Liberating Learning: Insights into the Merdeka Curriculum Implementation

Nina Trisna¹, Yasir Arafat², Nuril Furkan³
¹ Universitas PGRI Palembang, Indonesia

Email: nina.trisna1005@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The Merdeka Curriculum is a key component of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology's Merdeka Belajar policy, aimed at enhancing the quality of education in Indonesia. This study investigates the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in educational institutions, specifically describing and analyzing its execution, impact on teacher performance, and the factors that either hinder or support its implementation. The research was conducted at SMA Negeri 3 Prabumulih, utilizing a qualitative research approach with data collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Data were analyzed using the interactive model analysis technique from Miles and Huberman. The findings revealed that: (1) The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has been effectively carried out, transitioning from an independent choice model to a shared independent implementation model; (2) The successful implementation is supported by the roles of the principal, teachers, educational staff, and other stakeholders; (3) The Merdeka Curriculum is applied in grades X and XI, while grade XII continues to follow the 2013 Curriculum due to the transitional period; (4) The implementation process involves the planning of operational curriculum documents, organizing resources, mobilizing learning activities, and monitoring through direction, guidance, and assistance.

Keywords: Merdeka Curriculum; Learning; Education Policy

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is characterized as an era of openness or globalization, signifying fundamental changes in human life that differ significantly from previous centuries. This era demands quality in all human efforts and outcomes, necessitating high-quality human resources produced by professionally managed institutions to achieve excellence (Gnan et al., 2013; Heber Dunning, 2015). The new demands require breakthroughs in thinking, conceptualization, and actions. Philosopher Thomas Kuhn argued that new challenges cannot be effectively addressed using old paradigms; instead, they require a breakthrough thinking process to produce high-quality outputs that can compete globally (Gassing et al., 2015; Komljenovic, 2022; Sahade & Ngampo, 2016; Sukendro et al., 2020).
In the realm of education, there has been a noticeable shift, even a fundamental change, at the level of philosophy, direction, and goals. The advancement of science, particularly due to the advent of computer science and technology, has led to significant progress in cognitive science, bio-molecular science, information technology, and nano-science, all of which characterize the 21st century (Jaipal-Jamani, 2023; Mohamed Hashim et al., 2022). One of the most prominent features of this century is the increasing interconnectedness of various scientific fields, leading to faster synergies between them. The utilization of information and communication technology in education has proven to diminish the constraints of "space and time," which previously determined the speed and success of knowledge acquisition (Cui et al., 2023; Silva et al., 2022).

Therefore, the educational processes organized by a country must be oriented and adaptive to the developments in science and technology. This necessitates changes in the educational structure, such as dynamic and flexible curriculum adjustments to align with current and future scientific and technological advancements. The success of a nation can be gauged by the achievements of its education system. The role of education in nation-building, particularly in facing the knowledge age, has been recognized since the formulation of the 1945 Constitution (Jarvis, 2018; Mahmood, 2021). Without an educated populace, a nation cannot compete in the knowledge age (Capetillo et al., 2022; Dewi et al., 2018).

Educational success heavily relies on the curriculum, which functions as a plan, execution, and evaluation tool for learning. The curriculum must be continuously evaluated and adapted to meet the learning needs of students and build competencies relevant to present and future contexts. As Ki Hajar Dewantara stated, "Education is the determinant of all natural strengths within a child so they can achieve the highest safety and happiness, both as individuals and as members of society" (Treffgarne, 2019). Indonesia has undergone eleven curriculum changes, from the 1947 Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum, to keep up with scientific and technological advancements. The Merdeka Curriculum emerged in response to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on learning processes, aiming to address learning loss and gaps. This curriculum offers flexibility and simplicity in implementation, allowing educational units to effectively integrate it into daily learning activities.

METHOD

The research method used in this study is a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. The research was conducted at SMA Negeri 3 Prabumulih, South Sumatra, over four months from October 2023 to January 2024. The qualitative method was chosen because it can describe and analyze phenomena naturally and in-depth, without manipulating conditions. This approach allows researchers to explore and capture social situations related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, including aspects of planning, execution, organization, and supervision, as well as supporting and inhibiting factors such as human resources, facilities, financing, and stakeholders.

The research procedure follows qualitative stages consisting of pre-field, fieldwork, and data analysis phases. In the pre-field phase, researchers conduct field surveys, draft designs, and handle permits. The fieldwork phase involves data collection through observations, in-depth interviews with informants such as the Principal, Vice Principals, IKM Team, Head of the Library, and Teachers, as well as document studies. The collected data is analyzed during and
Result AND DISCUSSION

Result

The Merdeka Curriculum is a key component of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology's Merdeka Belajar policy, aimed at enhancing the quality of education in Indonesia. This study investigates the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in educational institutions, specifically describing and analyzing its execution, impact on teacher performance, and the factors that either hinder or support its implementation. The research was conducted at SMA Negeri 3 Prabumulih, where observations, interviews, and document analyses were employed to gather comprehensive data.

The findings revealed that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMA Negeri 3 Prabumulih has been effectively carried out. Initially, the school adopted an independent choice model, allowing teachers to customize their teaching methods based on the curriculum guidelines. Over time, this model transitioned to a shared independent implementation model, fostering greater collaboration and consistency among educators. This shift has significantly contributed to the successful integration of the Merdeka Curriculum into the school's educational framework.

The successful implementation is notably supported by the active roles of the principal, teachers, educational staff, and other stakeholders. The principal plays a pivotal role in providing leadership and direction, ensuring that all staff members are aligned with the curriculum's objectives. Teachers, on the other hand, have shown a commendable willingness to adapt their teaching strategies, participate in continuous professional development, and collaborate with peers to enhance the learning experience. The support from educational staff and stakeholders, including parents and the local education authority, further reinforces the curriculum's effective execution.

In terms of curriculum application, the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented in grades X and XI, while grade XII continues to follow the 2013 Curriculum due to the transitional period. This dual approach allows the school to gradually phase in the new curriculum while ensuring that students in their final year receive a consistent educational experience. The transition period has been carefully managed to minimize disruptions and ensure a smooth adaptation process for both students and teachers.

The implementation process involves meticulous planning of operational curriculum documents, organizing resources, mobilizing learning activities, and monitoring progress through direction, guidance, and assistance. The planning phase includes the development of detailed lesson plans and instructional materials tailored to the Merdeka Curriculum's objectives. Organizing resources involves allocating adequate teaching aids, technology, and other materials necessary for effective curriculum delivery. Learning activities are mobilized through interactive
and student-centered approaches, encouraging active participation and critical thinking among students.

Monitoring and evaluation are integral components of the implementation process, providing continuous feedback and support to educators. This is achieved through regular supervision, coaching sessions, and professional development workshops. The principal and senior teachers conduct periodic reviews to assess the effectiveness of teaching strategies and student outcomes, ensuring that any challenges are promptly addressed. Overall, the study highlights that the Merdeka Curriculum’s implementation at SMA Negeri 3 Prabumulih has been a multifaceted and collaborative effort, resulting in a positive impact on teacher performance and educational quality.

Discussion

To discuss the findings of this article comprehensively, it is essential to analyze several key aspects that emerged from the study on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMA Negeri 3 Prabumulih. Firstly, the transition from an independent choice model to a shared independent implementation model signifies a significant organizational change in curriculum delivery (Edelson et al., 1999; Murithi & Yoo, 2021; Roehrig et al., 2023). This shift has demonstrated positive outcomes by fostering collaboration among educators and ensuring consistency in instructional practices aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum’s goals.

Secondly, the pivotal roles played by school leadership, teachers, and other stakeholders underscore the importance of strong institutional support (Kaimara et al., 2022; Penuel et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2022). Effective leadership from the principal has provided clear direction and oversight, ensuring that teachers are equipped to implement the curriculum effectively. Moreover, the active engagement of teachers in professional development and collaborative activities has enhanced their ability to tailor instructional strategies to meet the curriculum’s objectives (Datzberger, 2018; Sotto, 2021).

Thirdly, the article highlights the dual-track approach where grades X and XI adopt the Merdeka Curriculum, while grade XII continues with the 2013 Curriculum during the transitional phase (Rohimat et al., 2022). This approach acknowledges the need for continuity and stability in educational delivery, particularly for students preparing for national examinations. However, future studies could explore the impact of this transitional period on student learning outcomes and teacher workload, offering insights into optimizing curriculum integration.

Limitations of the study include the single-site focus on SMA Negeri 3 Prabumulih, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other educational contexts. Future research could broaden the scope by including multiple schools across different regions to capture diverse perspectives and variations in curriculum implementation strategies. Additionally, while the study examined the immediate effects of the Merdeka Curriculum, longitudinal research could investigate its sustained impact over several academic years, providing deeper insights into its long-term effectiveness.

CONCLUSION
The study at SMA Negeri 3 Prabumulih underscores the significant strides made in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum as part of Indonesia's broader educational reforms. The transition from an independent choice model to a shared independent implementation model has facilitated cohesive educational practices, supported by robust leadership roles and active participation from teachers and stakeholders. While grades X and XI have successfully integrated the Merdeka Curriculum, the transitional phase for grade XII highlights ongoing challenges in curriculum alignment. Moving forward, optimizing resource allocation, enhancing teacher capacity, and addressing curriculum continuity across all grades will be pivotal in realizing the full potential of the Merdeka Curriculum to enhance educational quality nationwide.

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