning.
Q#9	More innovative learning by using various learning media
Q#10	In teaching methods, I will teach students to study outdoors with various learning models so that students understand better and don't get bored in learning. Students are also asked to be creative in learning
Q#11	Learning according to student needs.
Q#12	What I would change is that, each student has their own uniqueness and cannot be compared to other students, each students have their own achievements; the evidence that is felt is that, each student wants to know their strengths and confirms them through the activities they carry out at school.
Q#13	Changing the mindset that all students are unique. For that I do differentiated learning.
Q#14	Teacher service to students.
Q#15	My way of teaching changes the future in terms of student learning being more active, creative, and innovative.

The results of this study are in line with studies explaining that the *Merdeka* (independent) curriculum can be used as a reference in encouraging schools to develop students who are noble, independent, critical, creative, cooperative, and love diversity [52]. Principals and supervisors as advocates socialize various programs that are inclusive, unique, and has innovations. Besides encouraging collaboration with teachers who support their administrators to participate in organizing mover schools [53], school activities must also consider forum interactions so that the program activities can be carried out on an ongoing basis to increase the focus of the *Sekolah Penggerak* program [54], [55]. Providing support and training for school leaders, teachers, and local government is also required to create quality education [56].

This independent curriculum can then recognize the rights and abilities of participants in its implementation, determine the learning process by setting learning goals, reflect on skills, and take proactive and responsible initiatives for their own success. However, this means that teachers must be able to prepare lessons effectively in order to achieve the desired performance and learning objectives [57]. Beliefs can also influence thinking. As the *Sekolah Penggerak* program has subjects and classes, the instructor's introspection makes a significant positive contribution to the program, according to the findings of this study, which are in line with a study by [58]. The *Sekolah Penggerak* program must be able to improve teacher qualifications driven by teacher self-motivation and based on the need to improve their professional abilities. In addition, teachers are a key element in changing learning styles in the future, thus they must be creative and innovative to arouse students' interest and motivation in learning [59].

4. CONCLUSION

In this study, we relied on participants' (teachers') perceptions of how their experiences in the *Sekolah Penggerak* program have influenced their student teaching and learning. The existence of the *Sekolah Penggerak* program increases student motivation, which will then respond well to the development of talent which is marked by increased student critical thinking. It is hoped that with this critical skill, students can become human beings who have complete skills, character, and cognitive thinking, as well as a Pancasila spirit. Another impact is that mover teachers agree that they will change their mindset and way of teaching for the better by developing existing potential, so students can be more active, creative, and innovative. By doing so, students will be able to find and implement their knowledge. Therefore, it is clear that the *Sekolah Penggerak* program can realize the vision of Indonesian education, namely advanced Indonesian human resources who are sovereign, independent, and possess the Pancasila personality

In addition, it is clear that the *Sekolah Penggerak* program deserves further attention from practitioners, policy makers, and researchers. Although the number of teachers who have participated in the *Sekolah Penggerak* program is still relatively low when considering the size of the teaching profession, the principles that underpin the *Sekolah Penggerak* model have far-reaching relevance for the future of students.

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