Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and its Impact on Effective Learning Achievement in Elementary School

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Article History

accepted 26/11/2023

approved 26/12/2023

published 26/1/2024

Abstract

The study on the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at elementary school, reveals a positive overall readiness and commitment among teachers to adapt to changes in the learning approach. Through interview analysis, it is evident that teachers comprehend the Merdeka Belajar concept and are prepared to embrace the new curriculum, emphasizing creativity and innovation. Significant obstacles arise from differences with the previous curriculum, notably in project-based learning assessments, necessitating deeper understanding and additional training. The assessment aspect analysis indicates effective implementation of formative and authentic assessments by teachers. However, challenges linked to the lack of understanding among teachers and parents about the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly Merdeka Belajar, may impact curriculum goal achievement. Consequently, concerted efforts are required to improve parental understanding and support, along with additional training for teachers regarding assessment within the Merdeka Curriculum context. The curriculum encourages teachers to design more engaging and interactive learning experiences, granting students the freedom to choose subjects and unlocking opportunities to explore talents and potentials in various fields. Keywords: Merdeka Curricuum, effective learning, achievement, parental support, creativity and innovation

Abstrak

Kajian Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di Sekolah Dasar, menunjukkan adanya kesiapan dan komitmen positif di kalangan guru dalam beradaptasi terhadap perubahan pendekatan pembelajaran. Melalui analisis wawancara, terlihat bahwa guru memahami konsep. Menyadari dukungan orang tua sebagai hal yang penting, penelitian ini menekankan perlunya meningkatkan pemahaman mereka untuk mempengaruhi pencapaian tujuan kurikulum secara positif. Hambatan yang signifikan muncul karena adanya perbedaan dengan kurikulum sebelumnya, terutama dalam penilaian pembelajaran berbasis proyek, sehingga memerlukan pemahaman yang lebih dalam dan pelatihan tambahan. Analisis aspek penilaian menunjukkan efektivitas pelaksanaan penilaian formatif dan autentik oleh guru. Namun tantangan terkait dengan kurangnya pemahaman guru dan orang tua terhadap Kurikulum Merdeka, khususnya Merdeka Belajar, dapat berdampak pada pencapaian tujuan kurikulum. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan upaya bersama untuk meningkatkan pemahaman dan dukungan orang tua, serta pelatihan tambahan bagi guru mengenai penilaian dalam konteks Kurikulum Merdeka. Kurikulum mendorong guru untuk merancang pengalaman belajar yang lebih menarik dan interaktif, memberikan kebebasan kepada siswa untuk memilih mata pelajaran dan membuka peluang untuk mengeksplorasi bakat dan potensi di berbagai bidang.

Kata kunci: Kurikulum Merdeka, pembelajaran efektif, prestaasi, dukungan orang tua, kreativitas dan inovasi

Social, Humanities, and Education Studies (SHEs): Conference Series p-ISSN 2620-9284 https://jurnal.uns.ac.id/shes e-ISSN 2620-9292



INTRODUCTION

The development of education curriculum in Indonesia has reached a crucial point with the introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum. Because of Covid-19 many educators, students, and parents, they are unable to receive formal education at home. especially in developing countries where the accessibility, availability, and use of technology in education is not yet widespread states that it can be very difficult (Onyema, 2020). Innovatively responding to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, this curriculum emerges as a development and implementation of an emergency curriculum. The foundational principle of this curriculum is learner-centered education, introduced through the concept of Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn)(Rahayu et al., 2022; Sumarsih et al., 2022). Merdeka Belajar is defined as a method that grants freedom to learners to choose subjects that interest them, empowering schools to develop a curriculum according to the specific needs and characteristics of students. The success of this curriculum selection policy is expected to expedite the stages of national curriculum reform(Artila Dewi* et al., 2023; Maipita et al., 2021). The launch of the Merdeka Curriculum by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology on February 11, 2022, as part of the Merdeka Belajar Agenda, has created a transformation in the approach to learning in Indonesia (Maipita et al., 2021). The curriculum aims to strengthen the quality of education by emphasizing the development of 21st-century skills, project-based learning, numeracy literacy, and literacy in every learning activity. However, a deep understanding and implementation of key concepts of the Merdeka Curriculum remain challenging among elementary school teachers. According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2022), the Merdeka Curriculum applies a different evaluation approach compared to the previous curriculum (2013) to measure students' learning abilities. The evaluation methods include formative approaches, authentic assessment, the use of portfolios, and teacher observation. Formative evaluation is conducted regularly to track students' progress and provide in-depth feedback. Authentic assessment focuses on applying knowledge in real-world contexts, while the use of portfolios provides a comprehensive overview of students' abilities. Teacher observation serves as an evaluation tool by directly observing student interactions and participation. This comprehensive approach ensures that students not only master the material but also develop skills and attitudes relevant to real-world challenges.

Based on previous research by Faiz et al., (2022) it highlights the importance of Information and Communication Technology in supporting the Merdeka Curriculum through a community learning platform. Daga, (2021) found that the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools prioritizes project-based learning and the 4C skills (critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication). When implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, it is crucial for educational institutions to establish close collaboration with teachers to implement innovative learning (Yulianto et al., 2022). The readiness of teachers plays a crucial role in implementing the curriculum, especially in the context of the teaching-learning process. The effectiveness of learning is highly influenced by the attitudes and readiness of both teachers and students.

Currently, the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum faces several obstacles that hinder its readiness for implementation. Some criticisms argue that the curriculum has not reached the expected level of perfection, and the education system and its delivery still require better management. Additionally, the existing human resources and systems are not fully adequate. Nevertheless, such conditions do not hinder the government from promptly implementing and introducing the Merdeka Curriculum without delay. After the decision is in effect, educational institutions need to prepare and respond to various resource aspects, including their human resources. Various studies, such as Ingtias et al., (2022), state that the purpose of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is designed to address the challenges of education in the era of the Fourth Industrial

Revolution. This aligns with the viewpoint of Rustini et al., (2023)who suggests that the goal of Freedom to Learn is to create students with critical, creative, collaborative, and competent abilities. Meanwhile, Nisa, (2023)emphasizes that the goal of this curriculum is to create a pleasant and comfortable environment for teachers, students, and parents. This is consistent with Saleh's view (Oksari et al., (2022)), expressing that a happy and enjoyable environment is the key to the educational process. The implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum at SDN Bolo 01, Kare sub-district, Madiun regency, is a crucial aspect in formulating the direction of learning that can enhance the quality of education at the elementary level.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum can be a major determinant of the success of the education process at SDN Bolo 01. The preliminary study in the research location revealed that the school has implemented the Merdeka curriculum in all classes, including the lower classes that are the focus of this research. However, further research is needed regarding the extent of the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum. Based on these identified issues, it is the driving force for researchers to examine the readiness of teachers in implementing the Freedom to Learn curriculum, especially at the Elementary School (SD) level. The aim of this research is to analyze the Influence of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum on Effective Learning Achievements at SDN Bolo 01, Kare sub-district, Madiun regency as in the research report but is manifested in the form of a state of the art study to show the scientific novelty of the article.

METHOD

The study adopts a descriptive approach employing qualitative methods. The definition of the qualitative research type explained by Sugiyono (Sugiyono, 2023) is that it is a research method based on the philosophy of post-positivism, in which research is conducted under scientific conditions (experiments), and researchers use it as a tool analyze data with functional and qualitative characteristics. This approach was chosen to thoroughly investigate the natural conditions of the research object, where the researcher functions as the key instrument. The goal of qualitative research is to intricately describe and explain the issues that are the focus of the study. The research subjects consist of teachers in SDN Bolo 01, Kare sub-district, Madiun regency, totaling 10 teachers responsible for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in their classrooms on September 2023. The research aims to analyze the readiness of these teachers in SDN Bolo 01. Kare sub-district. Madiun regency in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Data collection techniques in this study include observation using observation sheets, interviews, and document analysis tools. The readiness evaluation process is conducted through questions designed to encompass indicators such as understanding the curriculum structure, readiness in lesson planning, readiness in the teaching process, preparedness of teaching materials, and readiness in assessing learning outcomes. The accuracy of information in this study is tested using technical triangulation, source triangulation, and time triangulation. Source triangulation is employed to verify doubts about the material by reviewing information obtained from various sources. Time triangulation is a method to obtain information over time. The data analysis technique utilizes Miles and Huberman's approach: acquisition (data collection), reduction (data reduction), display (data presentation), and drawing conclusions from the data (data verification) (Moleong, 2017).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Learner-Focused Learning

Analysis of interviews with teachers regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum provides a deep understanding of various aspects influencing the learning process in elementary schools. Key findings from these interviews include the

teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Belajar concept, their readiness to adopt the new curriculum, and its impact on teacher-student interactions. First, the interviews reveal that teachers have a solid understanding of the Merdeka Belajar concept. They acknowledge the importance of granting students the freedom to choose learning based on their interests and talents. This understanding is a crucial foundation for the effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, enabling teachers to design learning experiences that better suit the individual needs of students. Second, a positive impression is observed regarding teachers' readiness to adopt the Merdeka Curriculum. They are familiar with teaching methods that align with students' talents and interests. This guides teachers to focus on developing students' competencies without being burdened by excessive administrative tasks. This readiness creates a strong foundation for the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, as mentally and pedagogically prepared educators tend to be more effective in managing curriculum changes. The impact of the Merdeka Curriculum on teacher-student interactions is also reflected in the interviews. Teachers state that learning has become more dynamic and responsive to students' needs and interests. The learning process is designed to actively engage students, encourage discussions, and stimulate their creativity.

This indicates a paradigm shift from one-size-fits-all learning to a more individualistic and personal approach. However, the interviews also identify some challenges, especially related to learning assessments. Teachers are still seeking a deeper understanding of how the assessment concept changes in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum(Isnaeni & Irawan, 2023). This suggests a need to support teachers with additional training related to assessment in the context of the new curriculum. Overall, the analysis of interviews highlights teachers' readiness and understanding as key factors for the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary school level. These findings can serve as a basis for developing strategies and providing further support to ensure a smooth transition towards a more independent and responsive learning approach. Assessment Readiness

Learning assessment, as a tool to determine the success of education and reflect students' performance, takes center stage in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. One appreciated form of assessment is authentic assessment, capable of measuring students' progress in cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions. Although providing detailed information, authentic assessment is considered to require a considerable number of instruments(Setiawan et al., 2020). The interview results with grade school teachers indicate a good readiness in conducting assessments. Teachers utilize the Learning Objective Flow (ATP) to detail the learning objectives (TP) to be achieved. The evaluation process includes written tests, oral tests, post-tests, and pretests. Despite this positive readiness, teachers acknowledge the need for additional training related to assessment in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. In the document review, differences between the assessment in the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum are evident.

The 2013 Curriculum strengthens authentic assessment in each subject, while the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes strengthening the pancasila student profile project. The 2013 Curriculum divides assessments into attitudes, knowledge, and skills, whereas the Merdeka Curriculum does not separate these aspects. Teachers only assess based on the learning objectives they aim to achieve. The definition of assessment in project-based learning poses a challenge due to involving many types of assessments such as presentations, projects, products, oral, and written. The hindering factor in teachers' readiness in SDN Bolo 01 to implement the Merdeka Curriculum related to assessment is the lack of understanding among teachers and parents about the concept of this curriculum. Parental support is crucial, as suggested by Indarta et al., (2022) encompassing presence, attention, and understanding of the Merdeka

Curriculum concept. Therefore, mutual understanding and support from all parties, including parents, are key to the success of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary school level.

Teacher Readiness in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

Analyzing the interview results regarding the readiness and challenges of teachers in SDN Bolo 01, Kare sub-district, Madiun regency, in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, it is evident that teachers demonstrate a relatively good readiness to meet the demands of a curriculum that emphasizes creativity and innovation. They recognize the importance of designing learning experiences that encourage students to think critically, creatively, and innovatively, viewing the Merdeka Curriculum as an opportunity to create a more engaging and interactive learning environment. However, challenges are observed in the lack of understanding among both teachers and parents regarding the Merdeka Curriculum, especially the Merdeka Belajar concept. Parental support is deemed crucial, and their lack of understanding can impact the achievement of curriculum goals.

Additionally, differences with the previous curriculum (2013), especially concerning assessment in project-based learning, create confusion among teachers. Although teachers show readiness in conducting assessments, they acknowledge the need for additional training related to assessment in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum(Nurjanah, 2021). Therefore, recommendations include conducting additional training, strengthening communication with parents, and solidifying the assessment system of the Merdeka Curriculum so that teachers can better understand the types of assessments required and how to integrate them into learning. This interview analysis provides a comprehensive overview of teacher readiness and challenges in SDN Bolo 01, laying the foundation for formulating more effective strategies and support in the implementation of this curriculum.

Assessment Aspects in the Merdeka Curriculum

The analysis of interview results regarding assessment aspects in the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN Bolo 01, Kare sub-district, Madiun regency, shows that teachers have understood and implemented formative and authentic assessments quite well. Formative assessment, an integral part of the evaluation strategy of the Merdeka Curriculum, allows teachers to periodically assess students' progress during the learning process. This approach provides flexibility for teachers to provide in-depth feedback to students, enabling them to continuously improve their understanding of the subject matter. The use of authentic assessment is also a distinctive feature of the Merdeka Curriculum, where teachers can measure students' understanding in the context of the real world. By creating evaluation situations that reflect everyday life, students are given the opportunity to apply their knowledge in relevant and meaningful ways(Bunga Nabilah et al., 2023).

The interview results indicate that teachers see the benefits of implementing formative and authentic assessments not only as a tool for evaluating student progress but also as a means to stimulate creativity and the application of knowledge in real-life contexts. This is expected to strengthen overall student learning outcomes, creating graduates who not only have theoretical knowledge but can also apply and relate it to real-world challenges. In conclusion, the integration of formative and authentic assessments in the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN Bolo 01 not only reflects teachers' readiness to implement different evaluation approaches but also provides a solid foundation for producing a generation capable of competing and adapting in a constantly changing environment. Thus, the assessment strategies used in this curriculum are expected to strengthen and improve the quality of learning at the elementary school level, aligning with the vision and goals of the Merdeka Curriculum(Ramdani et al., 2021).

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Creativity and Innovation

The interview analysis highlights the importance of creativity and innovation in the context of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at Bolo Elementary School. This curriculum, as the latest representation of changes in Indonesian education, emphasizes the development of 21st-century skills, including critical, creative, and innovative aspects. The significance of creativity and innovation has a significant impact on the learning process at SDN Bolo 01, creating space for students to develop their potential holistically. In this context, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum encourages teachers at SDN Bolo 01 to design more engaging and interactive learning experiences.

Teachers are expected to create a learning environment that stimulates critical thinking, motivates students to be creative, and provides opportunities to apply innovative ideas(Wijaya et al., 2020). This signifies that learning is no longer just about transferring knowledge but also about developing high-order thinking skills essential for life in the 21st century. Specifically, teachers at SDN Bolo 01are expected to design learning projects that actively involve students. This process encourages students to seek creative solutions to problems and involves innovative aspects in presenting their work. With the freedom to choose subjects, students at SDN Bolo 01 can tailor their learning to their interests, enhancing motivation and active participation in the learning process. Moreover, it is essential to consider how this curriculum opens opportunities to explore students' talents and potential in various fields, including arts, sciences, and technology. Teachers at SDN Bolo 01 can leverage this freedom to create an inclusive learning environment, allowing each student to explore and develop their unique skills. Thus, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN Bolo 01 not only shapes students as knowledge receivers but also as individuals who are creative, innovative, and ready to face future challenges(Jamilah et al., 2023; Rachmawati et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN Bolo 01 in the Kare subdistrict, Madiun regency, reveals a positive readiness and commitment from teachers to embrace changes in the learning approach. The analysis of teacher readiness through interviews indicates a strong grasp of the Merdeka Belajar concept and a preparedness to adopt the new curriculum that emphasizes creativity and innovation. Teachers exhibit a willingness to design responsive learning tailored to students' needs, fostering a dynamic and interactive environment. However, challenges arise, particularly in the insufficient understanding among teachers and parents regarding the Merdeka Curriculum, especially Merdeka Belajar, Recognizing parental support as crucial, the lack of understanding is identified as a potential hindrance to achieving curriculum goals. Differences in the assessment approach, particularly in project-based learning, pose a significant obstacle requiring deeper understanding and additional training. While teachers effectively implement formative and authentic assessments, addressing challenges related to the understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum, especially Merdeka Belaiar, is essential for reaching curriculum objectives. Therefore, efforts are necessary to enhance parental understanding and support, alongside providing additional training for teachers in the context of Merdeka Curriculum assessment. The analysis underscores the pivotal role of creativity and innovation in Merdeka Curriculum implementation, indicating that teachers at SDN Bolo 01 are already aware and striving to integrate these aspects into their teaching. The curriculum encourages teachers to design more engaging and interactive learning experiences, granting students the freedom to choose subjects and explore their talents and potentials across various fields.

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