

## Educational Transformation: Implementation and Impact of the Merdeka Curriculum in Elementary Schools

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**ABSTRACT:** This study analyzes the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Anggaranu Elementary School. The purpose of this research is to explore the efforts, challenges, and successes in implementing the curriculum at the elementary school level. Data were collected through interviews and documentation, involving school administrators, teachers, and students. The findings reveal positive transformations in education, emphasizing literacy, creativity, and character development. The challenges faced include changing teaching paradigms and developing teacher competencies. Proposed solutions include collaborative planning, innovative teaching methods, and training programs such as Teacher Working Groups (KKG) and Teacher Learning Groups (Kombel Guru). Collaboration with parents and the community also supports curriculum implementation. Positive responses highlight the benefits of the Merdeka Curriculum, with an emphasis on individualized learning and creative thinking. Although progress has been made, challenges remain, requiring continuous evaluation. The study concludes that the implementation reflects innovative educational transformation, with the active involvement of the principal playing a crucial role. Challenges have been overcome through collaborative efforts and technology integration. Ongoing teacher training, collaboration, and infrastructure improvement are recommended for long-term success. These findings contribute to curriculum development and serve as a reference for education policymakers and stakeholders.

**Keywords:** Educational Innovation, Educational Transformation, Learning Paradigm, Merdeka Curriculum Implementation.

**ABSTRAK:** Penelitian ini menganalisis implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di Sekolah Dasar Anggaranu. Tujuan studi ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi upaya, tantangan, dan keberhasilan dalam menerapkan kurikulum pada tingkat sekolah dasar. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara dan dokumentasi, melibatkan administrator sekolah, guru, dan siswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan transformasi positif dalam pendidikan, dengan penekanan pada literasi, kreativitas, dan pengembangan karakter. Tantangan yang dihadapi termasuk perubahan paradigma pengajaran dan pengembangan kompetensi guru. Solusi yang diusulkan mencakup perencanaan kolaboratif, metode pengajaran inovatif, dan program pelatihan seperti Kelompok Kerja Guru (KKG) dan Kelompok Belajar Guru (Kombel Guru). Kolaborasi dengan orang tua dan masyarakat juga mendukung implementasi kurikulum. Respon positif menyoroti manfaat Kurikulum Merdeka, dengan penekanan pada pembelajaran individual dan pemikiran kreatif. Meskipun kemajuan telah dicapai, tantangan tetap ada, membutuhkan evaluasi berkelanjutan. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa implementasi mencerminkan transformasi pendidikan yang inovatif, dengan keterlibatan aktif kepala sekolah memainkan peran penting. Tantangan telah diatasi melalui upaya kolaboratif dan integrasi teknologi. Pelatihan guru yang berkelanjutan, kolaborasi, dan peningkatan infrastruktur direkomendasikan untuk keberhasilan jangka panjang. Temuan ini berkontribusi pada

pengembangan kurikulum dan menjadi referensi bagi pembuat kebijakan dan pemangku kepentingan pendidikan.

**Kata kunci:** Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka, Inovasi Pendidikan, Paradigma Pembelajaran, Transformasi Pendidikan.

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## INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the key sectors in the development of a country, including in the context of building quality human resources in the era of globalization and technological advancement. Education, both in a specific and general context, refers to human efforts to develop inherent talents and potential, both physically and spiritually, in accordance with the values upheld by society and culture (Pristiwanti et al., 2022). Humans can survive and enhance their intelligence on this planet thanks to the essential role of education. Education has brought about significant advancements through research and development, both in the utilization of natural resources and in the development of human potential itself (Farihin, 2023).

In efforts to improve the quality of education, the curriculum becomes a highly important aspect and holds a central role. The "Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka" (MBKM) Curriculum is one of the curriculum innovations introduced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia. The Merdeka Curriculum embodies a learning concept that emphasizes empowering students to learn independently, creatively, and innovatively, while enhancing their competencies to face 21st-century challenges.

This research aims to analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Anggaranu Public Elementary School (SDN Anggaranu). SDN Anggaranu was selected as the research site because it is one of the schools that has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum since its national enactment. Through this implementation analysis, it is hoped that a comprehensive understanding can be obtained regarding the efforts, challenges, and successes in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary level.

It is expected that the results of this study will contribute to the development of the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary level and serve as a reference for relevant parties, including the government, schools, and educational policymakers. Additionally, this research is also expected to provide insights for other researchers interested in the field of curriculum and the implementation of educational innovations.

## METHODS

This research is a qualitative study using a case study approach (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Qualitative research is a type of research aimed at providing a description of naturally occurring events. The case study approach is suitable for research involving contemporary events studied in a natural setting where the researcher does not intervene in the behavior of the subjects being studied (Gomm et al., 2000). Case

studies allow research data to be collected through various methods and sources (Green et al., 2006), combining the description and analysis of events and data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

In this research, two types of data sources were used: primary data sources and secondary data sources. Primary data were obtained through interviews with the school principal, teachers, and students. Meanwhile, secondary data consisted of documentation and important archives. Other examples include books relevant to the research topic.

Data were collected through interviews and documentation methods in this study. The respondents involved included the school principal, teachers, and students. During the interviews, the researcher referred to prepared guidelines. Additionally, the documentation approach involved gathering data relevant to the research focus. Data analysis was conducted using an inductive qualitative data analysis model (Miles et al., 2014), which included steps such as data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion formulation.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

A curriculum is a plan or scheme containing a series of teaching and learning plans designed to achieve educational goals. According to Tyler, a curriculum refers to the totality of learning experiences designed by a school to achieve specific educational objectives. This includes all materials taught in the classroom, teaching methods used, school activities, and extracurricular experiences designed to achieve these goals (Tyler & Hlebowitsh, 2013). The educational goals themselves have been outlined in the Constitution regarding Indonesia's national educational goals in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System. The articles regulating national educational goals are found in Chapter II, Articles 3 to 6 (National, 2003).

Indonesia has experienced many changes in curriculum implementation from 1947 to the present. Recently, the Ministry of Education and Culture (KEMENDIKBUD) made a breakthrough with a new curriculum called the Merdeka Curriculum. Nadiem Makarim, as the Minister of Education and Culture, initiated the introduction of the "Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka" (MBKM) Curriculum (Vhalery et al., 2022). The concept of "Merdeka Belajar" aims to liberate education by providing freedom of thought and innovation. The Merdeka Curriculum program has been widely socialized, but few academics and practitioners truly understand this concept.

### **Discussion**

The Merdeka Curriculum was introduced as an innovative step to improve the quality of education in Indonesia, focusing on empowering students to learn independently, creatively, and innovatively. This study analyzes the implementation process of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN Anggaranu, including challenges faced,

strategies employed, and responses from stakeholders such as the principal, teachers, and students.

In its application, the school principal actively participates in the development, planning, and evaluation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN Anggaranu. Udin Saepudin, S. Pd, the Principal of SDN Anggaranu, emphasized that active and effective collaboration is crucial for the school as an educational unit. This collaboration encompasses planning, implementation, and follow-up on the resulting outcomes. According to him, dominant involvement in these processes is vital for curriculum development. In other words, effective collaboration among various school stakeholders is a determining factor for the success of curriculum development and implementation.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN Anggaranu, as highlighted by the principal, focuses on literacy with the primary aim of influencing students' morals, religion, and character. The initial step in applying this curriculum is ensuring that all students, from grades 1 to 6, have a fundamental understanding of reading. Techniques used include reading aloud, text comprehension, and observation. This is carried out through school activities and literacy programs. For example, every Thursday, all students gather in the school yard for a joint literacy activity. Book literacy refers to an individual's ability to read, comprehend, interpret, analyze, and effectively use the information contained in books to gain knowledge and enhance understanding on various topics (McKool, 2006). These activities include student presentations, which are then rewarded by the school to encourage participation. This program is part of the extracurricular activities outside regular learning activities (KBM).

In the context of KBM, the principal grants teachers the freedom to design learning materials aligned with the curriculum, emphasizing creativity and flexibility in teaching approaches. Although the curriculum is independent in nature, evaluations are conducted through peer teacher evaluation sessions held twice a week. This approach ensures that despite its independent nature, the implementation of the curriculum stays aligned with the literacy goals and character development of the students. Peer evaluations are essential for ensuring teaching success. During these sessions, teachers provide constructive feedback to each other and collaborate to identify both positive and negative aspects of their teaching methods. The ultimate goal is to find joint solutions to enhance student learning outcomes (McGinn, 2009). Several challenges were identified in the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum at SDN Anggaranu. One of the main challenges, as stated by the Principal, is the shift in the learning paradigm that requires teachers to transition from being instructors to facilitators and mentors in the learning process. The role of teachers as facilitators in education has been an important topic of discussion in the field of education (Bull & Kajder, 2005).

The solution recommended by the Principal, according to Udin Saepudin, S. Pd, involves several steps to address the challenges in implementing the Merdeka

Curriculum. First, teachers are expected to explore and engage in activities related to understanding the curriculum and to convey this understanding to students. According to Sanjaya (2014), teachers are not merely sources of knowledge but facilitators who facilitate the learning process of students. Teachers do not only provide information to students but also help them construct their own knowledge. In their role as facilitators, teachers must be able to create a conducive learning environment, design learning activities that are relevant to students' needs, and provide guidance and support to students during the learning process.

In teaching and learning activities (KBM), collaboration between teachers, other school staff, parents, and students is considered important as the Merdeka Curriculum has a very broad scope. Teachers can gain deeper insights into students' needs from the perspective of parents and the students themselves, while parents can be actively involved in supporting their children's learning at home (Cummings, 2017). Through this collaboration, it has been found that students' motivation and participation in learning increase, while the social support provided by parents and the school strengthens the effectiveness of learning. Furthermore, to address the challenge of improving teachers' competence in teaching using innovative approaches, efforts are needed to provide adequate resources, such as infrastructure, learning materials, and training. These challenges must be addressed to enable teachers to effectively implement innovative approaches in line with the demands of the Merdeka Curriculum. With sufficient training, teachers can acquire new skills, understand new concepts, and improve their ability to design and conduct innovative learning that aligns with the new curriculum demands (Johnson, 2018). According to Farihin (2023), having quality human resources will enable a nation to advance further.

In facing changes or adjustments that may be required during the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (KUMER), the principal acknowledges that this is a challenge not only for the school in question but also for other schools. Teachers are faced with a dilemma because there are still tasks to be completed under the previous curriculum, while there is already a shift toward the new curriculum. Particularly in the context of KUMER, where English is taught starting from grade one, this adds complexity and requires better preparedness from the teachers. This challenge is recognized as difficult in the field, and some teachers may feel left behind or find it hard to adapt. Therefore, the principal emphasizes that addressing these changes starts with the teachers.

Teachers are expected to be prepared to face these changes, and an understanding of information technology (IT) is seen as a tool that can facilitate the adaptation process. Teacher readiness, both in terms of subject knowledge and the use of technology, is considered an essential first step in overcoming challenges that arise during the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Thus, concrete steps to address these challenges involve collaboration between teachers, school staff,

parents, and students, as well as providing sufficient resources to support the enhancement of teacher competencies.

SDN Anggaranu has adopted several strategies to overcome challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. One of these strategies is the training and professional development of teachers in innovative and student-centered learning. Education is an integral part of every individual and is considered a comprehensive training experience. This is an important investment for individuals to effectively interact with their social environment (Mulyawan, 2012). SDN Anggaranu also collaborates with relevant parties, including parents and the local community, to support the implementation of this curriculum. Additionally, the school has adjusted its infrastructure and available resources to support learning aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum.

For teacher professional development, two main activities are conducted: Teacher Working Groups (KKG) and Teacher Study Groups (Kombel Guru). Through KKG, teachers gather to discuss and analyze the curriculum, providing a platform for deeper understanding of the changes or developments within the Merdeka Curriculum. The Teacher Working Group (KKG) offers a space for teachers to participate in professional activities, particularly for those responsible for managing the learning process in the classroom, such as homeroom teachers (Al Rasyid, 2015). This activity allows teachers to share experiences, opinions, and evaluations related to curriculum implementation. Meanwhile, Kombel Guru in the school serves as a regular forum—held weekly, biweekly, or at least monthly—where teachers gather to share knowledge, opinions, and their evaluation results. This activity acts as a medium for enhancing communication and collaboration among teachers. Thus, establishing a Learning Community (Kombel) among teachers in educational institutions will be an effective step (Ritonga et al., 2023).

In communicating changes or developments in the Merdeka curriculum to all relevant parties, the principal uses effective strategies. Initially, the principal informs the teachers to announce to the parents. Communication with stakeholders such as the principal, teachers, parents, and the committee is maintained to remain open and transparent. This is important to avoid misunderstandings and ensure that all parties understand the curriculum implementation well. However, the principal also recognizes that certain boundaries need to be set in the curriculum implementation to maintain balance and clarity. Collaboration among stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, school staff, and other related parties, has a significant impact on the learning context in schools. This collaboration allows for the exchange of information, a better understanding of individual student needs, and the creation of a supportive learning environment (Cummings, 2017).

In this study, positive responses were found from the parties involved in the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum at SDN Anggaranu. The teachers reported that the Merdeka curriculum provides an opportunity to focus more on the individual needs of students and develop creativity and critical thinking skills. This aligns with

the statement from Mahruf S, Ag, the Vice Principal of SDN Anggaranu, who mentioned that the fundamental difference between the previous curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum (KUMER) lies in the more independent and innovative approach to learning. Teachers are now expected to keep up with innovations related to digital technology and IT, in line with the independent learning character. Students are encouraged to be truly independent in learning, where the learning load no longer feels heavy. The focus is on making teaching enjoyable, different from the learning approach in the Curriculum for Education Unit Level (KTSP), Active Student Learning (CBSA), and even the 2013 Curriculum.

The development of the curriculum from 1945 to 2006, known as the Curriculum for Education Unit Level (KTSP), was in effect until the end of 2012 (Zulkarnain, 2018). The curriculum has undergone continuous changes, with the main goal of improving the quality of education and learning at all educational levels or schools (Prasetyo & Rahman, 2023). CBSA is a teaching method implemented to improve skills and find solutions to problems to achieve specific goals. Active learning strategies involve student participation in seeking information to be learned during the learning process, aiming to enhance their learning experiences and improve the quality of education (Izmi, 2022).

The importance of freedom in learning for students in KUMER stands out, where students are given the freedom to express their ideas, thoughts, and opinions. The role of teachers is more as facilitators and motivators, while students are given the freedom to develop their talents and interests. The role of teachers, especially in facilitating character education, is key to its success and functions as a way to meet teachers' teaching time needs (Agung, 2017).

This curriculum emphasizes the concept of students' freedom to learn anywhere, not limited to the classroom. Students can learn according to their conditions and the surrounding environment, reflected in the Lesson Plan (RPP) that refers to the curriculum. This motivates students to be more creative because they are given freedom in learning, but still with the guidance of teachers who actively play the role of educators. Motivation is the internal dynamics of an individual marked by increased energy and the emergence of feelings, followed by responses to the goals they aim to achieve (M, 2004). Moreover, KUMER allows for more concrete and in-depth learning. Students are not only encouraged to think abstractly but also to directly observe and analyze by interacting with their environment. For example, in a lesson about animals, students can go directly to the field to see and understand what the animals are really like. This curriculum adds a new dimension to the teaching-learning process by emphasizing the concept of independence and freedom in developing students' potential.

Trianawati, S.Pd, a teacher, also expressed her satisfaction with the Merdeka curriculum being implemented at SDN Anggaranu. She stated that the current curriculum is more flexible compared to the previous curriculum. According to her, children found it harder to understand the previous curriculum because they only

received brief information. However, in the 2013 Curriculum, teachers are expected to have the skills to search for the materials to be delivered to students. Teachers are no longer relying solely on textbooks but are required to provide more detailed explanations so that students truly understand the subject matter. She also noted that in the current curriculum, every subject is considered a "gem" of learning (not as a subtopic as in the previous curriculum), so students can better understand the substance of each lesson they are learning. This provides clear guidance for students, and they can focus on learning the material being taught. In contrast to the previous curriculum, which tended to spread out and make the material confusing, the current curriculum is considered more focused and provides clarity for students regarding what they are learning. Meanwhile, students expressed their satisfaction with learning independently and having more room to develop their interests and talents. Sahrul, a fifth-grade student, shared his opinion on the comparison between the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum, saying that the implementation is the same, but the Merdeka curriculum is more fun. They emphasized that the implementation of the Computer-Based National Assessment (ANBK) is considered easier and more understandable. ANBK is an assessment or evaluation conducted at each level of education, from elementary school to high school/vocational school (Malaikosa & Permata, 2021). Additionally, students enjoy the Merdeka Curriculum more because it gives them freedom in learning, allowing them to study outside the classroom.

At this stage, a comparison is made between the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum at SDN Anggaranu and other nearby schools. The data shows that SDN Anggaranu has made positive progress in implementing the Merdeka curriculum, especially in terms of teachers' and students' readiness to adopt innovative approaches. However, some aspects still need improvement, such as enhancing infrastructure and obtaining full support from related parties.

## **CONCLUSION**

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN Anggaranu reflects an innovative transformation in education, focused on empowering students. With the active involvement of the principal, Udin Saepudin, S.Pd, the school does not just implement the curriculum as a series of subjects but as a holistic learning experience. The curriculum's initial focus is on literacy, particularly foundational reading skills, which are applied through a weekly literacy program every Thursday. Students from various classes gather on the field, participate in the joint literacy activity, and conclude the session with presentations that are appreciated by the school.

In the teaching and learning activities (KBM), teachers have the freedom to design learning materials in line with the curriculum, fostering creativity, and providing more diverse learning experiences. Although the approach is flexible, evaluation remains essential, with bi-weekly evaluation sessions among teachers. The shift in the learning paradigm, where teachers become facilitators and mentors,

presents a challenge. The proposed solution involves teachers exploring curriculum-related activities and collaborating with school staff, parents, and students.

Principal Udin Saepudin, S.Pd, acknowledges that the curriculum change, particularly the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, is a challenge that requires teacher preparedness. The process begins with understanding information technology (IT) as a facilitation tool for adaptation. Through the adoption of KBM, teachers can address the challenges posed by the previous curriculum and adjust to the new curriculum.

In the face of challenges, SDN Anggaranu has taken concrete steps. Teacher training and development through Teacher Working Groups (KKG) and Teacher Learning Groups (Kombel Guru) are key activities. Collaboration with parents and the local community supports the curriculum's implementation. Students respond positively, stating that KBM in the Merdeka Curriculum is more enjoyable and allows for learning outside the classroom. Regular evaluations and continuous improvement are integral parts of the school's efforts to ensure the success of the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation.

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