

ANALYSIS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MERDEKA LEARNING CURRICULUM AT BUNTU AMPANG PRIMARY SCHOOL

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article History: <i>Received: date of received article</i> <i>Accepted: date of accepted article</i>	<i>This study aims to analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum at SDN Buntu Ampang, Baroko District, Enrekang Regency, through the implementation process, obstacles encountered, and the impacts after its implementation. This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive research type. The research subjects consisted of the principal, teachers, and students. Data collection techniques were carried out through interviews, observation, and documentation. Data analysis was carried out through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of the study indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum at SDN Buntu Ampang has been carried out quite well, especially in the planning and implementation of learning that is more flexible and student-centered. Teachers act as facilitators by using teaching modules and various learning methods, such as discussions, group work, and project-based learning. However, in the implementation there are still several obstacles, including limited internet access, and minimal training and mentoring of teachers related to the Merdeka curriculum. The impact of the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum shows an increase in learning motivation, activeness, creativity and independence of students in the learning process. Therefore, the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum needs to be supported by improved facilities and infrastructure as well as ongoing training for teachers to ensure optimal implementation.</i>
Keywords :	
Keywords 1; Merdeka Curriculum Keywords 2; Curriculum Implementation Keywords 3; Elementary School Learning	

1. INTRODUCTION

Education has a very important role in advancing a nation. Education is expected to be able to educate the young generation who are able to develop their potential, as well as think critically and dynamically, be responsible, have noble morals, have faith and piety towards God Almighty. Education must also be able to produce human resources who have competencies, namely attitudes, knowledge and skills. Education is a reorganization of experience in increasing abilities to direct education in the future. According to Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System Chapter I Section 1

(paragraph 1). Education is basically a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and learning process so that students actively develop their potential to have spiritual religious strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble morals, and skills needed by themselves, society, nation, and state.

In accordance with the mandate of Law No. 20 of 2003 regarding the National Education System (commonly known as the Sisdiknas Law) and the aforementioned arguments, the education system is manifested through the curriculum, which serves as a primary reference at every educational level. From primary schools to higher education, the current elementary school system implements the Merdeka Curriculum (Merdeka Learning Curriculum), which was initially introduced in 2020.

The term "curriculum" was first used in the world of sports in Ancient Greece, derived from the words *curir* and *currere*. At that time, it was defined as the distance a runner had to cover, or more specifically, the race track from start to finish. Subsequently, the term was adopted into the field of education. Although educational experts offer varied interpretations, a common thread remains: curriculum is closely related to the effort of developing students in alignment with desired educational goals. Literally, "curriculum" comes from the Latin word *curriculum*, meaning instructional materials. The term evolved to represent a series of subjects that students must complete to obtain a degree or certificate. This definition aligns with the perspective of Saylor, Alexander, and Lewis (cited in Wina Sanjaya), who state that a curriculum is a prescribed set of subjects to be mastered by students.

Historically, the Indonesian education system has been heavily influenced by shifting political paradigms and power dynamics, often leading to the "new minister, new policy" phenomenon. However, the introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum marks a significant transition toward a more student-centered and flexible framework. The core of this curriculum lies in "Merdeka Belajar" (Freedom to Learn), which prioritizes essential materials and character development through the Pancasila Student Profile Project (P5). Key innovations include the removal of rigid academic streaming in high schools and the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL). By focusing on contextual problem-solving rather than rote exam preparation, the Merdeka Curriculum aims to create a more engaging, relevant, and meaningful educational experience for both teachers and students.

The Merdeka Curriculum is an enhancement of the 2013 Curriculum. The Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek RI) officially launched this framework in February 2022. It aims to improve the equity of education quality in Indonesia by optimally implementing diverse and in-depth learning approaches (Dikdasmen, 2022). Under this curriculum, the learning process is designed to be flexible, Merdeka, active, and focused on character building.

The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes that educators must focus on students' learning outcomes rather than merely striving for material completion, as seen in traditional education. One of its flagship initiatives is the Pancasila Student Profile strengthening project. This program is designed to instill character traits aligned with Pancasila values through various themes, such as the environment, diversity, and entrepreneurship. These projects are conducted at least twice a year. Significant transitions from the 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum include the merging of Natural Sciences (IPA) and Social Sciences (IPS) into a single subject called IPAS.

This integration aims to help students understand natural and social environments holistically. Furthermore, Computational Thinking is now integrated into Indonesian Language, Mathematics, and IPAS. Arts subjects are categorized as elective or skill-based subjects. As part of the 2022 learning recovery efforts, the Ministry of Education (Kemendikbudristek) established a policy allowing schools not yet ready for the Merdeka Curriculum to continue using the 2013 Curriculum or the Emergency Curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum remains an optional framework for schools prepared for its implementation. Consequently, its rollout is not mandatory or massive; instead, it provides flexibility for educational units to implement the curriculum according to their readiness.

According to the Decree of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology No. 56 of 2022 concerning Guidelines for Curriculum Implementation in the Context of Learning Recovery,

the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented in stages. The regulations specify that the first year covers Grades 1 and 4; the second year extends to Grades 1, 2, 4, and 5; and the third year encompasses all grades from 1 to 6.

Currently, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools is being carried out gradually, specifically in Grades 1 and 4. In the second year, this will expand to Grades 2 and 5. However, several obstacles hinder the implementation process, including a lack of teaching materials, low motivation, and insufficient internal support from schools. Teacher unreadiness, resulting from limited training, has led to classroom instruction that is occasionally difficult for students to comprehend. Furthermore, teachers still require professional development regarding the Merdeka development of teaching modules. Inadequate infrastructure and sub-optimal instructional planning remain the primary barriers to the effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The aforementioned phenomena are highly relevant to the conditions at SDN Buntu Ampang, Baroko District, Enrekang Regency. Based on observations conducted on January 11, 2024, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has not proceeded smoothly due to limited internet access and unstable connectivity. Consequently, there is an urgent need for technology-based instructional media. Furthermore, the lack of professional training and mentoring for teachers remains a significant barrier. Without adequate resources and support, the effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is difficult to achieve.

Failure to investigate and find solutions for the issues at SDN Buntu Ampang will result in delays in curriculum adoption, potentially causing students to fall behind and decreasing the overall quality of education. Through this research, the author aims to identify solutions to the obstacles hindering the implementation process at the school.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the classroom often encounters various obstacles. This is primarily because the curriculum is still in its early stages, leaving both teachers and students unaccustomed to the systemic changes. Consequently, some instructional processes lack innovation, and teachers occasionally revert to Teacher-Centered Learning patterns.

Instructional methods under the Merdeka Curriculum differ significantly from the 2013 Curriculum, particularly in the utilization of teaching modules and textbooks as primary learning keys. Teachers are expected to provide learning experiences that are enjoyable, empowering, and meaningful for every student. Thus, the teacher plays a pivotal role in ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of this curriculum. Accordingly, this research was conducted to evaluate the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and identify the factors influencing its success in the field.

This study draws upon several relevant previous researches as comparative references: Nurul Hasanah et al. (2022), regarding the socialization of the Merdeka Curriculum to improve teacher knowledge at Muhammadiyah 04 Private Elementary School, Binjai; Fadhilah Addini (2022), concerning the improvement of learning outcomes in Fiqh subjects; M. Fikri Khusni et al. (2022), regarding the implementation at MIN 1 Wonosobo, which noted that the curriculum was not yet fully operational due to heavy academic workloads; Shoffiya Hattarina et al. (2022), focusing on the structural framework of the Merdeka Curriculum in educational institutions; M. Reza Arviansyah & A. Shagena (2022), examining teacher effectiveness and the problematic aspects of curriculum implementation.

The objectives of this research are to analyze the implementation process, identify the obstacles encountered, and evaluate the impact of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation at SDN Buntu Ampang.

2. METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design. Qualitative research is a method that describes specific social conditions through authentic and accurate descriptions in the form of words, derived from the collection and analysis of relevant data within a natural setting. The research will be conducted at SDN Buntu Ampang, Baroko District, Enrekang Regency, during the odd semester. The subjects of this study include the teachers at SDN Buntu Ampang. The research instruments and data

collection techniques consist of interviews, observations, and documentation. Data analysis is performed through several stages, beginning with data collection, followed by data reduction and data display.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

Based on i Instructional Process and Classroom Atmosphere The observation was conducted in the second-grade classroom of SD Buntu Ampang, Baroko District, Enrekang Regency. The teacher initiated the lesson with a greeting and an engaging opening activity. The classroom atmosphere appeared lively; students were actively asking questions, and the teacher responded positively while encouraging participation from all students.

Differentiated Instruction and Methodology The teacher utilized Merdeka Curriculum teaching modules (modul ajar) tailored to the classroom's needs. Materials were delivered through various methods, such as small group discussions, presentations, and the use of visual media or videos. Students were given opportunities to complete tasks both collaboratively and Merdekaly, depending on their individual learning styles and abilities.

Assessment and Reflection In the assessment process, the teacher did not focus solely on the final outcome but also evaluated the students' learning process (Formative Assessment). The teacher provided both oral and written feedback and encouraged students to reflect on their own learning. By providing space for expression, inquiry, and creativity through mini-projects, educational games, and group discussions the learning process became significantly more engaging. Furthermore, the teacher adapted the learning approach to accommodate varying student abilities, including students with special needs.

Impact and Evaluation The implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum at SD Buntu Ampang demonstrates a positive effort to create meaningful and enjoyable learning. The teacher actively served as a facilitator, and students showed high enthusiasm. Students are no longer confined to conventional methods; instead, the curriculum stimulates their curiosity and fosters creativity.

Conclusion and Recommendations Beyond academic knowledge, this curriculum emphasizes character development, creativity, and essential skills such as problem-solving, communication, and teamwork. Assessment is conducted not only through exams but also through projects, presentations, and practical tasks, providing a more accurate representation of student understanding. However, to achieve optimal results, continuous professional development for teachers, procurement of learning facilities, and intensive mentoring are required to better prepare students for Merdeka and project-based learning.



(Figure 1. The researcher conducting an in-depth interview with the Principal of SD Buntu Ampang, Baroko District, Enrekang Regency)

The successful implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum relies on two critical pillars: Adequate Infrastructure and Adaptive Management. Flexible classroom environments are essential to support diverse learning activities, ranging from collaborative group work to Merdeka study. Complementing this, an adaptive and participatory school management system—where principals and teachers collaborate effectively is vital for resource optimization and strategic instructional leadership.

When high-quality infrastructure meets effective management, the Merdeka Curriculum can be executed optimally, fostering an innovative learning environment that yields a positive impact on student development.

Interviews with several informants, the author concludes that the Merdeka Curriculum is highly beneficial as it supports both students and teachers in the learning process. Teachers are granted the autonomy to design activities tailored to students' interests while remaining aligned with the required competency standards. The Principal and teachers at SDN Buntu Ampang have planned their instruction based on the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. The Principal stated that teachers have been given the flexibility to design learning activities, supported by the provision of necessary resources and facilities such as instructional materials, technology, and a conducive learning environment.

Consequently, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN Buntu Ampang is proceeding effectively. This finding reinforces the research by Indrawarmi (2022) titled "Teacher Perceptions of Nadiem Makarim's Merdeka Belajar Concept in Thematic Learning at SD Negeri 140 Seluma". That study indicated that teachers hold a positive perception of the Merdeka Belajar concept, as reflected in their willingness to adopt current policies.

However, this study is not entirely aligned with the findings of Isthofiyani et al. (2014). Their research suggests that frequent curriculum changes are not universally accepted by all schools and educators. While some institutions embrace these changes as a government effort to improve the educational system, others feel that the frequent transitions are overwhelming and inconsistent. Furthermore, the lack of simultaneous implementation across schools is often hindered by geographical factors, which directly impact the disparity in teacher competencies.

b. Challenges in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary level faces multifaceted challenges, particularly in remote areas where limited access to ICT devices and unstable internet connectivity hinder the use of the "Platform Merdeka Mengajar" (PMM). Beyond infrastructure, teachers especially senior educators struggle to adapt to student-centered approaches such as differentiated instruction and diagnostic assessments, as previous socializations were often perceived as too theoretical. In response, schools have initiated strategic measures, including practical workshops on Project-Based Learning (PjBL) and realigning school visions to improve facilities. Furthermore, while parental engagement remains low due to a lack of understanding of the new paradigm, students demonstrate significant resilience by actively participating in class and seeking supplementary resources to overcome learning obstacles.



(Figure 2. Implementation of Collaborative ICT-Based Learning in Elementary Schools)

The documentation illustrates a group of elementary school students engaged in collaborative learning using laptops, guided by their teacher. While this reflects the active and student-centered spirit

of the Merdeka Curriculum, it also serves as a critical reflection of the systemic challenges faced by schools with limited resources.

Key obstacles identified in this implementation include inadequate ICT infrastructure and unstable internet connectivity, which hinder access to digital learning platforms. Furthermore, teacher readiness remains a concern as educators navigate the transition to becoming digital facilitators. These issues are compounded by uneven student literacy levels, limited parental support, and the broader digital divide, all of which necessitate a more localized and resourceful approach to curriculum adaptation.

One of the inhibiting factors in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is limited instructional time. Teachers face challenges in time management as they are required to identify the unique characters, interests, and talents of a large number of students. To address this, a transparent explanation of the Merdeka Belajar concept must be provided to students, and teachers should be granted policy flexibility to adjust their teaching schedules effectively.

This finding aligns with a study by Kasmawati (2021) titled "Teacher Perceptions of Educational Concepts (A Study on the Implementation of Merdeka Belajar at SMAN 5 Takalar)." That study identified that the lack of understanding among teachers, students, and the community regarding the Merdeka Belajar framework remains a major obstacle. Furthermore, the autonomy granted to students can sometimes lead to behavior that deviates from established norms. To mitigate these issues, SMAN 5 Takalar conducted teacher training and intensive socialization of the curriculum's core concepts.

Interview results suggest that collaboration between teachers, parents, and the school is essential to overcome student barriers. A key solution is encouraging students to become more active in asking questions and engaging in discussions. As stated by Nur Hilal Haq: "During the learning process, I should ask more questions about things I do not understand to avoid difficulties in subsequent lessons." This highlights the necessity of student agency in addressing learning gaps.

In conclusion, the primary obstacles to implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN Buntu Ampang include time constraints and suboptimal internet connectivity. This is consistent with Prasetyo's (2023) research, which emphasizes the need for collaborative efforts between the government, schools, and the community through teacher training programs and infrastructure development. With strong collaboration between schools and parents, these hurdles can be overcome to ensure the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

c. Impact of Implementing the Merdeka Learning Curriculum

Field observations indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has significantly improved instructional dynamics. The curriculum's flexibility, which prioritizes student interests and needs, has successfully boosted student enthusiasm and active participation, resulting in a more vibrant classroom atmosphere. Pedagogically, teachers have begun adopting diverse methods such as differentiated learning and formative assessments. These approaches allow educators to identify individual strengths and weaknesses more effectively, ensuring that instruction is personalized and aligned with each student's specific competency level.

Furthermore, the integration of technology particularly through the Platform Merdeka Mengajar (PMM) has streamlined the development of teaching materials and assessment tools. However, these benefits are currently more prevalent in schools with adequate technological infrastructure. Conversely, the transition has increased the teachers' workload as they must prepare more diverse and individualized lesson plans. This highlights the urgent need for continuous professional training and better time management support to prevent teacher burnout. In conclusion, while the Merdeka Curriculum fosters innovation and student motivation, its long-term success depends heavily on equitable resource distribution and comprehensive stakeholder support.



(Figure 3. Fostering a Relaxed and Open Learning Environment)

The Merdeka Curriculum holds significant potential to positively impact Indonesian education, particularly by providing space for creativity, independence, and character development. The implementation of this framework allows students to explore their interests and talents more freely, which in turn enhances their learning motivation and achievements.

A significant shift brought by this curriculum is the freedom for students to choose learning paths suited to their aptitudes. Mrs. Nur Syamsi Hasan, Principal of SDN Buntu Ampang, explained that this aspect allows students to feel more connected to the subject matter. Furthermore, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes recognizing student abilities beyond traditional testing. Mrs. Nurleila, a classroom teacher at SDN Buntu Ampang, added that students feel more valued, which boosts their self-confidence. This aligns with research by Suryantika & Aliyyah (2023), stating that the Merdeka Curriculum aims to improve critical thinking, communication, and collaboration skills.

Interview results further indicate that since the implementation, students have been motivated to become more Merdeka and proactive in managing their learning schedules. Overall, the application of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN Buntu Ampang has yielded positive outcomes in terms of instructional transformation. This is supported by the findings of Agung Hartoyo et al., which suggest that prioritizing interest-based learning creates a more positive and interactive classroom environment. Learning is now perceived as a liberating experience rather than a daunting one. While challenges in consistent implementation remain, adequate teacher training, parental support, and equitable educational facilities will ensure that the Merdeka Curriculum achieves its goal of fostering an inclusive and relevant education system in Indonesia.

d. The Novelty

The Merdeka Curriculum is a response to the need for an educational system that is more adaptive, contextual, and student-centered. Compared to the previous curriculum (K13), the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes self-directed learning, differentiated instruction, and Project-Based Learning (PjBL) to strengthen the Pancasila Student Profile. The following are several innovative aspects of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation compared to its predecessors:

1) A student-centered learning approach.

The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes learning that aligns with the interests and needs of students. Teachers are granted the flexibility to adapt instructional materials and teaching methods to ensure they remain relevant to the learners. Through differentiated instruction, educators possess the autonomy to design lessons tailored to the students' achievement levels and individual characteristics, rather than strictly adhering to a rigid, centralized curriculum.

2) A More Flexible Curriculum Structure.

Focus on Essential Material: The content within the Merdeka Curriculum is simplified to focus more on essential and in-depth subject matter. This stands in contrast to the previous curriculum, which was densely packed and tended to prioritize the exhaustive completion of Basic Competencies (KD). By

focusing on essential material, teachers have more time to foster students' fundamental literacy and numeracy skills.

3) Character Strengthening through the Project for Strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile (P5).

The Merdeka Curriculum promotes interdisciplinary learning through integrated, specialized projects. These projects are designed to instill character traits in alignment with the Pancasila Student Profile. This character-building process is not limited to classroom instruction but is also achieved through concrete experiences that are relevant to the students' environment and context.

4) The Role of the Teacher as an Instructional Designer.

Teachers play a more significant role as autonomous instructional designers. They are granted full authority to develop learning objectives and instructional tools, such as the Operational Curriculum of the Educational Unit (KOSP), which is tailored to meet student needs. Furthermore, educators are encouraged to innovate and design more creative learning experiences, such as implementing Project-Based Learning (PjBL) or Problem-Based Learning (PBL) models.

5) A More Formative and Diagnostic Assessment Approach.

Process-based assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum places greater emphasis on formative and diagnostic assessments to monitor student readiness and learning progress, rather than focusing solely on the final outcome. This evaluation framework is more flexible, valuing individual growth and student creativity instead of relying strictly on numerical grades or final scores.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

a. Conclusions

Based on observations and interviews regarding the Analysis of Merdeka Belajar Curriculum Implementation at SDN Buntu Ampang, Baroko District, Enrekang Regency, conducted with the Principal, teachers, and students, several key points form the conclusions of this study. The observational results indicate that the understanding of the Merdeka Belajar implementation concept among the Principal, teachers, and students is sufficiently high. They have grasped the fundamental principles of this curriculum as a flexible learning framework. Based on these findings, the conclusions of this research are as follows:

1) Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum at SDN Buntu Ampang

The Principal and teachers at SDN Buntu Ampang demonstrate a solid understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum concepts and have successfully designed learning activities that align with students' interests and needs. This indicates that the curriculum can enhance educational quality through a more flexible and relevant approach. Furthermore, students have shown a positive perception of the Merdeka Curriculum. They feel more comfortable as the curriculum grants them the freedom to choose learning paths based on their interests, making the learning process more enjoyable and leading to significantly higher motivation.

2) Obstacles in Implementing the Merdeka Learning Curriculum

A primary obstacle in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is the limitation of instructional time, particularly in lower grade levels. Both the Principal and teachers expressed that the time available to manage curriculum content while simultaneously tailoring it to student interests is highly constrained. Furthermore, some students encounter difficulties in grasping the subject matter, especially when completing home-based assignments. This issue stems from a methodological gap between the Merdeka Curriculum and its predecessor, compounded by insufficient parental support during the transition. Additionally, suboptimal infrastructure remains a significant hurdle. Poor internet connectivity in this region poses a major challenge, as technology is intended to be a vital supporting pillar for the effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

3) Impact of Implementing the Merdeka Learning Curriculum

After the implementation of the Merdeka learning curriculum, it provides freedom for students to choose a learning path that suits their interests and talents. This makes students more engaged with the

material being studied. A more inclusive approach in the Meirdeika curriculum provides recognition for students' abilities that are not only assessed through exams or tests. This helps students feel more valued, increases their self-confidence, and motivates them to learn. The Meirdeika curriculum also encourages students to learn more Merdeka and manage their time better. This leads to increased personal responsibility in the learning process.

b. Suggestions

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- 1) Optimization of Instructional Time: Schools should design more flexible schedules and implement differentiated instruction to cater to varying student needs within limited timeframes.
- 2) Infrastructure and Technology Enhancement: Collaborating with local authorities to improve internet access is vital. In the interim, teachers should utilize offline-based digital resources and undergo consistent training in digital pedagogy.
- 3) Parental Engagement: Schools should organize workshops to align parents' understanding with Merdeka Curriculum methods, ensuring supportive home learning environments.
- 4) Fostering Student Agency: Teachers should promote independence through small-scale research projects and active classroom discussions to enhance students' critical thinking and time management.
- 5) Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation: Regular feedback loops involving all stakeholders (teachers, students, and parents) are essential to refine instructional strategies and address implementation hurdles.
- 6) Inclusive and Experiential Learning: Learning should focus on practical, project-based activities that align with students' personal development and local contexts.

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