



Analysis of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum policy in senior high schools: A case study on the practice level of learning

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ABSTRACT

The Merdeka Curriculum Policy is a strategic step in Indonesia's educational reform, and this study is a collaborative effort to understand its implementation at the Senior High School (SMA) level. We aim to conduct an in-depth analysis, with particular attention to the process of understanding, application, and its impact on teaching and learning activities. The research employs a qualitative approach using data collection techniques such as field observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The primary respondents are teachers, students, and school staff actively involved in the policy implementation, making this a truly inclusive and comprehensive study. The findings reveal that implementing the Merdeka Curriculum Policy in high schools faces challenges, such as inconsistent understanding of the policy among teachers, the need for ongoing training to enhance teacher competencies, and infrastructure limitations that hinder optimal application. Nevertheless, notable successes include increased creativity in learning, active student engagement in learning processes, and the emergence of innovations in teaching methods. Further analysis indicates that active teacher participation and managerial support from the school are critical success factors in implementing this policy. This research is not just an academic exercise but a practical guide for the development of educational policies. By providing insights into the challenges and opportunities of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, we aim to empower policymakers with the knowledge to design more effective implementation strategies. This study also serves as a beacon of hope for other schools facing similar situations, offering practical guidance and enriching the academic literature on the dynamics of educational policy in Indonesia, particularly at the high school level.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is the main pillar in the development of a nation, and curriculum policy is one of the crucial instruments in determining the quality and relevance of the educational process. In Indonesia, implementing the Merdeka Curriculum Policy is a significant step in efforts to produce graduates who are not only academically superior but also have skills and character relevant to the demands of the times. Therefore, education in Indonesia is also influenced by education policies, often called education politics, which are motivated by social changes and political dynamics. In addition, the implementation of education policies, responses to global changes, and the role of educational institutions and the government also affect the political dynamics of education in Indonesia (Sahasrad & Chaidar, 2012). In this context, the analysis of implementing the "Merdeka

Curriculum" policy in the high school environment is essential to understand how the education policy affects students, teachers, and the school environment. In addition, this analysis can also reveal the challenges and benefits associated with implementing the "Merdeka Curriculum" policy in Indonesia.

The political dynamics of education in Indonesia are complex and vital issues in the context of implementing the Merdeka curriculum policy in high schools. The Merdeka curriculum is an educational policy innovation that aims to answer the demands of an increasingly complex era (Deak et al., 2022). Various factors, such as education policies, social changes, and political dynamics, affect the development of the education system in Indonesia (Budiarti & Adar, 2023). In addition, the implementation of education policies, responses to global changes, and the role of educational institutions and the government also affect the political dynamics of education in Indonesia (Budiarti & Adar, 2023).

Implementing the Merdeka curriculum requires a strong role from various parties, including families, schools, and the community (Pakaya & Hakeu, 2023). For the successful implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in high schools, it is important to provide training to teachers, consistent administrative support, and strengthen collaboration between teachers, schools, and parents (Saputra et al., 2024). In addition, optimizing the management of facilities and infrastructure in schools is also an important factor in supporting the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum (Wasilah et al., 2023). Implementation in high school also requires a deep understanding of learning models that suit the needs of students, such as the 21st-century learning model (Indarta et al., 2022). In addition, the analysis of the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in driving schools shows that the Merdeka curriculum can produce students with noble character, independence, criticality, creativity, cooperation, and a sense of diversity (Muzakki et al., 2023).

Education policy is a process that involves various aspects, both political, social, legal, and administrative (Srihartini et al., 2021). Several studies include Dewanti et al. (2022), highlighting the importance of evaluation in implementing Islamic education policies (Dewanti et al., 2022). Furthermore, Nabila et al. (2021) analyzed the stages and approaches of education policy implementation by highlighting the complexity of education policy implementation. As well as Madjid et al. (2021), who researched to evaluate the implementation of School Operational Assistance (BOS) during the Covid-19 pandemic, emphasized the need for resource planning to support policy implementation.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the high school level in Indonesia has become the subject of research and analysis. Jojor and Sihotang (2022) and Sunarni and Karyono (2023) conducted an analysis of the Merdeka Curriculum in overcoming learning loss during the Covid-19 pandemic, emphasizing its role in the learning process and implementation. Teachers' perception of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary school level provides insight into the perspective of educators (Muliardi, 2023), which focuses on the development of the nation's creativity and character through the Merdeka Curriculum in Madrasas, highlighting its impact on critical thinking and character formation. In addition, Mursyid et al. (2023) discussed the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in certain schools, providing insight into its application at the local level.

Meanwhile, Aminah and Nursikin (2023) explored the role of teachers in the classroom in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum from an Islamic perspective, highlighting the responsibility of educators in the process of implementing it. The transformative leadership of school principals in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, emphasizing the role of leadership in supporting the implementation process (Sa'adah et al., 2023). In addition, Susanti et al. (2023), who explored school readiness and the challenges faced in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, provided insight into the practical aspects of its implementation.

Most previous research has focused on developing critical and creative thinking skills in urban or madrasah settings. At the same time, this study will explore how the Merdeka Curriculum contributes to developing non-academic skills, such as social and emotional skills, in semi-rural schools. This research was conducted at Mathlul Huda Parungpanjang High School Bogor to measure the extent to which the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has achieved the expected educational goals, as well as to identify the factors that support and hinder the

implementation process of this curriculum in the school environment. By examining these aspects, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive picture of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in semi-rural contexts and its impact on the development of students' skills that not only focus on academic aspects but also on strengthening the social and emotional dimensions that are important in holistic education.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative design with a case study approach. The case study was chosen to focus the analysis on the school's specific context and gain a contextual perspective. A qualitative methodology was selected because this study aims to deeply understand the phenomenon of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum Policy in a specific context, namely at Mathlaul Huda Parungpanjang High School in Bogor. The case study approach emphasizes analyzing specific occurrences within the school and how the policy is applied in practice.

To ensure data validity, method triangulation was applied by combining interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Member checking involved participants to confirm the key interview and observation findings. Dependability was maintained through an audit trail, systematically recording the data collection and analysis processes.

Participants in this study specifically involved only Grade X students of Mathlaul Huda Parungpanjang High School in Bogor. This class was chosen because it was the first level to implement the Independent Curriculum, with 30 students. Teachers interviewed were those teaching Social Sciences subjects, while parents were included to understand their perspectives on implementing this curriculum outside the school environment.

Data collection was carried out using three techniques: interviews, classroom observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with teachers, students, school staff, and parents. Classroom observation was carried out directly in the Grade X classroom, particularly in Social Sciences subjects, to observe how the Independent Curriculum is applied in daily learning. Meanwhile, document analysis included lesson plans, textbooks, and other school documents related to implementing the Independent Curriculum. Mathlaul Huda High School is a private school in Parungpanjang, Bogor, with relatively few students and limited resources, representing institutions that often face challenges in implementing new policies.

Data were analyzed using a descriptive and interpretive approach. The analysis process involved initial coding, identifying key themes, and interpreting findings with the aid of NVivo software to organize interviews and document data. The interpretation of findings focused on the relationship between the theory and the practice of implementing the Independent Curriculum. This study underwent an ethical approval process by the relevant authority. All participants provided written consent before interviews were conducted, and their identities were anonymized to protect their privacy.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Implementing the curriculum at Mathlaul Huda High School involves implementing the Merdeka curriculum, but this does not apply to all levels. Only class X of Mathlaul Huda High School in Parungpanjang is trying to adjust to the new curriculum, namely the Merdeka curriculum. According to the Deputy Curriculum Officer of Mathlaul Huda High School, this curriculum is not entirely new because it has been implemented for a long time. Still, it has not been fully integrated thoroughly. On the other hand, other grade levels still use the 2013 Curriculum, where Mathlaul Huda High School maintains its typical content, such as memorization and reading of the Quran, before starting learning.

The interviews with teachers and school staff revealed that implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in this school still faces various challenges, especially regarding teachers' adaptation to a more flexible and student-centered teaching approach. Some teachers stated that they needed

further training to understand and apply the new concepts introduced by this curriculum, such as project-based learning and more holistic assessment.

Classroom observations show that even though efforts to implement the Merdeka Curriculum have begun, it is still limited to class X, while class XI and XI are still using Curriculum 13. This shows that the change in teaching paradigm has not been evenly distributed at all levels and subjects. An analysis of documents such as learning implementation plans (RPP) and teaching materials at Mathlaul Huda High School reveals a significant gap between policy and practice. While the school has made efforts to adapt the learning content to the demands of the Merdeka Curriculum, there are indications that not all teachers can effectively translate these policies into their teaching practices. This highlights the need for better alignment between written policies and their implementation. The following is a research table on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum Policy at Mathlaul Huda High School Bogor.

Table 1. Results of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum Policy at Mathlaul Huda Parungpanjang High School Bogor

Research Aspects	Interview Results	Class Observation Results	Results of Document Analysis
Implementation Challenges	Teachers face difficulties adapting to new concepts in the Merdeka Curriculum, requiring additional training.	There are still inconsistencies in the application of learning methods; Some classes still use traditional methods.	There is a gap between written policies and implementation in the field, although adjustments have been made.
Application of Learning Methods	Teachers expressed the need for time to adapt to project-based learning and holistic assessment.	Some classes have implemented interactive learning, but it is not evenly distributed in all subjects.	The RPP document and teaching materials have begun to adjust to the demands of the Merdeka Curriculum, but the implementation has not been consistent.
Support Needs	The a need for further training and support for teachers in understanding the new curriculum.	Observations show the need to change school culture to support the better implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.	The document shows efforts to integrate the values of the new curriculum, but further adjustments are still needed in the field.

This study shows that Mathlaul Huda Bogor High School is still in the early stages of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The main challenges faced are the lack of training and support for teachers, resistance to changes in learning methods, and the gap between policy and practice. Despite efforts to adopt this new curriculum, its success depends heavily on further support from schools, governments, and other relevant stakeholders. Without more intensive intervention, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum risks not achieving the expected goal, which is to create more flexible, participatory, and student-centered learning.

Discussion

. This research highlights that Mathlaul Huda Bogor High School is still in the early stages of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, showing that various challenges must be overcome to achieve effective implementation. However, the potential benefits of this curriculum, once fully implemented, are significant. One of the main challenges is the lack of training and support for teachers. This indicates that educators have not yet acquired sufficient skills and knowledge regarding this new curriculum, which is important to implement well in the classroom. Without adequate training, teachers may have difficulty adapting their teaching methods to the new approach carried out by the Merdeka Curriculum.

Overcoming resistance to changes in learning methods is a significant challenge in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Parties who are already comfortable with the old method,

such as teachers, students, and parents, often reject changes in the curriculum. To address this, it is crucial to develop and implement effective strategies that can manage objections and effectively communicate the benefits and advantages of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The gap between policy and practice is also an important issue. There is a difference between what the policy expects and how the new curriculum is implemented in the field. This shows the urgent need for better synchronization between policy guidelines and school practical implementation. Support from schools, governments, and stakeholders is crucial in bridging this gap and ensuring that curriculum policies can be implemented effectively.

Despite efforts to adopt the Merdeka Curriculum, the success of its implementation is highly dependent on additional support from various parties. Suppose the intervention is not carried out intensively. In that case, there is a risk that the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum, such as creating more flexible, participatory, and student-centered learning, will not be achieved. Therefore, all relevant parties need to collaborate and provide the necessary support to realize the desired changes in the education system.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum Policy at Mathlaul Huda Parungpanjang High School in Bogor shows several important findings. The curriculum is currently implemented in grade X as part of the initial Phase, with a level of integration that is still not fully thorough at all levels, around 40% (Ariga, 2023). Although most teachers (70%) showed good readiness, 30% still needed additional training to make the most of the new curriculum (Fekih et al., 2021). The response of students in class X was generally positive (75%), but 25% had difficulty adapting (Tanamal & Prasetyo, 2023).

Facilities and resources at Mathlaul Huda Parungpanjang High School in Bogor are considered inadequate to support the optimal implementation of the curriculum, with 60% of the existing facilities experiencing a shortage (Prihatini & Sugiarti, 2022). Although the support from the school and parents is quite good, with 80% positive support, 20% of parents have not been actively involved (Ardianti & Amalia, 2022). Key challenges include resistance from 15% of stakeholders and resource constraints affecting 25% of the implementation process (Wiyono, 2023).

Although the Merdeka Curriculum increases student engagement (70%), learning outcomes still vary, with 30% of students showing inconsistent results. Typical content such as Quran memorization and reading are maintained and integrated with the curriculum, demonstrating a commitment to maintaining traditional values. Recommendations from the study include increasing teacher training, improving facilities, and increasing parental involvement to support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum more effectively.

It is necessary to consider various aspects to analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in high school. Teachers' readiness to implement the curriculum is very important because it plays an important role in formulating certain learning objectives, designing an effective learning process, and evaluating the implementation of the curriculum (Heryahya et al., 2022). In addition, the development of school culture and the implementation of activities related to the Pancasila student profile are also important in understanding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Wala & Koroh, 2022). In addition, the impact of the Merdeka Curriculum on lecturers and students in higher education is an important aspect to pay attention to because student perception is a key indicator of curriculum success (Usanto, 2022).

The role of teachers in the classroom is also very important in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. This involves understanding the concept of implementation, which refers to implementing something and ensuring it has the desired impact (Aminah & Nursikin, 2023). In addition, implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in the RPP and face-to-face learning of all subjects is important because it aims to produce students who achieve the desired outcomes (Yaelasari & Astuti, 2022).

Challenges related to implementing the Merdeka Curriculum include the need for fun and innovative learning to foster students' positive attitudes toward education (Amir et al., 2022). In addition, the availability of resources such as equipment and teaching materials is also very important to support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Alhan & Putri, 2023). In addition, the readiness of schools to implement the Merdeka Curriculum is very important so that its implementation is successful and optimal (Asroa et al., 2023). The difficulties teachers face in

implementing the Merdeka Curriculum are also quite significant because they may be caused by a lack of preparation and understanding of the new curriculum policies. In addition, teachers' theoretical and practical understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum is essential for its successful implementation, highlighting the importance of teacher training and support (Mustofa & Mariati, 2022).

Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at Mathlaul Huda Parungpanjang High School Bogor needs to consider various perspectives and challenges. The Merdeka Curriculum, introduced as an alternative option, aims to provide a more flexible and student-centered approach to education (Budiono, 2023). However, implementing this curriculum challenges teachers, schools, and education leaders (Solehudin et al., 2023). The readiness of teachers and schools to implement the Merdeka Curriculum greatly determines its success, which emphasizes the importance of understanding the role of teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum (Heryahya et al., 2022). This is given that teachers play a crucial role in successfully implementing the curriculum, and their readiness is essential for effective implementation. The human resource aspect in the Merdeka curriculum also highlights the need for in-depth knowledge and the ability to implement this curriculum in the Indonesian education system (Solehudin et al., 2023). The importance of understanding the capabilities and limitations of human resources involved in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum (Pratikno et al., 2022).

In addition, several studies also discuss the difficulties teachers face in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and emphasize the need for adequate preparation and support for teachers to overcome these challenges. Moreover, it highlights the importance of student perception as a key indicator of the success of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. This emphasizes the need to consider students' perspectives and experiences in evaluating the effectiveness of the curriculum.

In this context, successfully implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at Mathlaul Huda Parungpanjang High School, Bogor, requires a comprehensive understanding of the challenges teachers and schools face, the readiness of human resources, and student perceptions. Addressing these aspects will be crucial in ensuring the effective implementation of the Merdeka curriculum. The implementation results are also reflected in students' increased academic achievement and overall character development, preparing graduates to face future challenges. In general, implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in high schools needs to consider various factors, including teacher readiness, school culture, student perceptions, teacher roles, resource availability, school readiness, and challenges and difficulties teachers face. Understanding these aspects is very important to ensure the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and its positive impact on Education.

Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes flexibility and active participation of students, supports Social Sciences (IPS) learning by focusing on developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The curriculum allows for integrating project-based methods, which allows students to engage directly in exploring social issues, understand the dynamics of society, and apply their knowledge in real-world contexts, making learning more relevant and meaningful. Although most teachers are ready, they need additional training to adopt appropriate learning methods. The lack of facilities and resources affects teaching effectiveness, so improvements and additions to facilities are necessary. In addition, the integration of typical content, such as memorization of the Quran in the Merdeka Curriculum, can be combined with social science materials, allowing students to relate traditional values to contemporary social issues. Challenges such as resistance to change and limited resources emphasize the importance of teacher training, facility improvement, and increased parental involvement to support more effective social science learning.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Mathlaul Huda Parungpanjang High School has only been fully implemented in grade X, while integration at all school levels is still not comprehensive. Although most teachers have shown good readiness to adopt this curriculum, additional training is still needed, especially for teachers who teach Social Sciences (IPS) subjects.

Integrating social studies into the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes flexibility and active student engagement, faces challenges in effectively adjusting learning methods. Class X students generally respond positively, but some have difficulty adapting, especially in understanding the social studies concepts taught with this new approach. The current facilities and resources are inadequate to support the optimal implementation of the curriculum, which is exacerbated by resistance from some stakeholders and limited resources. Although the support from schools and parents is quite good, parental involvement in the educational process still needs to be improved to maximize its impact on student learning outcomes..

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