



Evaluation of the Challenges of Merdeka Curriculum in Education in Indonesia

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Abstract

The curriculum in teaching is a very important guideline. There are several types of curriculum in the world of education, one of which is the Merdeka curriculum in Indonesia. This study aims to evaluate the challenges of implementing the Merdeka curriculum in Indonesia. The methodology of this study is to use a qualitative descriptive research type with a qualitative approach through literature studies. The results of the study indicate the need for an evaluation of improvements to the Merdeka curriculum starting from the challenges of human resource readiness (teachers) as the main pillars of curriculum implementation, the challenges of teacher abilities in empowering digital-based technology facilities, the challenges of strengthening communication networks and partnerships between educational units and relevant stakeholders, and the challenges of carrying out the function of learning assessment which is an integrated part of learning. As well as obstacles originating from the condition of school facilities or infrastructure, the second obstacle is related to the condition of Human Resources owned by teachers and educators, the third obstacle is related to the condition of students, the school environment and families, the fourth obstacle is obstacles from the government. Based on the study's results with various evaluations of obstacles, it can be the basis for improving the education curriculum in the era of the leadership of the President of the Republic of Indonesia Prabowo Subianto.

Keywords: *Curriculum; Merdeka Curriculum; Indonesian Education*

Introduction

Education is one of the most important aspects of a country (Dumciuviene, 2015). Where education has a very vital role for the wheels of government to continue running (Astakhova et al, 2016). Where education can increase economic growth in the country (Hanushek & Wößmann, 2007; O'Neill, 1995). In realizing a good country that is supported from an educational perspective, cannot be separated from the education curriculum in the country (Fiala, 2007; Halinen, 2018).

Where each country depends on the quality of the curriculum, a good curriculum is considered to have a good impact on all elements of the government (Amrullah et al, 2024; Mulia et al 2023). Every country in its government always develops a curriculum that is considered good for its reign (Santika et al, 2022; Morris. 2019; Hughes et al 1996).

The development of the ever-changing education curriculum also occurs in Indonesia (Abong, 2015; Soleman, 2020; Sukmayadi & Yahya, 2020). Where Indonesia is currently implementing an merdeka curriculum (Fauzan et al, 2023; Fuadi et al 2023). The merdeka curriculum was brought by the Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture, Nadiem Makarim, since 2020 and is still used in the education curriculum in Indonesia even though the new Minister of Education has changed.

The characteristics of the merdeka curriculum are: a). Flexibility, the Merdeka curriculum provides freedom for teachers, students, and schools to carry out learning activities flexibly. Teachers can adjust their teaching methods according to the needs and interests of students, as well as the local socio-cultural context. b). Focus on essential material, the Merdeka curriculum focuses more on essential, relevant, and in-depth material so that students have enough time to build creativity and innovation. c). Improving skills and character, c). The Merdeka Curriculum focuses on improving students' skills and character, such as religious, nationalist, mutual cooperation, integrity, and independence. d). Project-based learning, the Merdeka Curriculum has project-based co-curricular activities called the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5). P5 is carried out flexibly in terms of content, activities, and implementation time. e). Sufficient teaching tools, Teachers are free to use quite a lot of teaching tools, ranging from textbooks, literacy and numeracy assessments, teaching modules, and others (Fikrotussholihah, 2024; Minsih et al, 2023).

The Ministry of Education and Culture stated that there are three general characteristics that are symbols of learning carried out with the merdeka curriculum, namely: 1) Soft skill development; 2) focus on essential materials; and 3) flexible learning (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2023). Implementing the merdeka curriculum in Indonesia faces various challenges and problems, including; challenges in the readiness of human resources (teachers) as the main pillars of implementing the merdeka curriculum, challenges in teacher abilities in empowering digital-based technology facilities, challenges in strengthening communication networks and partnerships between education units and related stakeholders, challenges in carrying out learning assessment functions which are an integrated part of learning (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2024).

Where in the implementation of the merdeka curriculum there are problems or obstacles such as inadequate facilities and infrastructure, inadequate teacher and education personnel resources, conditions of students, families, and the environment that are not yet supportive, inequality of government policies between big cities and cities or underdeveloped areas (Nisa et al, 2023; Zulaiha et al, 2023; Nifriza et al, 2023; Efendi & Suastra; 2023). Based on the phenomena, challenges, and problems encountered by researchers and also based on the change of the Ministry of Education in Indonesia, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the challenges of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia.

Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative research method based on theory and analysis to describe the general picture related to the background of the study and as material for presenting the results and discussion. Qualitative research is conducted in natural conditions so that researchers do not provide any treatment that can affect the scientific nature of the object being studied (Sugiyono, 2013). There are five characteristics of qualitative research, including using data sources based on the natural environment, being descriptive and analytical, emphasizing the research process, inductively, and prioritizing meaning. Descriptive research aims to describe, explain, or explain systematically and in detail related to the object being studied. In this study, the descriptive method used is a literature study by observing and

understanding various reading sources or literature related to the problem topic. Literature can be in the form of articles, books, or writings from previous researchers that serve as references and guidelines in supporting the sustainability of the research. The purpose of this literature research is to collect data and information using various sources available in the library. The results of this study can be used as the basis and main source for research in the field.

Findings and Discussion

In the implementation of the merdeka curriculum in Indonesian education, various obstacles and challenges are faced, and these obstacles and challenges must be evaluated and revised in the era of the new Minister of Education and Culture under the era of the President of the Republic of Indonesia Prabowo Subianto. The challenges and obstacles include (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2024);

- a).The challenge of human resource readiness (teachers) is the main pillar of the implementation of the merdeka curriculum. The existence of teachers in the implementation of the merdeka curriculum is the locomotive and driver of the success of various merdeka learning programs such as differentiated learning, implementation of the Pancasila student profile strengthening project and learning assessment, and empowerment of technology as a learning support tool. Therefore, strengthening the existence of teachers through development programs according to needs to be carried out continuously and consistently, especially if you look at the results of teacher professional development programs so far that have not had a significant impact on improving quality in Indonesia.

The scope of teacher competency development is certainly not always on theoretical and knowledge-based aspects but also on strengthening psychological, cultural, skills, and adaptive attitudes towards the development of social dynamics. Strengthening and changing teacher paradigms (shift paradigm) can be a priority in development programs, the aim of which is to provide philosophical provisions, restore idealism, and encourage teachers to always be adaptive to every change. Various development efforts that can be carried out by educational units through initial brainstorming, in-house training, workshops, focus group discussion (FGD) activities between teachers, seminars, forums for sharing good practices and empowering the network of subject teacher deliberation programs (MGMP) and being involved in empowering the merdeka teaching platform (PMM). Without these efforts to develop teacher competencies, the inevitability of achieving and optimizing the role of teachers in implementing the merdeka curriculum will encounter obstacles and could become new problems.

- b).Challenges of teacher capabilities in empowering digital-based technology facilities. As the direction of the learning process in the merdeka curriculum is based on technology, it is time for every subject teacher to empower digital technology in learning services, especially in finding and using various learning resources. This suggests that now and in the future every teacher is required to master digital technology as a basis for learning activities. In conditions like this, teachers should have started to recognize and utilize learning platforms, email, hybrid learning, e-learning, digital-based learning resources, and media. With this effort, learning can be made broader in scope, interesting, interactive, and contextual, and allows for deeper material development according to needs. Through empowering digital-based learning, students are also trained to utilize technology positively, adaptively, and innovatively towards technological developments.
- c).The challenge of strengthening communication networks and partnerships between educational units and related stakeholders. No matter how sophisticated and great the learning curriculum is designed, without the support of effective communication networks and partnerships by educational units and related stakeholders, the implementation of the curriculum will be less than optimal and may even encounter obstacles. The urgency of having support for communication

networks and partnerships carried out by schools is to strengthen the implementation of the merdeka curriculum through mutual cooperation synergy, sharing inspiration and support to realize meaningful learning for students.

Therefore, the support of communication networks and partnerships that have been formed through the channels of the role of school committees, professional organizations, the industrial world, universities, art, and cultural centers practitioners, and the community is optimized and even continuously developed to encourage the realization of merdeka learning. On the other hand, communication networks and partnerships can also be carried out by teachers, by building networking between users of ICT-based learning media in cyberspace, engaging in learning communities, and utilizing the Merdeka Mengajar Platform for joint learning media in the community. In such a situation, a take-and-give process will occur between educational units, teachers, and stakeholders to facilitate liberating learning.

- d). Challenges to carry out the function of learning assessment which is an integrated part of learning. One important aspect that is often ignored by schools in achieving the objectives of curriculum implementation is the implementation of learning assessment. Currently, learning assessments carried out by some general teachers are still limited and focused on final/summative learning assessments), whereas if referring to the concept in evaluation and learning theory, the implementation of assessments should include initial assessments, process assessments (assessments for and as learning) and end of learning (learning assessments). The series of assessment processes are also a unity that is interrelated and integrated in the learning process, cyclical and non-linear.

The assessment model framework illustrates that the component parts of learning are interrelated; learning objectives, initial conditions of students, learning implementation process, and learning assessment. In such a cycle model, the assessment results provide feedback to all components of learning, so that the quality of the learning process and results are expected to be achieved optimally in accordance with the concept of learning with a new paradigm.

In addition, the scope developed in the assessment should be holistic, measuring all aspects of competency and character of students according to their natural conditions. Likewise, the instruments used in the assessment need to be developed in a varied manner according to the learning objectives, needs, and characteristics of the students. The instruments used are not limited to written test questions and/or oral question-and-answer questions with seemingly shallow questions, but various forms of test instruments such as projects, videos, images, performances, creative works, and other relevant test tools with a focus on strengthening higher order thinking skills.

Apart from that, other obstacles encountered in the implementation of the merdeka curriculum are:

- a). Obstacles originating from the condition of school infrastructure or facilities. The Merdeka Curriculum which has been implemented for approximately one year still has several shortcomings or obstacles (Angga et al., 2022), one of which is in the aspect of infrastructure. As in the study conducted by Rahayu et al., (2021), the limited number of teachers who have laptops, capable gadgets, and also adequate internet access is one of the obstacles in the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This has an impact on the limited number of teachers who can take part in online training organized by the government on the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.
- b). The second obstacle is related to the condition of human resources (HR) owned by teachers and educators. In relation to the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers according to Fitriyah and Wardani (2022) actually still feel uneasy, even though several studies have shown their readiness in IKM. The condition of the readiness of teachers and educators in the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is one thing that is no less important to pay attention

to, because it can have an impact on teacher performance in carrying out their duties. Moreover, according to Ozgenel and Mert (2019), teacher performance is a key element in the success of the effectiveness of educational units.

- c). The third obstacle is related to the condition of students, the school environment, and the family. Sumarsih et al., (2022) in the results of their research at a Penggerak Elementary School stated that in the early stages of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, obstacles also came from the mindset or thoughts of school residents who were not yet accustomed to student-centered learning. This obstacle is quite attention-grabbing and challenging because it is a challenge for the principal to invite teachers and school residents to change their thinking to get out of their comfort zones. This is because according to Sumarsih et al., (2022), the changes made by the principal will be in vain if the mindset of the teacher (and the entire school community) does not want to change. Other obstacles were also found in the research of Hidayati et al., (2022) in terms of students in project-based learning. According to their findings, one of the obstacles in IKM, especially in project-based learning, is when there is a lack of unity between project group members.
- d). The fourth obstacle is an obstacle from the government's perspective. According to the research results of Hidayati et al., (2022), the lack of synchronization of the mindset of local governments with the central government regarding the Merdeka Curriculum policy is also one of the obstacles in the initial implementation of IKM. This is reflected in the policy of implementing Mid-Semester Assessments, Final Semester Assessments, and End-of-Year Assessments in several regions. Referring to the Merdeka Curriculum, the Mid-Semester Assessment, Final Semester Assessment, and End-of-Year Assessment activities should not be carried out simultaneously. However, in reality, several local governments still carry out assessment activities simultaneously for district-level ranking purposes.

Conclusion

Based on the phenomenon of research results and discussions, several challenges and obstacles are known in the merdeka curriculum, starting from the challenge of human resource readiness (teachers) as the main pillar of curriculum implementation, the challenge of teacher ability in empowering digital-based technology facilities, the challenge of strengthening communication networks and partnerships between educational units and related stakeholders, and the challenge of carrying out the learning assessment function which is an integrated part of learning. As well as the obstacles encountered; obstacles originating from the condition of school infrastructure or facilities, the second obstacle is related to the condition of Human Resources owned by teachers and educators, and the third obstacle is related to the condition of students, the school environment, and families, the fourth obstacle is obstacles from the government. Together with the results and limitations of this research, it can be used as evaluation material for the merdeka curriculum under the new Ministry of Education and in accordance with the direction of the President of the Republic of Indonesia Prabowo Subianto.

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