

## Preservice Teachers' Skill to Design Lesson Plans in the Merdeka Curriculum

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A new curriculum, namely the Merdeka Curriculum, was implemented to overcome the learning loss due to the pandemic. Teachers are responsible for developing lesson plans to meet the curriculum objectives. Preparing lesson plans is vital for preservice teachers as it helps them with their teaching practice. This study examines pre-teachers' competence in designing lesson plans in the Merdeka Curriculum. This research is descriptive qualitative research. Fifty students at Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa University participated in this study. Data were collected through document analysis and interviews. Data analysis is done through data condensation, data display, and verification. Three main components are evaluated: general information, core components, and supplementary components. The findings show that 52% of respondents are competent in making good lesson plans, 44% of respondents can design fairly, and 4% still design lesson plans poorly. Merdeka Curriculum has several elements that have become its character: phases, diagnostic assessments, stimulate query, prior competencies, Pancasila learners' profiles, and differentiated learning. The findings of this study prove that behind the importance of preparing teaching modules for learning, many prospective teachers still have difficulty compiling them due to curriculum changes. The findings of this study prove that behind the importance of lesson plans for learning, many preservice teachers still have difficulty compiling them due to curriculum changes. Therefore, universities must provide ongoing mentoring for pre-service teachers to improve their education quality and prepare them for their role as educators.

Keywords: preservice teacher, lesson plan, merdeka curriculum, design, skill

## INTRODUCTION

Teachers' roles are crucial as they are responsible for designing, planning, and delivering instruction to students based on the curriculum objectives. Teachers must deeply understand the curriculum, goals, individual needs, and learning styles. To make effective teaching, they must understand how students learn and think. As part of their responsibilities, teachers must be able to design effective learning. To enhance content delivery, they must be conscious of the factors contributing to effective learning that positively affect students' academic performance (Saoke et al., 2022).

Designing lesson plans is a way for teachers to create effective learning. A lesson plan is a teacher's guide containing a roadmap of what students need to learn and how it will be done during class (Ndiokubwayo et al., 2022). It involves several key components to ensure effective instruction and learning outcomes, such as learning objectives, strategies, instructional activities, and assessment, including affective, cognitive, and psychomotor domains. A lesson plan permits teachers to better organize and manage time and resources in class.

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Lesson plans are crucial in the teaching and learning process because they ensure the teacher that their instruction is focused, engaging, and aligned with students' needs and abilities (Amador et al., 2022; Iqbal et al., 2021). It also acts as a guide that ensures the student gains knowledge, skills, and attitude within learning objectives (van Diggele et al., 2020). Through engaged learning, the teacher can create an experience that fosters students' motivation and develops the skills needed for success in education and beyond.

Lesson plans require teachers' knowledge and ability to promote active learning. It reflects a teacher's actual practice in developing effective teaching and learning. How the teacher delivers the lesson affects students' level of achievement. Not only assists teachers in planning meaningful tasks and structuring their ideas, but lesson plans also allow teachers to prepare the materials, technology, and resources required ahead of time (Backfisch et al., 2020; Hatch & Clark, 2021). Lesson planning allows them to compile and arrange the relevant resources, ensuring an uninterrupted lesson flow (Saoke et al., 2022). By devoting time and effort into lesson planning, teachers can improve student learning outcomes.

Despite the importance of lesson planning for creating effective learning, the teacher faces many obstacles. Moreover, a new curriculum called the 'Merdeka Curriculum' was implemented due to the pandemic. Merdeka Curriculum, also known as the independent curriculum, was aimed to respond to the prevailing education crisis (Rahina & Syamsi, 2023). The curriculum is designed to be more flexible than the prior curriculum. Besides, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes the development of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication skills, rather than the previous curriculum, which focuses more on academic knowledge (Ndari et al., 2023; Yunianti & Fatin, 2023). Regardless of the flexibility, the lesson plan in the Merdeka Curriculum was hard to develop, especially for preservice teachers, because there are many new terms that are quite different from the previous curriculum.

Several studies have shown that lesson plans are the key to successful teaching. Lesson plans help teachers teach effectively by making inferences about what students need and know (Black & Wiliam, 2018). Besides, it helps teachers stay on track by focusing on achieving the objectives, consistently delivering subject matter, and creating an adaptable learning environment that accommodates students' needs (Iqbal et al., 2021; Nesari & Heidari, 2014). It connects theory and practice (Yan & Goh, 2023).

Regardless of the urgency of lesson planning, especially for preservice teachers in Indonesia, the related research is fairly limited. In some cases, educational research might emphasize other fields of study, such as curriculum development, educational policy, or assessment techniques. Despite being essential for effective teaching, lesson planning might not attract as much attention. Additionally, the newly implemented curriculum has fewer relevant studies than the prior curriculum. In fact, an investigation regarding preservice teachers' ability to design lesson plans in the Merdeka Curriculum has never been conducted before.

Designing lesson plans is a challenging task teachers have to master in their daily work. They need to master it as an investment for their future career. Therefore, this study examines preservice teachers' skills in designing lesson plans in the Merdeka Curriculum. This research addressed the following research questions:

1. How are preservice teachers' skills in designing lesson plans on the general information component?
2. How are preservice teachers' skills in designing lesson plans on the core component?
3. How are preservice teachers' skills in designing lesson plans on the supplementary component?
4. How are preservice teachers' skills in designing lesson plans comprehensively?

## Literature Review

The Indonesian national curriculum has changed over the years. Since the independence in 1945, the curriculum has changed several times: 1947, 1952, 1962, 1968, 1975, 1984, 1994, 2004, 2006, 2013, and 2022. The implemented curriculum is based on Indonesian national ideology (the so-called Pancasila) and the 1945 Constitution of Indonesia (Mukminin et al., 2019). Merdeka Curriculum, or independent curriculum, was implemented after the Covid-19 pandemic in 2022. This curriculum is expected to strengthen learning transformation efforts by giving schools and teachers more autonomy and flexibility in designing and implementing the curriculum (Aini & Adiyono, 2023; Wibowo et al., 2022).

The concept of the Merdeka Curriculum is the freedom to learn, an idea that frees teachers and students to determine how the learning process will be done (Abidah et al., 2020; Ruaya et al., 2022). The curriculum aims to improve the quality of learning, form independent student characters, and reduce gaps in education. The curriculum focused more on literacy, numeracy, and character education (Harahap, 2022). This is partly based on the low score of Indonesian students in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), a study to evaluate the education system in which more than 70 countries worldwide participated (Suwarma & Apriyani, 2022).

The difference between the Merdeka Curriculum and the previous curriculum, the 2013 Curriculum, is that the Merdeka Curriculum focuses on essential material and character development of the Pancasila learners' profile (Yunianti & Fatin, 2023). By focusing on essential material, the Merdeka Curriculum can provide a special time for project-based learning (Abidah et al., 2020; Siregar et al., 2022). This cross-curricular learning focuses on doing work or solving real problems together. This type of learning can sharpen social awareness, promote tolerance, and practice communication and cooperation. This type of learning also encourages students to apply concepts/materials from different subjects to real problems or issues (Resa et al., 2023).

Moreover, the Merdeka Curriculum engages in differentiated learning based on students' learning phase, allowing the teacher to design the lesson according to students' cognitive development (Istaryaningtyas et al., 2021). The Merdeka Curriculum is designed to be more inclusive of diverse backgrounds, cultures, and abilities (Rahina & Syamsi, 2023). While in the 2013 curriculum, the curriculum focused on a scientific approach for all subjects and emphasized the knowledge aspects rather than the skill aspects (Yunianti & Fatin, 2023).

Lesson plans in the Merdeka Curriculum have more complex components than lesson plans in the 2013 Curriculum. The 2013 Curriculum has core and basic competencies, while the Merdeka Curriculum changed to learning outcomes (Ndari et al., 2023). The lesson plan in the Merdeka Curriculum refers more to the flow of the learning objectives developed through learning outcomes. Meanwhile, in the 2013 Curriculum, the lesson is only developed from the learning syllabus and other indicators. Learning outcomes in the Merdeka Curriculum have been determined by the central government, so the teacher or educational units need to arrange the learning objectives and flow of the learning objectives based on the student's characteristics and abilities (Siregar et al., 2022).

In addition, in the Merdeka Curriculum, the term "phase" refers to the stages of learning that students go through based on grade level (Wibowo et al., 2022). The phases in the curriculum are divided into six: phase A (for grades 1 and 2 of elementary school); B (for grades 3 and 4); C (for grades 5 and 6); D (for middle school); E (for grade 1 of high school); and F (for grade 2 and 3 of high school). There is also Pancasila learner profile. The Pancasila learner profile is stipulated in the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 22 of 2022. It is a form of translation of national education goals. It acts as the main reference that directs educational policies, including being a reference for educators in building the character and competence of students (Ministry of Education, Culture Research, and Technology, 2022). Pancasila is an Indonesian ideology that emphasizes values that

cover various aspects of life, including trust, justice, and kinship (Mukminin et al., 2019). The Pancasila learner profile aims to shape Indonesian students into lifelong learners with character and behavior based on Pancasila values and global competence (Resa et al., 2023). It consists of six dimensions, namely: 1) faith, devotion to God, and virtuous personality, 2) independence, 3) mutual cooperation, 4) global diversity, 5) critical thinking, and 6) creativity (Nurhayati et al., 2022). The Pancasila learner profile represents an evolution of efforts to enhance character education that was already present in the 2013 Curriculum. As part of the development effort, the Pancasila learner profile maintains a basic structure similar to that of previous character education but with an emphasis on greater complexity and detail.

There are a lot of new terms in the Merdeka Curriculum that confuse teachers when developing lesson plans, let alone preservice teachers. Given the importance of developing lesson plans following the implemented curriculum, preservice teachers need to master how to develop lesson plans as a provision for their future work. Similar studies rarely discussed the importance of lesson plans for preservice teachers; they only focused on experienced teachers. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate the ability of preservice teachers in developing lesson plans in the Merdeka Curriculum to determine the extent of their understanding and mastery of teacher competencies.

## **METHOD**

### **Research design**

This research used descriptive-qualitative to achieve the research objective. This study is focused on providing a detailed and in-depth description of preservice teachers' skills in designing lesson plans by conducting interviews and document analyses. The interview was conducted after the preservice teacher finished developing the lesson plan.

### **Participants**

The population of this study is second-year undergraduate students of Primary Teacher Education at Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa University Yogyakarta, Indonesia. They were selected because they were currently conducting a learning simulation. One of the mandatory requirements before conducting a learning simulation is to develop a lesson plan. Understanding good lesson planning aligned with the current curriculum is essential as part of their future commitment. A total of 50 respondents were voluntary as a research sample. There were 36 females and 16 males.

### **Instrument and data collection**

Data were collected through a series of document analyses and interviews. The documents comprise preservice teachers' self-designed lesson plans on Indonesian language subjects. The documents were assessed using a review form modified by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia. Three main components are evaluated. Each component consists of several indicators that must be present in the lesson plan. Details of the instruments can be seen in Table 1. Before designing the lesson plan, the respondents had already been informed about teaching preparation, including how to make a lesson plan. Interviews were conducted to determine their understanding of their difficulties while making lesson plans. The interview was a semi-structured interview that was conducted face-to-face during class.

Table 1  
Components of lesson plan in merdeka curriculum

Component	Indicators
General information	1. Identity
	2. Prior competency
	3. Pancasila learners' profile
	4. Phase and class
	5. Target learner
Core component	1. Learning outcome
	2. Learning objective
	3. Stimulate query
	4. Meaningful understanding
	5. Learning activities
	6. Assessments
	7. Remedial and enrichment activity
Supplementary	1. Student worksheet
	2. Reading material
	3. Bibliography

### Data analysis

Data analysis is done through data condensation, data presentation, and verification. We only examine the components that should emerge in the Merdeka Curriculum's lesson plan. To address research questions, we thoroughly read the transcripts of self-designed lesson plans to gain an understanding of how preservice teachers designed the lesson plan. The transcripts were assessed using review. Each indicator is measured using a Likert scale of 1-3. The minimum score is 1, and the maximum is 3. Score 1 if the indicators are missing. Score 2 if the indicators are present but inaccurate. Score 3 if the indicators are accurate. The scores obtained by each respondent were analyzed descriptively. Then, the analysis results are categorized into four criteria: excellent, good, fair, and poor, according to Sturges's rule (Scott, 2009). The details of the criteria can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2  
Scoring criteria

Range	Criteria
2,60 – 3,00	Excellent
2,10 – 2,50	Good
1,50 – 2,00	Fair
0,00 – 1,40	Poor

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Skills in compiling general information components

General information is the first component to be compiled in the lesson plan. The result of preservice teachers' skill in designing lesson plans on the general information components can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3  
Scoring on general information components

Indicator	Score	Mean	Criteria
Identity	150	3,00	Excellent
Prior competencies	102	2,04	Fair
Pancasila learners' profile	82	1,64	Fair
Phase and class	145	2,90	Excellent
Target learners	98	1,96	Fair
Mean	115,4	2,30	Good

As seen in Table 3, respondents can arrange identity and phase-class parts excellently. They also do well with target learners' part. The prior competencies and Pancasila learners' profile part were arranged adequately. To summarize, preservice teachers' skill in designing lesson plans on general information can be categorized as 'Good' with an average score of 2,34.

This finding shows that preservice teachers can compile general information components very well. Even identity, phase and class indicators are categorized as excellent. The interviews showed that preservice teachers can arrange general information components easily because, in this section, they are familiar with many terms. In the identity section, they only need to write the author's name, subject, school name, and time allocation. Also, in the phase and class section, they only need to write the classes and phases of the classes that are already written in the Decree of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia. However, in the prior competencies section, they face a little difficulty. Prior competencies are the knowledge or skills students need before learning a particular topic (Klages & Mustafa, 2023). Some preservice teachers have not been able to determine prior competencies appropriately. They still confused it with learning objectives.

The same case happened in the Pancasila learner profiles section, which has not been well organized. Pancasila learners' profile is the character and competence that Indonesian students need in this 21<sup>st</sup>-century era because it is designed to create lifelong learners who have global competence and behave following the values of Pancasila: faith and devotion to God and have a virtuous personality; global diversity; mutual aid; independence; critical thinking; and creativity (Nurhayati et al., 2022). The six dimensions of the Pancasila learner profiles are interrelated and integrated in all subjects through (or visible in) lesson material, learning activities, project activities, or assessments (Resa et al., 2023). Not all six dimensions are included in the lesson plan; only those deemed necessary. However, most preservice teachers still included all six dimensions in their lesson plans. Moreover, it was not reflected in the learning activities, material, or assessment.

In the target learner indicator, most only write the number of students in the class, not followed by the type of students. Three types of students become target: regular students (students with no difficulty understanding the material), students with learning difficulty, and students with high achievement. In determining whether the students in the class are regular students or not, it can be calculated from the majority of students in the class. If the majority are regular students, then the target learner is also regular, even though a few students with special needs are in the class (Wibowo et al., 2022).

### Skills in compiling core components

Following the first component, the result of preservice teachers' skill in designing lesson plans on the core components is presented in Table 4. This component has the most indicators, considering it is the key component in the lesson plans.

Table 4  
Scoring on core components

Indicator	Score	Mean	Criteria
Learning outcome	122	2,44	Good
Learning objectives	115	2,30	Good
Stimulate query	94	1,88	Fair
Meaningful understanding	89	1,78	Fair
Learning activities	101	2,02	Fair
Assessments	89	1,78	Fair
Remedial and enrichment activity	100	2,00	Fair
Mean	102	2,04	Fair

Based on Table 4, we can see that respondents can arrange learning outcomes and learning objectives quite well. However, on the remaining indicators, they did not compile it well enough, but it is still considered sufficient. To summarize, preservice teachers' skill in designing lesson plans on core components can be categorized as 'Fair' with an average score of 2,04.

The second finding relates to the core components. Most teachers have not been able to compile the lesson plans properly. The indicator that gets good criteria is learning outcomes. They can easily compile it because the learning outcomes are clearly stated in the Decree of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia. The same goes for learning objectives. Preservice teachers can compile it properly. This indicates that they already understand the structure of learning objectives in the Merdeka Curriculum. Learning objectives are a derivative of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes refer to the actual results achieved by students at the end of the phase, while learning objectives refer to what students are expected to learn, understand, or achieve during learning activities (Siregar et al., 2022). Learning objectives describe the achievement of three aspects of student competence (knowledge, skills, attitudes) that need to be built through one or more learning activities. Learning objectives focus more on directives or guidelines for learning design and implementation, while learning outcomes focus more on concrete results that can be observed or measured (Asmarawati, 2022).

Unlike the prior curriculum, the learning objectives in the Merdeka Curriculum are arranged more simply. Before, the structure had to consist of Audience-Behavior-Condition-Degree (*e.g., students can analyze the main idea after reading nonfiction texts carefully*). This curriculum's learning objectives must only contain competencies and learning content (*e.g., analyzing the main idea of nonfiction texts*) (Herwin et al., 2021). Bloom's taxonomy and Anderson and Krathwohl's taxonomy are used in constructing the learning objective domain.

Next, in the stimulate query, most have not been able to compile it correctly. Stimulating queries aims to cultivate students' memories of the topic and foster their critical thinking. Stimulate query is a new aspect of the Merdeka Curriculum lesson plan. There are still not many examples of how to ask the right questions. Based on the interview, many struggle to make one because they mistake it for an apperception. Apperception is the activity of connecting what is known or experienced with what is to be learned. At the same time, stimulating queries are more directed at stimulating students' curiosity and interest in the topic to be studied.

Meanwhile, in the meaningful understanding, preservice teachers' skills were categorized as fairly good. Meaningful understanding is information about the benefits that students will gain after following the learning process (Iqbal et al., 2021). Students can later apply these benefits in their daily lives. Meaningful understanding encouraged students to connect the material with daily life applications. For example, the reason why students have to understand descriptive text is so that when they want to talk about people/events, they can use the knowledge they get regarding descriptive text.

The interview showed that most preservice teachers confuse meaningful understanding with learning objectives. Some did not even include it because they thought meaningful understanding and learning objectives were the same, so they only compiled learning objectives. Learning objectives are competencies that students are expected to achieve through activities, while meaningful understanding is the goal or benefit of studying the material.

The same goes for the learning activities; preservice teachers can compile them adequately. Learning activities are the most important part of the lesson plan because they are a series of activities carried out by teachers and students in the learning process to achieve predetermined learning objectives (Sudipa et al., 2020). Learning activities are written sequentially according to the planned time duration, including three stages: introduction, main, and closing activity. Learning activities must be stated concretely, accompanied by alternative learning options to suit students' learning needs. Merdeka Curriculum has a distinctive characteristic, which is differentiated learning. Differentiated learning is an instruction that adjusts the students' characteristics, needs, interests, learning styles, and cultural backgrounds (Ismajli & Imami-Morina, 2018; van Geel et al., 2019). Differentiated learning impacts student learning outcomes, makes them feel more enthusiastic, and elevates their motivation since the process is congruent with their needs, learning style, and ability level. Preservice teachers should identify individual differences in terms of abilities, interests, and learning styles. This can be identified from the results of the diagnostic assessment. In lesson planning, differentiated learning must be reflected in the learning activity, especially in the main activity. However, in reality, many have not included it. Mostly, the lesson plan is based on the principles of the prior curriculum, in which learning activities are designed similar for all students. This part makes preservice teachers' scores in the learning activities poor. Even though they had written the three stages sequentially, it was considered incomplete because differentiated learning did not emerge in the main activity.

In the assessment aspect, their skills are also considered adequate. Assessment is used to measure learning achievements at the end of the activity. Achievement criteria must be clearly defined following the learning objectives. Three types of assessments can be carried out: assessment before learning (diagnostic), assessment during the learning process (formative), and assessment at the end of the learning process (summative) (Yunianti & Fatin, 2023). At the same time, the form of assessment includes attitude, cognitive, and skill assessments. In the preservice teachers' self-design lesson plan, many did not include all three assessments. Most of them only arrange formative and summative assessments, the same as in the previous curriculum. As stated before, every child is unique and has different learning needs. Hence, diagnostic assessments are required to determine students' state during the learning process. It is important to determine students' cognitive levels, pedagogical needs, and areas of interest to decide the most efficient methods to achieve learning objectives. Diagnostic assessment is the first step in creating differentiated learning. Once the teachers understand the needs of each student, they can determine what strategies and assessments are suitable to accommodate student potential. In the Merdeka Curriculum, assessments for students with an auditory learning style must be differentiated from those with a visual and kinesthetic learning style. However, many preservice teachers have not prepared assessments as they should. This is because they still rely on the previous curriculum lesson plan, which did not accommodate students' differences.

Lastly, in the remedial and enrichment activities, preservice teachers have not been able to compile it well. Enrichment is designed to provide students with high achievements so they can develop their potential. Remedial is given to students who need guidance to understand the material or repeat learning. When designing enrichment activities, teachers must pay attention to differentiation, for example, worksheets/activities that differ from each level.



### Skills in compiling supplementary components

Supplementary components are designed to support and enhance the content of the lesson plan. There are four indicators assessed. The result can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5  
Scoring on supplementary components

Indicator	Score	Mean	Criteria
Student worksheets (LKPD)	127	2,54	Good
Reading materials	87	1,74	Fair
Bibliography	121	2,42	Good
Mean	112	2,23	Good

Table 5 shows that respondents can organize student worksheets and bibliographies quite well. However, they still have not compiled reading materials properly. To summarize, preservice teachers' skill in designing lesson plans on supplementary components can be categorized as 'Good' with an average score of 2,23.

Student worksheets are tasks that students must complete. It contains instructions, steps, and how to complete certain material tasks. Student worksheets are used to develop cognitive aspects and all aspects of learning in investigative activities and solving problems (Asmarawati, 2022). It can be in the form of a group or individual worksheet. Preservice teachers are already competent in preparing student worksheets. It is also following the predetermined learning objectives and the subject material.

Meanwhile, in the reading materials part, many have not included it. Reading material is used to comprehend the subject, so it should be relevant to the material taught. The reason why most preservice teacher do not compile reading material in their lesson plan is because they think it is not important. They might not be aware of the positive impact that reading materials can have on students' learning experiences. Lastly, in the bibliography part, preservice teachers' skills are considered good. Many have included references used while designing lesson plans. References are taken from student books, reference books, articles, internet sites, the surrounding environment, and other sources.

### Skills in designing a lesson plan

After assessing the lesson plan based on each component, we recapitulate all the scores obtained to comprehensively determine preservice teachers' skills in designing lesson plans. The result can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6  
Scoring on overall self-designed lesson plans

Component	Score	Mean	Criteria
General information	577	2,30	Good
Core component	714	2,04	Fair
Supplementary	440	2,20	Good
Mean	542	2,19	Good

Table 6 shows that preservice teachers can design lesson plans pretty well. They did well in organizing general information and supplementary components. Meanwhile, in the core component, it is considered fairly good.

In addition, we classified each respondent's scores while designing the lesson plan and categorized it based on the same criteria above. This is intended to determine how many preservice teachers can design lesson plans excellently and how many cannot. The results are presented in Figure 1.

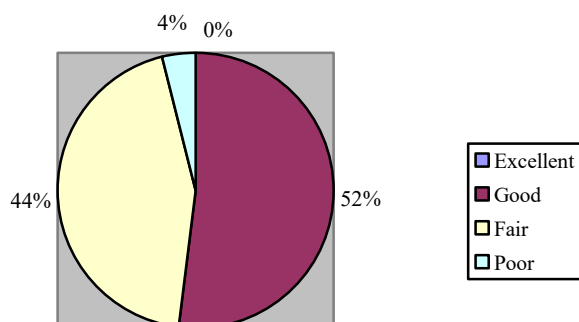


Figure 1  
Preservice teachers' skills in designing lesson plan

Based on the chart above, none of the preservice teachers can design lesson plans excellently. However, 52% of respondents are competent in making good lesson plans. It is equivalent to 26 preservice teachers. Then, 44% of respondents design lesson plans fairly. It is equivalent to 22 preservice teachers. Though most respondents can make lesson plans quite well, 4% (2 respondents) still cannot design lesson plans properly. It indicates that most preservice teachers have acquired the necessary knowledge, skills, and training for lesson planning. A lesson plan is a fundamental tool to structure and guide the teaching and learning process coherently and organize to achieve learning objectives. Therefore, preservice teachers are obligated to create one.

It should be emphasized that lesson planning in the Merdeka Curriculum has several elements that differentiate it from the previous curriculum. Phases, diagnostic assessments, stimulate query, prior competencies, Pancasila learners' profiles, and differentiated learning characterized the lesson plan in the Merdeka Curriculum (Herwin et al., 2021). A good lesson plan must have all these elements in it. Teachers are encouraged to align their lesson plans with the Merdeka Curriculum's objective and philosophy to create meaningful educational experiences for their students.

Although most can compile lesson plans properly, most preservice teachers still struggle with it, especially in the core components. They struggled to understand the lesson plan in the newest curriculum because it differed from the previous one, which they had learned. It is aligned with Ndari et al. (2023), who stated that many teachers felt they had just adapted to the 2013 Curriculum, but suddenly a new curriculum was implemented. It overwhelms them since they do not understand the contents of the course and the difference between the two curricula. The struggle faced by the pre-teacher is mostly caused by the lack of information, either about the newest curriculum or the lesson planning itself. Even teachers in several educational institutions have no adequate information about the Merdeka Curriculum since it does not socialize properly (Abidah et al., 2020). A study by Siregar et al. (2022) showed that many teachers cannot compile and complete lesson plans according to the current curriculum. They feel reluctant since the curriculum change feels somewhat hasty and not ready to be implemented. As mentioned, the Merdeka Curriculum has several new terms that have become their characteristic. All that terms are unfamiliar to preservice teachers. This problem is similar to Rahina & Syamsi (2023), some teachers encounter several difficulties during lesson planning, such as deciding the lesson objective by themselves, understanding the format of the new lesson plan that is suitable to students' needs, and apprehending the terms in Merdeka Curriculum.

Designing effective lesson plans is indeed crucial to ensure optimal learning for students. Mastering lesson planning will help preservice teachers outline what will be taught, how it will be taught, and

how students' progress will be assessed. This finding underlines the importance of lesson planning for preservice teachers. As mentioned by König et al. (2020), a lesson plan allows the teacher to focus on their goal, stay on track throughout the lessons, and ensure that the learning objectives are achieved. Lesson plans allow teachers to select and integrate various learning strategies that suit student needs and lesson material. Lesson plans also help teachers to plan and organize learning materials well. This ensures that relevant and important topics are presented in a structured manner.

It is indisputable that designing lesson plans that align with Merdeka's curriculum goals is imperative for their future careers. Lesson plans act as a translation of curriculum intent into specific daily goals that include descriptions of the objectives through an instructional process to an effective learning process. It starts from analyzing the needs of teachers, students, and schools, identifying the dimensions of the Pancasila learners' profiles that will be developed, determining the learning objectives, compiling lesson materials and how they will be carried out, then evaluation and follow-up on the implementation of learning following the lesson plan that has been prepared.

As a place of learning for preservice teachers, the university should provide training and teaching on how to design proper lesson plans. Universities can conduct seminars for students on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This will help sharpen their skills and competencies in designing lesson plans that are useful for teaching practice. Thus, preservice teachers should design lesson plans that suit the students' characteristics, which will affect the development of students' critical and analytical skills.

## CONCLUSION

Regarding the four research questions, preservice teachers are good at organizing several components of the lesson plan, such as the general information and supplementary components. This is because they are quite familiar with the terms in these components. On the other hand, the core component can be said to be less good. In this component, there are a lot of new terms which are quite different from the ones in the previous curriculum. Thus, the pre-service teachers' skills to develop lesson plans in the Merdeka Curriculum were considered good. Many findings prove the importance of lesson plans as a teaching guide for teachers (Hatch & Clark, 2021; König et al., 2020; Nesari & Heidari, 2014; Siregar et al., 2022). In this context, pre-service teachers are also obliged to master the knowledge and skills of developing lesson plans to support their future careers. The results of this study also show that universities have an important role to play as places where preservice teachers can enhance their potential and skills, especially in developing lesson plans that align with the current curriculum.

## SUGGESTION

This research is still limited to the skills of sophomores regarding lesson plans in the Merdeka Curriculum. Further research needs to be conducted on the students in the senior year to determine the level of their understanding of the lesson plan. In the end, this research can be used by concerned parties such as universities and the government to provide workshops or training programs for pre-service teachers to prepare them to become effective teachers.

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