The Transition from Implementing the K-13 Curriculum to the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in Elementary Schools

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Abstract

This research aims to describe the curriculum management implementation process at the primary school level. The phenomenon of changing times is unavoidable, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, which has necessitated rapid changes in all aspects of human life, including education. Therefore, there has been a curriculum change in the Republic of Indonesia with the emergence of the "Merdeka Belajar" (Freedom to Learn) Curriculum as an alternative solution to address this phenomenon. The research used a qualitative method with a case study approach. Data sources were obtained through direct observation, documentation, and interviews with the school principal, Grade I, II, IV, and VI class teachers at SDN 01 Gayam Kota Kediri. This study seeks to uncover the curriculum transition process from the K-13 curriculum to the "Merdeka Belajar" curriculum in primary education units. The research findings indicate that the implementation of the "Merdeka Belajar" curriculum management is going well. The process includes planning and preparation through training and workshops, implementing learning based on the "Merdeka Belajar" curriculum, and continuous evaluation of the achievement of learning outcomes (CP). The "Merdeka Belajar" Curriculum Management process is effective and efficient.

Keywords: Curriculum Management, Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, Primary School

Abstrak

INTRODUCTION

Education plays the most crucial role in determining the development of a nation and the quality of the individuals within it. The educational process refers to the efforts of individuals to cultivate good mindsets and attitudes through learning experiences (Jai et al., 2020; Mantiri, 2019). In the realm of education, the curriculum holds a highly strategic role and position. It can be likened to the heart in the human body. If the heart functions well, the body will operate smoothly and normally. Similarly, the role of the curriculum and education is crucial. Learning activities will proceed smoothly and produce excellent students if the curriculum is effectively implemented to achieve success and is supported by all related components (Agustiana & Asshidiqi, 2021; Ainy & Effane, 2023; Martin & Simanjorang, 2022).

Based on Law No. 20 of 2003, the curriculum refers to a series of learning programs related to goals, materials, teaching resources, and educational methods that can be applied or used in the implementation of learning activities to achieve national education goals. In Indonesia, the curriculum has undergone several changes throughout its history. These changes include the 1947, 1964, 1968, 1973, 1975, 1984, 1994, and 1997 curricula (the latter being a revision of the 1994 curriculum). During the reform era, the curriculum changed in 2004 (Competency-Based Curriculum or KBK) and 2006 (introduction of the School-Based Curriculum or KTSP). Then, in 2013, the government through the Ministry of National Education adopted the 2013 Curriculum (K-13), which was revised in 2018 to become the Revised 2013 Curriculum. Most recently, we have witnessed the introduction of the latest curriculum known as the "Merdeka Curriculum" (Kurikulum Merdeka) (Insani, 2019; Suparjan, 2020; Susanto, 2020; Wahyuni, 2015).

The Merdeka Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) was introduced as a response to setbacks in the education sector during the COVID-19 pandemic that affected the entire world. The pandemic caused a halt to face-to-face teaching, which was replaced by online learning (Jojor & Sihotang, 2022). However, the presence of online or remote learning has proven to be less effective due to not all students having online devices and also many facing limited internet access (Hutabarat et al., 2022; Sartini & Mulyono, 2022). In response to this gap, the government has decided to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. Its aim is to minimize the worsening learning crisis in Indonesia due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Arisanti, 2022; Suhandi & Robi’ah, 2022).

The Merdeka Curriculum is an approach designed to emphasize the development of students' interests and talents. In this curriculum, students have the freedom to choose subjects they enjoy and express their talents. As a result, the learning process becomes more enjoyable and effective for both teachers and students (Arisanti, 2022). The aim of transitioning to the Merdeka Curriculum is to address the ongoing education crisis. The Merdeka Curriculum is also defined as a teaching and learning plan that provides students
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with an opportunity to learn and explore their potential in a more enjoyable environment free from pressure (Rusmiati et al., 2023; Suryaman, 2020).

The Merdeka Curriculum also places a stronger emphasis on freedom of thought and creativity. An initiative designed by the Ministry of Education and Culture in the inauguration of the Merdeka Curriculum is the School Movement program (Putri et al., 2024). A program designed to assist every school in shaping students who engage in lifelong learning while applying the values contained in Pancasila. Therefore, teachers and school principals play a crucial role in achieving the success of this program (Bungawati, 2022).

The educational process plays a role in fostering creative and innovative ideas relevant to the increasingly modern and sophisticated dynamics of the times. One of the ways to enhance the quality of education is through curriculum development (Madhakomala et al., 2022). As stated by Munandar, effective education lies in the effectiveness of curriculum implementation, as the curriculum is considered the core of education that influences the sustainability of the education system. Teachers play a primary role in creating positive impacts on students, and they should be the main drivers of actions beneficial to student development (Daga, 2021). The Merdeka Curriculum was introduced to accommodate changes and advancements within a nation so that it can adapt to the changing times. This aligns with the perspective of Minister of Education Nadiem Makarim, who emphasizes the importance of cultural transformation in educational reform (Arviansyah & Shagena, 2022).

In line with the notion of envisioning a vision and mission for the future of education in Indonesia, the concept of Merdeka Belajar can be applied to produce individuals with high-quality human resources capable of competing in various aspects of life, especially in the present era (Dewi, 2022). With the design of the Merdeka Curriculum, it is hoped that students can develop their abilities more effectively, as this curriculum provides learning experiences that are superior, diverse, critical, expressive, high-quality, and progressive (Istianah et al., 2023). According to Fertra, curriculum changes require good cooperation from all parties, dedication, tangible implementation, and strong commitment so that the profile of Pancasila learners can truly be embedded in each student (Lathif & Suprapto, 2023).

SDN 1 Gayam is one of the leading schools located in the Mojoroto District of Kediri City. The institution implements the Merdeka Curriculum in their teaching approach. In their learning process, they carefully design it to ensure that the set learning outcomes are achieved, including efforts towards the recovery of the 2013 Curriculum. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum aims to achieve the predetermined learning outcomes, and to do so optimally, appropriate and effective management of the Merdeka Curriculum is required.

In the implementation of Merdeka Belajar curriculum at schools, teachers are required to be active and creative in carrying it out. While some key elements of Merdeka Belajar curriculum can be executed well, they may also pose certain challenges. One such challenge is the lack of readiness and willingness among teachers to fully implement out-
of-classroom learning in the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, as they may have become comfortable with the K-13 curriculum (Jannah et al., 2022). Another issue is the difficulty in structuring the learning objectives and operating instructional media technology (Solikhah & Wahyuni, 2023). Moreover, the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum particularly requires strengthening the Pancasila P5 student profile, which necessitates educational facilities and infrastructure based on the internet and the streaming of instructional videos (Indriani et al., 2023).

Ultimately, the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum does empower teachers to design learning experiences as engaging as possible by optimizing instructional media technology with the aim of shaping character while strengthening the Pancasila profile of students. However, many teachers struggle to design and develop Merdeka Belajar due to a lack of readiness to relearn competencies, limited resources and infrastructure in schools, and the need to change their teaching strategies (Purani & Putra, 2022; Rahmadayanti & Hartoyo, 2022).

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN 1 Gayam is going smoothly, with the school principal and teachers actively updating teaching methods based on the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. The school principal provides full support for the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and prepares and provides the necessary teaching materials. The management of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN 1 Gayam has been carefully designed through consultations among subject teachers at various grade levels, especially for grades I, II, IV, and V. Based on this success, the author is motivated to conduct research at this institution with the aim of describing: (1) Lesson planning of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN 1 Gayam, (2) Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN 1 Gayam, (3) Evaluation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN 1 Gayam.

Research related to the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum has been conducted by many researchers, but there is still a gap in research regarding the theme of transitioning the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum at the elementary school level. Most of the researched themes are related to Merdeka Belajar in general and its various problems. Therefore, this research is necessary with the title "Transitioning the Implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum from K-13 at the Elementary School Level." This study aims to describe the model of curriculum transition that should be learned and understood by all educators who play an active role in the education sector in order to produce young generations who are moral, intelligent, have character, and are cultured.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative research method with a case study approach. Qualitative research aims to uncover descriptive data, making the sought-after data narrative and in-depth. Qualitative research is an approach used to naturally understand the phenomena under study and generate comprehensive descriptive data (Sugiyono,
Qualitative case study research is a research strategy used to uncover a specific case or the changes in a phenomenon that occur over a certain period of time (Yin, 2008).

In qualitative research, data obtained from the study are then understood and sorted according to similarities and discussion flow. Subsequently, if the obtained data are deemed insufficient, a further search for data sources is conducted to ensure the completeness of the required data for the research. Once the data are collected and the discussion sequence is determined, the next step is to draw comprehensive and easily understandable conclusions. To ensure the reliability or credibility of the data, a rechecking of data conformity is conducted using triangulation.

The data sources for this research include observation, interviews, and documentation at SDN 01 Gayam in Kediri City. Interviews were conducted with the school principal, homeroom teachers of grades I, II, IV, and VI. Briefly, data analysis used Miles & Huberman's analysis, which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. To test the credibility of the research, the results were tested using triangulation method. This research was conducted over a four-month period, from September to December 2023.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**The Implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum**

Implementation is the execution of a detailed and well-organized plan. In implementing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, several stages need to be undertaken such as planning, execution, and evaluation. In the first stage, planning, the school principal should prepare a plan by creating schedules and/or organizing workshops for all teachers involved in all important subjects covered in the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum (Suzetasari et al., 2023). Next, in the execution stage, all teachers develop an Merdeka Belajar Curriculum design that will then be implemented for the students. This represents a new paradigm in learning that focuses on student engagement, reinforcement of learning outcomes, and understanding of instructional materials through modules tailored to student learning, as well as strengthening understanding through Pancasila Student Profile (P5) projects (Ulandari & Rapita, 2023). And finally, in the material evaluation stage, teachers formulate and prepare instructional materials to be delivered the following day for each lesson in learning reinforcement. In the Pancasila Student Profile strengthening project, teachers still need to evaluate it to adjust to the needs and various characteristics of all students (Yusra & Silvianetri, 2022).

The Minister of Education of the Republic of Indonesia introduced the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum as an innovative breakthrough to create an inspirational and joyful learning environment. Minister of Education, Nadiem Makarim, hopes that the learning process and its tools will no longer be a burden for both teachers and students. One of the main changes is shifting the focus from merely achieving grades or the Minimum Competency Criteria (KKM) to the Achievement Criteria of Learning Objectives (KKTP) (Syafrizal, 2023).
The research results obtained regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN 1 Gayam in Kediri City are in line with the role model of implementation in the field. The Merdeka Curriculum is an approach to learning that provides greater freedom to students. This approach provides a broader space for students to take initiative in their learning process. One of the main characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum is the use of project-based or case study-based learning methods, such as the Pancasila Student Profile (P5) Strengthening Project, which integrates learning materials into practical contexts. This aims to provide a deeper and more relevant learning experience, allowing students to develop a better understanding of the subject matter and problem-solving skills.

Based on the interview results at SDN 1 Gayam in Kediri City, it was found that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has brought about several significant changes in the structure of subjects. Unlike the 2013 Curriculum, which combined several subjects into thematic books, the Merdeka Curriculum has separated subjects more specifically. For example, Indonesian language is now taught as a separate subject. Additionally, the Arts and Crafts (Seni Budaya dan Prakarya - SBDP) subject in the 2013 Curriculum has been divided in the Merdeka Curriculum into separate subjects such as theater arts, music, visual arts, and dance. Apart from these changes, the subjects of Natural Sciences (Ilmu Pengetahuan Alam - IPA) and Social Sciences (Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial - IPS) have been merged into one subject called Natural and Social Sciences (Ilmu Pengetahuan Alam dan Sosial - IPAS) in the Merdeka Curriculum (Sugih et al., 2023). The implementation is conducted over two semesters, with Natural Sciences (IPA) taught in the first semester and Social Sciences (IPS) in the second semester. The subject of Civic Education (Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan - PKn) has also undergone a change to Pancasila Education (Pendidikan Pancasila - PP), and the subject of religion has changed to Religious and Moral Education (Pendidikan Agama dan Budi Pekerti) in the Merdeka Curriculum.

**Implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum (IKM) at SDN 1 Gayam**

The stages or process of implementing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum (ILC) begin with the demand from the Ministry of Education (DIKNAS) for the change of curriculum, which is then implemented at SDN 1 Gayam. Subsequently, the teachers from SDN 1 Gayam actively participate in the Teacher Working Group (Kelompok Kerja Guru - KKG). This organization provides facilities such as activities, understanding, or training related to the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum to the teachers. Some of the activities organized by the KKG include: workshops attended by 1st & 4th grade teachers for 3 days at Universitas Nusantara PGRI Kediri (UNP), followed by training in creating teaching materials for the IPAS subjects in 4th grade, supervised by the school principal and supervisors. Additionally, the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum continues to be developed over time and in line with changes and advancements.

In the implementation stages of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, there are several characteristics as explained by the workshop speaker (Vhalery et al., 2022), including:
Learning outcomes. In every curriculum or learning process, there are competencies that students are expected to acquire after undergoing several learning activities, namely Core Competencies (KI) and Basic Competencies (KD) in the 2013 curriculum, while in the Merdeka Curriculum, the term changes to Learning Outcomes (CP), which refers to competencies that students are expected to achieve, and Learning Objective Sequences (ATP).

Implementation of the learning process. The implementation of the learning process in the Merdeka Curriculum now does not use a thematic approach but can be based on individual subjects. Subjects such as mathematics, Indonesian language, and others are included.

Implementation in the Social and Natural Sciences (IPAS) subject. Subjects that were originally separated, namely Natural Sciences (IPA) and Social Sciences (IPS), are combined into one subject in the Merdeka Curriculum, namely Social and Natural Sciences (IPAS). In this regard, teachers at SDN 1 Gayam for grade 4 have also developed teaching materials for the IPAS subject.

The stages of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN 1 Gayam are as follows: a) Teachers participate in socialization activities, training, webinars, workshops, and other events regarding the preparation for the Merdeka Curriculum after receiving demands from the government. b) Coordination regarding the Merdeka Curriculum, whether it can already be implemented at SDN Gayam or not. c) After the head of SDN decides to implement the Merdeka Curriculum, the school fills out a registration questionnaire to participate in the curriculum implementation, which is then submitted to receive intensive support from the Department of Education. d) Forming a coordinating team to organize the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, such as preparing: a) teacher training, b) arranging school operations in accordance with the vision and mission of SDN 1 Gayam, c) preparing Merdeka Curriculum tools, such as teaching models, learning outcomes, etc. e) Conducting socialization to school stakeholders. f) Then implementing the Merdeka Curriculum according to the standard guidelines.

Factors Supporting and Inhibiting the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

Based on interviews conducted at SDN 1 Gayam, several factors have been identified that can provide support for the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in practical field settings. These factors include: a) Clear budget allocation from the local government to support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. b) Efficient coordination between district and provincial governments with the central government regarding plans for acquiring learning facilities, training, and thorough planning. c) The availability of additional infrastructure such as internet access and computers, pursued by all parties.

Although the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has been effective in recent months, there are still several challenges, including:
Lack of experience with the concept of Merdeka Belajar

The main obstacle faced by teachers at SDN 1 Gayam is the limitation of their personal experience regarding the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. In this context, teachers have to deal with a limited understanding of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. Therefore, teachers need to pursue additional learning and delve deeper into the concept of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. To overcome this challenge, teachers can participate in training programs designed to enhance their understanding of the learning process. Additionally, teachers need to enhance their knowledge of the current Merdeka Curriculum system to better implement it (Syamsi & Zamroni, 2023; Syamsurrijal, 2020).

The Lack of Teaching Hours Due to a Focus on Projects

Another challenge faced by teachers at SDN 1 Gayam is the reduction of teaching hours. This is because during Merdeka Belajar, classroom teaching hours are reduced. This is caused by project-based activities incorporated into the learning process. Teachers no longer instruct students on theories, content, and materials, but rather students focus more on practical actions when completing projects. These projects are developed based on specific themes identified by the government, aimed at strengthening the achievement of the Pancasila Student Profile.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum at SDN 1 Gayam involves planning, execution, and evaluation stages. Planning begins with the school principal organizing workshops to familiarize teachers with the curriculum. During execution, the curriculum emphasizes active learning, content understanding, and the use of modules and the Pancasila Student Profile (P5) Strengthening Project for a deeper learning experience. There have been significant changes in subject structures, such as separating subjects previously combined in the 2013 Curriculum. Supporting factors include clear budget allocation, efficient coordination between local and central governments, and the availability of additional learning facilities. However, obstacles include teachers’ lack of experience with the Merdeka Belajar concept and reduced teaching hours due to project focus. The solution lies in enhancing teachers' understanding of the curriculum. The Merdeka Belajar Curriculum aims to create an inspirational learning environment, freeing students and teachers from the pressure of merely achieving Minimum Competency Criteria (KKM) and focusing on Achievement Criteria of Learning Objectives (KKTP) instead. In practice, this provides students with more freedom to take initiative in learning and enhances their understanding of subjects and problem-solving abilities.

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