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Sekolah penggerak program: a comparative case study in Indonesia's elementary school context

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ABSTRACT

The main reason for the research significance is misconceptions arising in the field when implementing Sekolah Penggerak Program, which started in 2021. Thus, the objectives of this study are to describe programs for enhancing exceptional human resources, and to explore the Kurikulum Operasional Satuan Pendidikan (Education Unit Operational Curriculum), and the Merdeka Curriculum learning. Four elementary schools in Indonesia's urban and rural areas served as the research unit for analysis, which used a qualitative comparative case study design. The results demonstrate that the programs of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology for improving human resources, which includes training and mentoring, have a favourable effect on both rural and urban primary schools. However, only one out of four schools examined the context of the educational unit while creating education unit operational curriculum documents, and every school simply used education unit operational curriculum as a prerequisite for administrative fulfilment. Based on the available components, all teachers developed teaching modules for the Merdeka Curriculum. It was found, nevertheless, that the students were not genuinely exposed to the content of these modules.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, has vocally criticised the educational paradigm that focuses on the education industry to "create" people as a result of significant technological advancements. Giroux [1] even labelled Paulo Freire as "one of the most important critical educators of the twentieth century" in which his most phenomenal thought was that education was a liberating practice. Beckett [2] also argues that the idea of liberation education is intriguing, challenging, and even revolutionary because it centers on an important aspect that previous philosophers have mostly overlooked. The concept of "deschooling," put forth by Freire, maintains that learning can occur anywhere and outside of official educational environments [3]. Freire correspondingly characterizes teacher-student interaction as a dialogue, and teachers and students as critical joint researchers, meaning that education entails not only teaching teachers and students learning, but teachers and students teaching and learning together [2], [4], [5]. Additionally, Ki Hadjar Dewantara has pushed for liberating education, emphasizing the unique aspects of Indonesian culture and the value of developing students' potential in all respects [6]. Through the Merdeka Belajar Program (emancipated learning) in 2020, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology later brought this idea up once more. The national education standards agency describes emancipated learning as a strategy that allows

students to select areas that they are interested in, allowing them to maximize their talents and provide the greatest service to the country [7].

Based on Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology no. 371 of 2021, the Sekolah Penggerak Program is a catalyst for achieving the vision of Indonesian education, with one of its objectives being to guarantee equal access to high-quality education through a program to build the skills of school principals who can guide educational units in achieving high standards of learning [8] [9]. This refers to educational institutions that place a strong emphasis on achieving the Profil Pelajar Pancasila (Pancasila Student Profile), which starts with having good human resources, especially to principals and teachers. Since teacher creativity is the most essential factor in learning, one of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology concerns in creating a Merdeka Curriculum that eventually launched Sekolah Penggerak Program. The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) study from 2015 revealed that student and teacher interaction during learning did not foster higher order thinking or analytical capabilities. The ability of a teacher to innovate, be creative, think critically, efficiently organize learning resources for pupils, and respond to and handle student inquiries in the most cutting-edge, inventive, and creative manner is referred to as teacher creativity [10]. Teacher creativity is a significant skill of educational instructors and facilitators when aiding themselves in facilitating the knowledge transfer to pupils in the current era of advanced technology and revolution [11]. As Beghetto [12] pointed out that the teacher plays a central role in designing and managing the types of learning experiences that determine whether creativity will be supported or suppressed in the classroom. Beghetto [12] added that creative learning is related to developing new and meaningful contributions to one's and others' learning and life as well. This relationship needs to be demonstrated in the 21st century due to the significant association between creativity and robust national economic development [13].

In addition, opportunities to experiment, create, and attempt new things can strengthen, expand, or grow an individual's creativity [14], all of which are initiated by creative teachers in their classes and supported by the principal's leadership abilities. The results of the study show that teacher creativity increases human resource competence, management and business competence, entrepreneurial competence and interpersonal competence [15]. The results of other studies support the notion that creativity has a direct positive relationship with self-efficacy in fostering a child-centered learning environment [16]. Thus, it is imperative for educators to understand how the environment affects creativity and how they may modify the environment to encourage creativity in their pupils [17]. Creating a positive environment is also an important part of pursuing quality education and the quality of pupils [18].

22 episodes of emancipated learning have been released by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology as of September 7, 2022, and the seventh episode specifically addressed target students and schools [19]. Previous research revealed that the Sekolah Penggerak Program encourages teachers to concentrate on their students' learning as well as their motivation and critical thinking abilities. Teachers become more professional as a result of participating in collaborative reflective practice of program implementation [20]. The other study indicated that because Indonesia's environment is so diverse, it is important to implement periodic evaluation programs for its curriculum [21]. In addition, the success of *sekolah penggerak's* implementation is greatly dependent on school principals [22]. Even though Sekolah Penggerak Program had reached its third batch spreading across 509 regencies/cities in 34 provinces in Indonesia by the time of its launch in December 2022, various misconceptions in the field began to be seen.

The need for more in-depth study is essential, and it should be done as soon as possible, based on the literature analysis, the findings of prior studies, and common misconceptions in the field. For the reason that it is a new educational program in Indonesia, little study has been done on it. The government will be able to analyze the program more thoroughly with the help of the practical implication provided by this research. In addition, this research contributes theoretically, empirically and practically to see the practice carried out directly in Indonesia in understanding the concept of liberation education inspired by Paulo Freire and Ki Hadjar Dewantara and the interventions carried out by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in hastening the school acceleration process. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the implementation of Sekolah Penggerak Program which focuses on the type of program to strengthen excellent human resources, the implementation of the education Kurikulum Operasional Satuan Pendidikan (Education Unit Operational Curriculum), and the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum learning at the elementary school level in urban areas and rural areas. The selection of urban and rural areas was carried out because these two regions have fundamental differences, for example in terms of the quality of human resources and facilities in the two regions. Moreover, it is to explore the implementation carried out which is likely to discover different issues from the two regions. The purpose of this exploration is to serve as a policy foundation for the local and national governments in addressing and foreseeing current issues or limitations in order to minimize issues that arise during the learning process and ensure the success of the Sekolah Penggerak Program and Merdeka Curriculum goals.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Research context

The Emancipated learning program, which was introduced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in early 2021, includes an episode called Sekolah Penggerak Program. Sekolah Penggerak Program is a catalyst for realizing Indonesia's educational vision which focuses on developing student learning outcomes holistically by realizing the Pancasila Student Profile which begins with excellent human resources, namely principals and teachers. To speed up the school acceleration process, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology is committed to providing five special interventions including i) consultative and asymmetric mentoring interventions, ii) strengthening school human resources, iii) new paradigm learning, iv) data-based planning, and v) digitalization of schools. However, the focus of this research is on the second intervention which is in line with the stages in achieving Pancasila Student Profile which begins with excellent human resources particularly for principals and teachers.

2.2. Research design

As part of a qualitative research approach with an interpretivism paradigm, this study used a comparative case study design [23]–[25] to explore the implementation of Sekolah Penggerak Program in the two geographically distinct regions of Indonesia the urban and rural areas. Four public primary schools, four of which are unique in their physical locations between urban and rural areas, were compared using this design. These four schools also differ in terms of their resources both human and physical which probably affects the outcomes.

2.3. Participants

Four primary schools-two public primary schools in a rural area, and two public schools in an urban area, which are located in Indonesia become the research unit of analysis. The participants of the study include school principals, learning committee, and teachers of the first and the fourth grade of primary schools because the first and the fourth grade are the first class in the first year of implementing Merdeka Curriculum. In addition, the school superintendent, and facilitators of Sekolah Penggerak participated in this study as well. We used initials for the participants' names and the schools' names because of ethical sensitivity, which protected both the participants' and the schools' privacy.

2.4. Data collection and data analysis

We garnered the data through observation, interviews and documentation. As one of us is a facilitator of Sekolah Penggerak and participated in the program directly, she did the participant's observation to understand the phenomena being investigated. Thus, the access to obtain the schools' permission is somewhat effortless. We informed the objectives of the research and requested them to participate in our study voluntarily. After we obtained the informed consent from the schools and participants, we made an appointment for observation and interviews. Observations were made during intracurricular learning, and school assistance by facilitator of Sekolah Penggerak. For interviews, we asked the participants' point of views about the implementation of Sekolah Penggerak Program and delved into more data about the vision and mission based on their perceptions. Whereas we analysed the government-issued documents, which include i) policy document on anticipated learning, Sekolah Penggerak Program and Merdeka Curriculum [9]; ii) guidebook on the preparation of operational curriculum in educational units [26]; iii) guidebook on learning and assessment [27]; and iv) guidebook on Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5) [28]. Since we focused on grade 1 and 4, we analysed six books of school operational curriculum in educational documents written by teachers of grade 1, seven books of school operational curriculum in educational documents written by teachers of grade 4, flow of learning objectives and teaching modules which are created by teachers of grade 1 and 4; P5 project module written by teachers of grade 1 and 4 and handbooks used by teachers and students in grades 1 and 4 [29]–[41]; and researchers' note of learning process, and activities related to the sekolah penggerak program.

For data analysis, we did pattern matching, explanation building, and time series analysis adopted by Vebrianto *et al*. [20]. For pattern matching, we matched the patterns of our data, which have the same idea to strengthen the validity. To get the results from pattern matching, we conducted data explanation in order that the obtained data become more specific, and we can make a conclusion. The last is time series analysis since the data was garnered for one year. We did source triangulation to check the validity of the data by comparing the information from school principals, teachers, supervisors and facilitators in each school. We also used method triangulation by comparing the data through observation, interviews and documentation. For data trustworthiness and rigor, we requested the participants to reread and give feedback to our data interpretation before we drew the conclusion.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Programs for strengthening human resources in Sekolah Penggerak

For starters, the government implemented a human resource strengthening program in Sekolah Penggerak, which was divided into two categories of strengthening programs, namely training, and mentorship. The government sent out Sekolah Penggerak facilitator, who was allocated to 5-8 supported schools, in order to strengthen human resources. The types of the program are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of training and mentoring for human resource strengthening programs

Human resource strengthening	Training	Mentoring
May-June 2022	Training for learning committee	-
September	Curriculum workshop: learning planning 1	Operational management working group Reflection
October	Curriculum workshop: processing and reporting of assessment results	Operational management working group
	Superintendent workshop: community practitioner	Field visit
November	Curriculum workshop: learning planning 2	Operational management working group
	Workshop on tolerance	Field visit
December	Supervisors workshop 2: facilitating learning needs and sharing good practices in education units	Operational management working group Reflection
January 2023	-	Operational management working group
February	-	Operational management working group Reflection
March	-	Operational management working group
April	-	Operational management working group
May	Principal leadership workshop Stakeholder forum	Operational management working group
June	End of academic year reflection	Operational management working group

All school principals and teachers acknowledged that they had benefitted from all the training and mentoring provided by the government through the facilitator of Sekolah Penggerak as following interviews.

> *The training carried out by West Java Balai Besar Guru Penggerak (BBGP) had a very positive effect on us, we now know more about what a Merdeka Curriculum is, how it is implemented in schools. (Ms. YW, principal in school A, urban area).*
> *Alhamdulillah this training had a great impact on us. Especially in mentoring, even though it is done online, it helps us a lot with our confusion in implementing it in the field. (Ms. HS, grade one teacher).*
> *I really feel the impact of strengthening human resources organized by BBGP West Java. This curriculum is something new, especially the sekolah penggerak program. Neither we nor the expert trainers (Sekolah Penggerak facilitator) are still learning. So, at first, we explored the curriculum Sekolah Penggerak Program. Expert trainers ask us to be perfect in their application. They don't see our condition in the field. Until finally at the point of the field visit, our expert trainers finally realized that assisted schools could not be generalized, for example, private schools started at number 6, while we could only start at number 3. (Ms. HP, school principal in school B, urban area).*
> *Initially, we did not know anything about the Merdeka Curriculum, we gradually know the content of the curriculum, its structure, and the way of learning through training. We know curriculum and its application in learning especially during the workshop, we understand how to prepare the curriculum, and the school's academic calendar". Training and mentoring were very influential, we conveyed our complaints at operational management working group, starting from applying the Sekolah Penggerak Program curriculum to students, we all shared the problems we were experiencing and chatted together to find solutions. Thank God, I obtained many benefits from operational management working group, for example when I had trouble evicting the traders, the traders really entered the front of the class, the smell of frying the food bothered the children. I told the problem at operational management working group, then we were recommended how to communicate with the merchants. Thank God the traders are now in order. (Mr. UM. school principal in school C, rural area).*
> *The impact, Alhamdulillah, is further advancing the school. But for its application, it is lack of cooperation. For myself it is very influential, I gain knowledge, make friends, but maybe because of the atmosphere in the village, it is difficult to keep the spirit up, so we are sluggish again. (Ms. MS, a teacher in school C of grade one, rural area).*

Assistance is very necessary, very impactful. With assistance, what we need, and the obstacles, we can immediately share anything with FSP and come up with solutions, so we can apply these solutions in school life. (Ms. LK, principal in school D, rural area).

Training is considered as one of the imperative factors in developing individual qualities and the success of any organization, including in the field of education. A lot of training has been provided for professionals and educators in the last ten years. Previous studies have proven significant results for both teachers and principals. For example, training improved the professional self-efficacy of teachers and improved the school climate. It also provided an efficient way for managing behavior and associated strategies for intervention schools [42], enhanced classroom literary assessment and teaching effectiveness [43], improve teachers' self-confidence in progressing students' problematical behaviour and the level of satisfaction [44], altering teachers' beliefs and enhancing teachers' knowledge, abilities, and self-esteem to effectively modify the curriculum for the more capable pupils [45], enrich their knowledge [46], [47] and developed teachers' ability to transfer the training knowledge to their jobs [48].

Likewise, with mentoring that provides many benefits. Mentoring is seen as a process of informally transmitting knowledge, social capital, and psychosocial support to facilitate communication of the values, vision, and mission of an institution or organization, and thereby assist juniors in understanding organizational culture and making necessary changes for workplace socialization [49], [50]. Healy dan Welchert [51] define mentoring as an activity in which more senior or experienced people who have earned respect and power in their field take more junior or less experienced peers under their tutelage to teach, encourage, and ensure success of their mentees. As a facilitator or known as a mentor in general also has several benefits including professional development, institutional recognition, and personal satisfaction [52]. Mentoring has been found to exert a positive influence in the professional/pedagogical and emotional/personal areas [53]-[55], influencing the process of integration of novice teachers into the education system as a whole and in their environment in their respective schools [56]. The research literature suggests that mentorship helps novice teachers gain self-confidence and enhances their professional abilities [57]. The study revealed that mentoring activities are found to benefit participants and bring them satisfaction, as well as having the ability to inspire them to work with pupils in the classroom [58].

3.2. Implementation of education unit operational curriculum in rural and urban areas

At the education unit level, the education unit operational curriculum. Education unit operational curriculum is a stand-alone curriculum that includes all learning process plans that serve as implementation guidelines for all learning activities. The operational curriculum of the educational unit is created utilizing the education unit operational curriculum preparation process and principles, specifically taking into account the needs of the educational unit and the students, in order to give it significance. The education unit operational curriculum document search results from the four sekolah penggerak were nearly identical, with the exception of school B, which produced different results. Table 2 shows the findings of the education unit operational curriculum document search for each school.

Table 2. The analysis of education unit operational curriculum

No	Analysis component	Schools in urban area		Schools in rural area	
		A	B	C	D
1	Context analysis of educational unit characteristics	X	√	X	X
2	Vision, mission, and objective	√	√	√	√
3	Learning organization	√	√	√	√
4	Lesson plan	√	√	√	√
5	Mentoring, evaluation, and professional development	X	X	X	X

"At the beginning of compiling the education unit operational curriculum, we only looked for existing examples, then we changed the vision and mission. Then, when there is a field visit from FSP, we get input to revise the education unit operational curriculum. Indeed, after I checked, the education unit operational curriculum did not match the school's conditions. So, we thought at that time the education unit operational curriculum was just a formality, the important thing was that we had the education unit operational curriculum" (Mr. UM school principal in school C, rural area).
In line with Mr. UM, Ms. HP as the principal in an urban school said "to be honest, we used to utilize an existing template that was given by the supervisor. But next year we plan to analyze it ourselves and compile our own Kurikulum Operasional Satuan Pendidikan. After the education unit operational curriculum *was signed, it went into the cupboard, then just forgot about it. Learning goes on as usual.*

These statements were strengthened by supervisor, Mrs. NW said that "in the beginning of Sekolah Penggerak, we were all blank. We as superintendents help schools to lighten their administrative burden a bit by looking for education unit operational curriculum *templates. Then we asked them to be able to adapt the* education unit operational curriculum *for their schools."*

The curriculum structure established by the government is used as a reference for educational units to develop curricula towards achieving a Pancasila Student Profile. This curriculum structure contains intra-curricular activities and projects to strengthen the Profile of Pancasila Students. Such principles, in particular on student-centered and contextual, are related to differentiated instruction/learning. Morgan and Hany [59] described differentiated instruction/learning (DI) as a method of identifying and teaching in accordance with various student talents and learning styles. DI is based on the theory of Howard Gardner on multiple intelligence that pupils learn through a variety of intelligences [60]. Peer tutoring, flexible grouping, and student choice are prioritized in this method of instruction in order to accommodate the requirements of a varied range of learners [61]. More significantly, the study discovered that this strategy entails adapting instruction to ensure the success of all students [62], [63]. Australian teachers in special schools employ DI to support the academic progress of pupils with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). To improve learning for this group of students and guarantee a secure learning environment, they employ DI as a successful teaching strategy [64]. If teachers adapt their lessons for individual learners' needs and learning styles, pupils at all levels of knowledge can learn more successfully in an inclusive atmosphere [60].

Regarding the third principle, which involves a variety of stakeholders, the results imply that flexible homework assignments supported by a central concept can enhance parents' opportunities to actively participate in their children's education. The other finding also suggests the involvement of the school committee in assessing the learning process' contribution to the standard of school life and in fostering contact between schools and parents of students [65]. The synergy among stakeholders in education is called "Triple helix" which was firstly introduced by Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff [66], [67] in management sector. Previous studies have shown that the ideas of triple helix demonstrate the positive effects of several types of teamwork and collaboration [68]-[71].

3.3. Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum learning

Since learning is prioritized in the Merdeka Curriculum in accordance with students' needs, one prerequisite to identifying these needs is diagnostic assessment. Additionally, the teacher can start designing instruction by developing learning objectives based on the learning outcomes in each phase once they have received the assessment results. As an intracurricular learning document, the teaching module is a lesson plan that the instructor will carry out, complete with learning objectives, instructional strategies, and assessment guidelines. Upon searching for teaching module documents consisting fixed components (as you can see in Table 3), the following results were found.

Table 3. Analysis of teaching module components

No.	Analysis component		Schools in urban area		Schools in rural area	
			A	B	C	D
1.	General information	Module author identity	√	√	√	√
		Pancasila Student Profile	√	√	√	√
		Facilities and infrastructure	√	√	√	√
		The learning model used	√	√	√	√
2.	Core component	Learning objective	√	√	√	√
		Trigger question	√	√	√	√
		Learning activities	√	√	√	√
		Assessment	√	√	√	√
3.	Appendixes	Student worksheets	√	√	√	√
		Enrichment and remedial	√	√	√	√

Based on document's analysis, it was found that of the four schools, all teaching modules were fulfilled according to the standard components in the 2022 learning and assessment guide from the government, but the facts on the ground found the following: At school A and B in urban area, all of the module documents are the result of searches on the internet, and they only change the identity of the module. Sometimes they make their own version of teaching modules. Even though these two schools had carried out an analysis of learning outcomes which were passed down to learning objectives and then the flow of learning objective was made, in fact when it was applied to the module it was as if what was made was not done. Based on the interview with a grade four teacher about the teaching modules, it was found as the following excerpt.

> *"For us, to be able to consistently make such complete modules is very hard. We only make our version one or two times and even then, if there is an inspection, we will submit our version. But for a year's bundle, we just change it from the internet," said Mrs. SP, a fourth-grade teacher.*

This information was also verified by his colleague. He pointed out how comprehensive the current modules were. Furthermore, if they followed such a comprehensive module, they felt inadequate and worn out, especially since he was teaching in grade one, which had an "invisible" workload. As a result, all he has done thus far is copy and alter the current modules like in the following excerpt.

> *Mrs. HS said "grade 1 is different from other classes, to make children enjoy going to school, and being enthusiastic about just coming to school is extraordinary. So, it is just administrative matters. For teaching modules, I only observe, imitate and modify existing ones."*

In the case of rural elementary schools, schools C and D, they have teaching module templates that are different from those on the internet. They were assigned by the facilitator to make templates according to school needs, teacher abilities, and still based on the 2022 learning guide and assessment. Even so, it's the same as schools in urban areas, they only occasionally arrange teaching modules based on templates. But in the end, they come back with modules teachings that are widely circulated on the internet.

> *"I'm still copying and pasting, (laughing). The point is when there is a need, namely the need to be seen by the school principal, and the need when requested by the facilitator*," said Mrs. MS, a teacher of School C.

When it comes to creating instructional modules, school C is much more consistent than school D. Three of the four teachers whose modules were examined and interviews conducted consistently apply learning according to the Merdeka Curriculum's tenets. The grade 1 teacher was still using the outdated paradigm of learning, as evidenced by the following excerpt.

> *Mrs. YH as the grade one teacher said "I haven't been able to use the Merdeka Curriculum, my focus is still on reading, writing and arithmetic (calistung). Our school is in a village, where 80% of students did not go to kindergarten. As a result, the introduction of new letters and numbers begins in class 1. I simply deliver the subject matter of Merdeka Curriculum while my main target is calistung."*

The current study found that many teachers still used an old paradigm and did not follow the principle of independent learning. There is a discrepancy between the teaching modules that have been prepared and the implementation of learning in class. The results of the field notes found that six out of ten teachers who were observed still used an old paradigm learning, which is teacher-centered and dominated by the lecturing method. The six teachers are two from school A, two from school C, one from school B, and one from school D. In general, curricula encourage collaborative, learner-centered involvement, with the teacher serving as a facilitator throughout the process. The curriculum aims to help students build their social and affective skills, linguistic understanding, communication abilities, and the ability to design unique, worthwhile initiatives [72]. Thus, understanding the principles of Merdeka Curriculum is profoundly imperative for teachers in order that they can apply it in the classroom. Project-based learning, for instance, which has gained popularity in conventional education and has several models devoted to it, is one of the Merdeka Curriculum's implementations.

The present findings also revealed that teachers mostly used summative assessment. In Merdeka Curriculum, assessment is divided into diagnostic assessment, formative assessment and summative assessment. Based on the field notes, it was found that of the 10 teachers who were observed, only five teachers carried out three types of assessments, three teachers of school D and two teachers of school B. The teachers' assessment literacy is advantageous since assessment plays a crucial part in the process of teaching and learning [73]. In the words of Xu and Brown [74], teachers' assessment literacy consists of their assessment knowledge and skills as well as how they conceptualize assessment in the milieu of their classroom practices. It is fundamental that teachers possess good assessment literacy since the outcome of the assessment will have an impact on the standard of instruction and student achievement. Djoub [75] pointed out that assessment literacy is the ability of teachers to decide what to assess and how to do so, depending on specified objectives, as well as to make decisions about how to evaluate student achievement. In other words, teachers who are proficient in assessment literacy understand how to collect correct data on student performance, how to use assessment results to assist student learning, and how to effectively and reliably convey assessment results [43].

4. CONCLUSION

For the purpose of realizing the profile of Pancasila pupils, the development of excellent human resources must begin with skilled and competent teachers and visionary school leaders. The Sekolah Penggerak Program, which is a component of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in both urban and rural locations, has seen substantial improvements and advantages as a result of strengthening human resources through training and mentoring supported by the Sekolah Penggerak facilitator. The requirement to include schools, both public and private, as a unit of analysis is one of the research's inherent limitations. Thus, the need for further research is emphasized. By doing so, more complete data can be collected, which the government can then utilize to inform policy decisions regarding Sekolah Penggerak Program.

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