

Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

Hamzah Sutisna

Islamic Education Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training (FTIK), Universitas Cendekia Abditama, Tangerang, Indonesia

Email: Hamzahtekzanena@gmail.com

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Abstract

This research aims to identify and find out how the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum program and its implications are implemented in various schools. This research uses a library research approach or through literature study. The data collection technique uses documentation by recording data from several book sources and other documents such as the official media of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research and also other sources of information. This research explains and describes how the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum itself and its implications have been implemented in various educational units. The findings reveal that the implementation of the curriculum in various educational units has been carried out optimally and is ongoing, although in its implementation there are still many obstacles and shortcomings. The key to the shortcomings of the implementation of this Merdeka Curriculum lies in the awareness of students as well as schools and teachers who must have the desire to make changes, as well as the clarity and real assistance from the government, especially the relevant education units, for the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum program run by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology.

Keywords: Merdeka Curriculum, Implementation of Curriculum, Educational Units, Education Reform

1. Introduction

The Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia (Kemendikbud) recently introduced the *Merdeka Curriculum* or also known as Independent Curriculum as a new option for educational institutions to use in the years 2022-2024, aimed at improving learning outcomes. Furthermore, there will be a reassessment of the national curriculum in 2024 following an evaluation of the effectiveness of the learning recovery period. The Merdeka curriculum is designed with a focus on both academic and non-academic activities, including initiatives to enhance students' understanding of Pancasila values and participation in extracurricular events (Fauziah et al., 2025). The distribution of class hours in the academic schedule is outlined for the entire year, along with recommendations for how to assign class hours on a regular or weekly basis.

The Merdeka Curriculum and Merdeka Campus are included in the *Merdeka Belajar* or also known as Independent Learning initiative established by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in Indonesia (Usman et al., 2023). This initiative aims to offer students the chance to develop their skills based on their individual talents and interests (Maghfiroh & Sholeh, 2021). The Merdeka Curriculum builds upon the previous *Merdeka Belajar* concept. It aims to revolutionize education by providing high-quality learning experiences that cultivate students' understanding and knowledge beyond their usual surroundings (Sopiansyah et al., 2022).

The framework of the Merdeka curriculum includes various academic tasks, initiatives to enhance the Pancasila learner's profile, and non-curricular activities. The distribution of instructional hours in



the curriculum outline is outlined annually and incorporates recommendations for weekly instructional hour allocations if consistently implemented.

Total lesson hours remain constant, however, each subject will now have JP allocated for two different learning activities - intracurricular learning and a project aimed at enhancing the identity of Pancasila students (Winarto et al., 2025). In this case, if we focus solely on the participation in routine classroom learning activities, it may seem like there is a decrease in the importance of the Extra-Curricular Activities compared to the previous curriculum in 2013 (Rozak & Ayaz, 2023; Yaqin et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the variance in teaching hours is designated to enhance the image of Pancasila students through the project.

The initiative to enhance the characteristics of Pancasila learners involves empowering students to investigate actual challenges within their community and work together to find solutions (Maula et al., 2023). As a result, it is essential to dedicate specific time resources to guarantee the success of the Pancasila Learner Profile Strengthening project.

2. Methods

This study employs a method of library research or literature review. Data is gathered through documentation, including information extracted from various books and documents, including official media from the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Research, as well as other sources of information.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum

As per the National Education Standards Agency (BSNP), the Merdeka Learning Curriculum is described as an approach that focuses on individual talents and interests. This curriculum allows learners, including both students and university students, to select their subjects based on their own talents and interests. The Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Mendikbud Ristek) Nadiem Makarim introduced the Merdeka Learning curriculum as a way to assess and enhance the 2013 Curriculum.

Due to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, educational institutions were forced to revert back to using the 2013 Curriculum exclusively for teaching and learning, as it proved to be the most effective during these difficult times. From 2020 to 2021, the Ministry of Education and Culture implemented a policy requiring educational institutions to follow the 2013 Curriculum and the Emergency Curriculum as their guiding framework during the pandemic. In the following year, a new policy was introduced by the Ministry of Education and Culture, which mandated the use of the 2013 Curriculum, the Emergency Curriculum, and the Merdeka Curriculum in School Driving and Vocational School Centers of Excellence.

The Ministry of Education and Culture implemented the use of the 2013 Curriculum both before and during the pandemic. This curriculum was later simplified into the Emergency Curriculum to assist educational institutions in efficiently managing essential learning materials. The introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum in SP/SMK-PK in 2021 marked a significant step towards enhancing and revitalizing the learning process. In order to facilitate learning recovery from 2022 to 2024, the Ministry of Education and Culture granted schools the option to continue using the 2013 Curriculum if they were not yet prepared to transition to the Merdeka Curriculum. The revised Emergency Curriculum is available for use by educational institutions that were using the 2013 Curriculum. If educational

institutions have been deemed prepared during the data-gathering phase, they can choose to adopt the Merdeka Curriculum.

In 2024, national educational policies will undergo significant changes based on assessments of the curriculum during the period of learning recovery. These evaluations will guide the Ministry of Education and Culture in making future decisions following the learning recovery phase. The Merdeka Curriculum, introduced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikburistek) in 2021, was implemented in school programs. In 2022, the Ministry of Education and Culture will attempt to collect data that will later become the basis for the future implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Several strategies for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum through an independent pathway will be followed as part of the Ministry's policies.

- 1) The first strategy, the Gradual Adoption Route of the Merdeka Curriculum, is about facilitating educational units to recognize their readiness as the basis for deciding to implement the Merdeka Curriculum and providing periodic feedback (every 3 months) to map out the need for adjustments and support for the Merdeka Curriculum implementation from both the central and regional governments.
- 2) The second approach, which involves using information and communication technology, is aimed at offering a range of assessment choices and teaching aids in digital format for educational institutions following the Merdeka Curriculum. This strategy, known as High Tech, provides resources like textbooks, teaching modules, project samples, and curriculum examples.
- 3) The third strategy, Providing Independent Training and Teacher Learning Resources (High Tech), is a strategy that also uses information and communication technology for conducting independent Merdeka Curriculum training that can be accessed online by teachers and educational staff to facilitate the adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum, along with learning resources in the form of videos, podcasts, or eBooks that can be accessed online and distributed via storage media (flash drives) (Musfah, 2012).
- 4) The fourth strategy, Providing Merdeka Curriculum Resource Speakers (High Touch), focuses on providing resource speakers for the Merdeka Curriculum from School Driving/SMK PKs that have already implemented the Merdeka Curriculum. Dissemination can be carried out through webinars or offline meetings organized by local governments or educational units. Offline meetings can be held in the form of face-to-face seminars, workshops, or other meetings in the region or within educational units.
- 5) The last strategy, Facilitating the Development of Learning Communities (High Touch), where learning communities are formed by Teacher Driving alumni or initiated by school supervisors as a platform to share best practices in adopting the Merdeka Curriculum within educational units and across units.

The Ministry of Education and Culture has started a new strategy for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum which involves collecting data to evaluate the preparedness of educational institutions. By analyzing this data, the Ministry can determine if educational units are ready to implement the curriculum without forcing it upon everyone. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) is offering the Merdeka Curriculum Implementation Options (IKM) which allow educational institutions to make decisions based on a preparedness assessment that evaluates the readiness of teachers and staff to implement the curriculum. In the assessment completed by educators at each institution, there is no one correct answer; instead, the choices will be tailored to match the institution's readiness level. The assessment provides the most suitable options based on the institution's readiness, and the more appropriate the choice, the more successful the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum will be in that particular institution.

The initial choice is Independent Learning, allowing educational institutions the flexibility to incorporate elements and principles of the Merdeka Curriculum without altering the current curriculum in place for PAUD, grades 1, 4, 7, and 10. The second choice is Independent Transformation, offering educational institutions the liberty to implement the Merdeka Curriculum utilizing the prescribed teaching materials at PAUD, grades 1, 4, 7, and 10. The third option is Independent Collaboration, granting educational institutions the freedom to apply the Merdeka Curriculum by creating their own teaching materials for PAUD, grades 1, 4, 7, and 10.

Kemendikbudristek has introduced the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM), an educational tool designed to support educators in implementing Pancasila Students. This platform includes features for Learning, Teaching, and Creating, aimed at helping teachers enhance their teaching methods following the Merdeka Curriculum. The Teaching aspect offers educational resources for teachers and school personnel to enhance their skills. There are currently more than 2000 references to teaching tools aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum. The student evaluation feature is designed to help educators quickly assess students' literacy and numeracy skills to tailor appropriate learning strategies according to their progress and growth.

The Merdeka Mengajar platform allows teachers to enhance their skills and knowledge at their convenience, offering a variety of learning opportunities. Through the Learning feature, teachers and educational professionals can access high-quality training materials independently, promoting continuous professional development. One additional aspect of Learning is Inspirational Videos, offering educators and school personnel a selection of motivational videos for personal growth on a continuous basis, leading to enhanced skills in applying the Merdeka Curriculum.

The Merdeka Mengajar platform motivates teachers to keep innovating and offers a platform for exchanging successful methods. Another function is the Creation section, where teachers and educational professionals can exhibit their "My Work Evidence," showcasing their effective teaching methods, particularly those aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum. Through building portfolios of their work, teachers and educational professionals can inspire each other and work together to advance. The goal of the Merdeka Mengajar platform is to support teachers in incorporating the Merdeka Curriculum through teamwork and knowledge-sharing. The materials created by Kemendikbudristek aim to enhance comprehension during the implementation and learning process in educational institutions that have adopted the Merdeka Curriculum. It consists of strategies and guidelines related to objectives, content, instructional materials, and techniques for structuring learning activities to reach academic goals.

The creation of the Merdeka Mengajar platform is anticipated to serve as a helpful tool for teachers as they carry out the Merdeka Curriculum. This platform emphasizes collaboration and the sharing of resources among educators. The Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbudristek) has developed content to support a more comprehensive understanding and facilitate learning in educational institutions which have adopted the Curriculum Implementation. The curriculum encompasses a series of strategies and structures that outline goals, subject matter, instructional materials, and approaches to be utilized as a framework for conducting educational activities in pursuit of higher academic objectives.

Independence Curriculum. What does the Independence Curriculum entail? The core of this Independence Curriculum is freedom in learning. Nadiem explained that freedom in learning is a guiding principle meant to enable students to delve into their unique passions and abilities. As an example, Nadiem pointed out that if siblings within a family have divergent interests, they should not be evaluated based on identical standards. Furthermore, children should not be coerced into studying subjects they lack interest in. "As parents, we cannot force our child who loves art to study computers

deeply, and vice versa," said Nadiem. Nadiem emphasized that children inherently have a curiosity and a desire to learn. "So there are no lazy children or children who can't learn," he said firmly.

Merdeka Belajar or Independent Learning is an innovation by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbudristek) to create superior human resources (HR) through policies that strengthen the role of all educational stakeholders. This policy is implemented through four improvement efforts:

- 1) First, improving infrastructure and technology.
- 2) Second, improving policies, procedures, and funding, and granting more autonomy to educational units.
- 3) Third, improving leadership, society, and culture.
- 4) Fourth, improving curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment.

Merdeka Learning is divided into several episodes. It starts with the first episode, which introduces four key policies to shift the old paradigm of teaching and learning toward progress. Some of these policies include the abolition of the National Standardized School Examination (USBN) and replacing the National Exam (UN) with the National Assessment. There are also policies simplifying lesson planning (RPP) and implementing more flexible policies for student admissions (PPDB).

The Merdeka Curriculum was designed as part of Kemendikbudristek's efforts to address the long-standing learning crisis, which worsened due to the pandemic. Low student learning outcomes, especially in basic skills such as reading literacy, are a prominent feature of the current crisis. The disparity in learning quality between different regions and socio-economic groups is another key aspect of the learning crisis. Simply changing the curriculum will not be enough to address the issues plaguing the education system and improve the situation. Enhancing the skills of educators and principals, assisting local authorities, restructuring the assessment process, and guaranteeing fairer facilities and finances are necessary. Nonetheless, the educational program is just as vital. It significantly influences the content and teaching methods employed by teachers. Hence, a carefully crafted curriculum will motivate and empower educators to deliver higher-quality instruction.

3.2. The Urgency of Implementing Merdeka Curriculum

The Merdeka Curriculum is designed to provide students with a wide range of academic subjects to explore, allowing them the opportunity to deepen their understanding of concepts and enhance their skills in order to better prepare them for a variety of challenges. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) is working on initiatives to improve the education system. The launch of the Merdeka Curriculum is one of the initiatives by Kemendikbudristek to tackle the current issues in education.

The Merdeka Curriculum was born as a response to the fading orientation of education itself, where many aspects need to be addressed, one of which is the effort to improve and develop students' personal growth, as well as enhancing their critical thinking skills. This has become a key focus for every educational institution, whether schools or other educational bodies. The hope is that students can develop courage and independence in thinking, a spirit of learning (which correlates with a high curiosity), self-confidence and optimism, freedom of thought, and the ability to accept both success and failure (Priyatma, 2020).

The urgency of the birth of Merdeka Learning or the Merdeka Curriculum, according to the Ministry of Education and Culture, is an effort to restore and improve the system from the 2022 to 2024 curriculum, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has made education and learning in Indonesia and globally less efficient. Hence, there is a need for renewal and a system that can be quickly implemented with measured adjustments to ensure the continuity of education and learning activities

at both the educational unit level and higher education. This has led to various new policies and regulations that the government, particularly the Minister of Education, continues to implement.

Through the Merdeka Curriculum handbook, Kemendikbudristek explains that one of the significant contributions of the Merdeka Curriculum is in its inclusive education approach (Kemendikbud, 2022). Inclusion here does not only refer to students with special needs but, more broadly, sees that the Merdeka Curriculum promotes education that directly acknowledges differences in race, culture, ethnicity, and religion, each of which is embraced by students (Marlina, 2022).

3.3. Implications of Implementing Merdeka Curriculum

The Merdeka Learning and Merdeka Curriculum are built upon the guidelines outlined in the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation (Permendikbud) Number 3 of 2020, which focuses on the standards for higher education at the national level (Sopiansyah et al., 2022). The educational program involves a structured framework detailing the objectives, subject matter, instructional resources, and strategies utilized to coordinate educational experiences in order to meet academic goals. According to Permendikbud's Article 11 (1), the qualities of the instructional process outlined in Article 10 (2) point to incorporate participatory, comprehensive, unified, empirical, situational, thematic, efficient, cooperative, and learner-focused methodologies. In the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* or MBKM curriculum, solid collaboration is required to ensure the curriculum runs smoothly. Collaboration between universities is essential to prepare graduates who are aligned with the needs of the business world, industry, and society.

The programs launched under the Merdeka Curriculum are quite diverse. These include KIP (Kartu Indonesia Pintar), school digitization, achievements and character strengthening, Teacher Movers, New Curriculum, Vocational Education Revitalization, Independent Campus/School, and Advancement of Culture and Language. These programs will significantly support the improvement of educational quality in Indonesia and the development of human resources if implemented effectively. The teacher's role is the most crucial in this context. Teachers, as the central figures in education, need to manage learning activities well so that the Merdeka Curriculum can be successfully implemented as envisioned (Direktorat Sekolah Dasar, 2020).

Quality assurance is also emphasized at both the secondary education and higher education levels, which are responsible for developing policies and quality manuals, setting quality standards, conducting monitoring and evaluation, and establishing assessment principles, aspects, and procedures. Based on the implications of the Merdeka Learning concept on its implementation in educational units, simplification is needed to ensure understanding and a consistent system across every educational institution. Another aspect of the implementation is the need to strengthen the national exams and other semester exams, which are considered to complicate the learning process that has already been undertaken. As a result, many aspects of children's potential and talents are judged solely based on their exam scores, while other talents in different fields may be overlooked.

As for the implications of the curriculum on the teaching profession, teachers still play an essential role in learning and strategically contribute to education and teaching aspects. However, in practice, teachers are no longer the only source of knowledge during learning activities or in seeking and discovering information. In the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers act as partners with students to jointly explore and discover knowledge. Therefore, teachers need to be more prepared, especially in terms of educating, not just teaching (Sopiansyah et al., 2022).

4. Conclusion

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which is currently underway, is an effort to address the many learning gaps experienced by students in Indonesia. This effort, of course, has both positive and negative aspects in its application. This aligns with the objective of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum itself, which focuses on simplicity but depth, more freedom and breadth, and a learning approach that is more relevant and interactive. The curriculum plays a vital role in the learning journey. The creation of the curriculum is based on the current requirements in the industry. The main aim of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* curriculum is a directive from the Minister of Education and Culture to motivate students to acquire knowledge that will benefit them in the future. The core principle of the Merdeka Curriculum is to unlock the skills of teachers and students, promote creativity, and cultivate self-directed learning, instead of just complying with educational rules and regulations.

The favorable results discussed earlier show that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is making a substantial difference in the push to bounce back from the educational setbacks caused by the COVID-19 outbreak. Conversely, one could argue that this initiative acts as a protective measure to tackle the possible decline in learning and educational disparities during the pandemic. Creating a curriculum that effectively tackles the learning crisis, a pressing issue in Indonesia, is imperative. In this context, this academic study on learning recovery is designed to examine various curriculum alternatives that can be utilized by educational units with their diverse characteristics to improve the quality of the learning process, optimize student learning outcomes, and mitigate the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on education in Indonesia.

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