

Merdeka curriculum in Buddhist religious education at Sariputra school Jambi in 2024/2025 academic year

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the obstacles in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Buddhist Religious Education at Sariputra School in Jambi at the primary, junior high, and senior high school levels for the 2024/2025 academic year. The focus of the study is on teachers' understanding of the curriculum, their level of readiness in implementing student-centred learning, and the obstacles they face in internalising the values of Buddha Dharma in the educational environment. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews, environmental and classroom observations, and learning documentation as the main sources of information. The research subjects include Buddhist Religious Education teachers and deputy principals in charge of curriculum at each level. The results show that teachers have a fairly good basic understanding of the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. However, in practice, they still experience difficulties or obstacles in developing learning that prioritises the needs, interests, and potential of students independently. Time constraints, lack of technical training or seminars related to the implementation of the independent curriculum, and the lack of availability of contextual learning media and facilities are the main obstacles. In addition, the implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) based on Buddhist Dharma values such as love (metta), compassion (karuna), and self-awareness (sati) has not been fully optimised. Despite facing various challenges, teachers continue to show dedication in shaping students' character through Buddhist moral values. This reflects the important role of teachers in integrating spiritual teachings into the learning process. Therefore, concrete efforts are needed from schools and policy makers to improve teacher capacity through training, the provision of modules, and the development of Buddhist spirituality-based learning media in line with the spirit of the Independent Curriculum.

Keywords: Merdeka Curriculum, Buddhist Religious Education, Curriculum Implementation

1. Introduction

Education plays a strategic role in determining the direction of a nation's progress. Along with the changing times and global dynamics, the education system is required to be able to adapt in order to remain relevant and effective in shaping competent and competitive human resources. In this context, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemdikbudristek) initiated the implementation of the

Merdeka Curriculum as a solution to the low quality of learning and the incompatibility between the old curriculum and the actual needs of society. This curriculum is designed with the principles of flexibility, learner-centred learning, and the development of individual potential according to each student's interests and talents.

Although conceptually the Merdeka Curriculum offers a more progressive approach, its implementation in the field, especially in areas such as Jambi, still faces various challenges. The transformation of Learning Outcomes (CP) into Learning Objectives (TP) has not been optimal, many educators do not fully understand the structure and essence of this new curriculum, and there is still limited technical training to support its implementation [1]. In addition, learning that is still dominated by lecture methods causes students to become passive, thereby failing to explore the creativity and 21st-century skills that are the main objectives of this curriculum.

Philosophically, the Merdeka Curriculum refers to a constructivist and humanistic approach, in which students become active subjects who construct knowledge through experience and reflection. However, this theory has not been fully internalised in learning practices in many schools [2]. This is also felt in the context of Buddhist Education, which faces its own challenges, such as limited time allocation, inconsistent student motivation, and the need to integrate the values of the Merdeka Curriculum, such as independence, global diversity, and mutual cooperation, with the principles of Buddhist teachings [3].

In this case, teachers are required not only to understand the curriculum content, but also to be able to design contextual learning strategies and methods that are in line with Dharma values. One of the main challenges is how to develop Pancasila Student Profile projects that remain spiritually relevant and pedagogically interesting. Therefore, research on the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in Buddhist Education at Sariputra School in Jambi in 2024/2025 is very important. This study aims to explore in depth the obstacles encountered in the implementation of the curriculum and to formulate applicable and contextual solutions to improve the quality of Buddhist education based on the spirit of the Merdeka Curriculum.

This study examines the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Buddhist Religious Education at Sariputra National School in Jambi, focusing on the application of the curriculum and the adaptation of teachers and students. Three main issues discussed include difficulties in formulating Learning Objectives, limitations in teacher competence, and the need for more adaptive curriculum evaluation. In addition, the researcher also determined the Scope of the Problem. To avoid expanding the problem and maintain the focus of the research, this study is limited to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Buddhist Religious Education subjects at Sariputra Jambi School at the primary, junior high, and senior high school levels. The research subjects included the Deputy Head of Curriculum and Buddhist Education teachers. The aspects examined included learning strategies, teacher readiness and roles, and curriculum evaluation and development. This study used a qualitative approach with a case study method, through interviews, observations, and document analysis.

To obtain data in line with the researcher's expectations, Research Questions were also prepared.

- 1.1. What and How is the Implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum in Buddhist Education at Sariputra School in Jambi in the 2024/2025 Academic Year?
- 1.2. What and How is the Comparison of the Implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in Buddhist Education at Sariputra School in Jambi in the 2024/2025 Academic Year at each level of education?
- 1.3. How is the process of developing Learning Objectives (los), teacher readiness, its impact on student character, and how the school evaluates and develops the curriculum?

This research has several main objectives, including examining the application of learning strategies in Buddhist Religious Education subjects to align with the concepts and principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. In addition, this study also aims to examine the readiness and competence of teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Buddhist Religious Education, as well as to assess the effectiveness of its implementation and identify steps that can be taken to improve the quality of implementation.

The benefits of this research are expected to be felt both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich scientific knowledge in the field of religious education, particularly related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Buddhist Religious Education in Jambi Province, as well as to serve as a reference for further research. Meanwhile, in practical terms, the benefits of this research cover various parties. For teachers, this research can help identify and overcome obstacles in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, improve learning strategies, and encourage professional development and collaboration among educators. For students, the results of this research can be used as a benchmark for the effectiveness of the learning they receive, so that the benefits of the Merdeka Curriculum can be felt directly and optimally. For schools, this research provides valuable input in improving the quality of curriculum implementation while also serving as a basis for strategic decision-making. For researchers, this research is a means of developing academic skills and is part of the graduation requirements for the Buddhist Education Study Programme at STIAB Jinarakkhita Lampung. Finally, for the STIAB Jinarakkhita Lampung institution, the results of this study can be used as an institutional reference in producing educators who understand the dynamics of modern value-based learning in the era of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The novelty and originality of this research lie in its scope and approach. Based on a review of previous studies, such as the study by Prihatien et al., (2023), which focused on the administrative and assessment difficulties of the Merdeka Curriculum in primary schools, and Wantiana & Mellisa, (2023), which examined the obstacles to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in junior high schools in limited areas with infrastructure and socialisation constraints, the scope of the research is still limited to certain levels of education. Meanwhile, Sutini & Muawanah, (2023) examined the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Buddhist Religious Education, but only at the primary school level and in the context of one subject in one school.

This study offers a new perspective by examining the comprehensive implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Buddhist Religious Education subjects at three levels of education simultaneously (primary, junior high, and senior high school) in a single Buddhist-based institution, namely Sekolah Sariputra Jambi. Another unique feature is

the comparative approach used to analyse the continuity of the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation across levels and the variations in challenges faced, such as teacher readiness for project-based learning, differences in the implementation of formative and summative assessments, and the use of educational technology. In addition, this study involved a variety of subjects, including teachers from each level and the Deputy Head of Curriculum, thus providing a more complete and in-depth picture. Thus, this study provides a broader theoretical and practical contribution to the understanding of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in the context of Buddhist Education in religious-based schools in Jambi Province.

The term "curriculum" comes from the Latin (Greek) word "cucere," which later developed into the noun "curriculum." This word was first used in the plural form in the context of athletics [6]. Curriculum can be interpreted in two perspectives: narrow and broad. In a narrow sense, curriculum refers to a set of subjects that students must study to complete their education at a particular institution. The Merdeka Curriculum is an educational approach that emphasises the core principles of learning, namely recognising and nurturing the unique talents and interests of each student. This also applies to students in understanding and processing the information provided by teachers during learning activities in the classroom [7], [8]. By knowing their learning style, students can optimise their learning outcomes and achieve maximum results. Each student has a unique learning style that differs from other students [9]. This will help students gain a better understanding and achieve optimal learning outcomes. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) has simplified the curriculum under special circumstances, known as the emergency curriculum, in an effort to overcome learning delays during the pandemic. Research shows that the use of the emergency curriculum can significantly reduce the impact of the pandemic, with a 73 per cent increase in literacy and an 86 per cent increase in numeracy [10].

This means that a teacher should have good communication skills and be able to motivate their students. Teachers who have good communication skills deliver their lessons using appropriate and easy-to-understand language that is meaningful and motivational, inspiring and bringing happiness to their students. Buddha himself conveyed his teachings through direct knowledge for the sake of teaching and benefiting others, as in the following verse. In the Udayi Sutta [11], Buddha explains five principles of teaching, namely: done gradually, accompanied by reasonable explanations, driven by love, selfless, and not harmful to oneself or others. These principles are reflected in the various methods used by Buddha, such as discussion, lectures, and stories.

For example, in the Kutadanta Sutta, the Buddha answered Brahmin Kutadanta's questions about sacrificial rituals by telling a story about a past life, followed by a gradual lecture, and ending with spiritual motivation. Meanwhile, in the Aganna Sutta, the Buddha began his teaching through a discussion with Vasettha and Bharadvaja about caste, then provided a logical explanation through a lecture, and reinforced understanding through illustrations of stories about the origins of life and the emergence of caste. The Buddha's teaching strategy is directly relevant to the principles of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, especially in Buddhist education. Just as the Buddha adapted his approach

to the needs of his listeners, teachers are also required to develop Learning Outcomes (CP), Learning Objectives (TP), and teaching modules that are contextual, gradual, and meaningful. The challenges teachers face in analysing LOs, compiling PLOs, and technological limitations demonstrate the need for systematic support so that they can teach effectively and inspiringly, as exemplified by Buddha with a rational, loving, and motivational approach.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is a process of applying educational policies that aim to improve the quality of learning by giving schools and teachers the freedom to develop teaching tools according to the needs of students. According to Kadarisman et al., (2015), implementation is an important stage in policy because it determines the direct impact on society. One form of flexibility provided is the Independent Sharing option, which allows educational units to develop their own teaching tools for certain classes. The Merdeka Curriculum also encourages a paradigm shift in learning, from teacher-centred to more student-centred [13], [14] states that the teaching system will become more flexible, involving more discussion, out-of-class activities, and student character development. This is in line with the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum, which is to create independent learners who are socially competent and possess 21st-century skills and character [15]. Therefore, teachers are required to understand the concept of the Merdeka Curriculum comprehensively in order to be able to deliver material effectively [16], [17], and utilise learning time to deepen student competencies [18], [19].

Previous relevant studies reinforce the urgency of this study. Research by [20] highlights the important role of the Deputy Head of Curriculum and the principal in the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in pilot schools. [21] shows that limited understanding and resources are the main obstacles at SMA PAB 4 Sampali, so that implementation is only carried out in Year 10. Meanwhile, [22] found that at SDN 154 Tulekko, teachers had been able to develop CP, TP, and conduct comprehensive assessments despite still facing certain challenges. These three studies share similarities in using qualitative methods and highlighting the roles of principals and teachers. However, this study is unique in that it focuses on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Buddhist Education subjects at Sariputra School in Jambi at the primary, junior high, and senior high school levels. This study also explores how Buddhist values are integrated into learning and how assessment and learning strategies are adapted to the principle of freedom of learning.

The framework of this study departs from the spirit of Merdeka Belajar, which emphasises the freedom of teachers and students to create innovative, creative, and meaningful learning processes [23]. In the context of Buddhist Religious Education at Sariputra School in Jambi, learning is designed to be flexible and contextual, including methods such as discussion, reflective meditation, and Dharma-based projects. Teachers act as facilitators, helping students relate Buddhist teachings to their daily lives. However, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in this context also faces obstacles such as limited resources, lack of teacher training, and challenges in spiritual value-based assessment [24]. Therefore, policy support, periodic evaluation, and the development of

more effective learning strategies are needed so that the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum can be achieved comprehensively, especially in Buddhist value-based religious education.

2. Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. The qualitative approach was chosen because it aims to understand phenomena in depth in a natural context, as explained by [25], that this approach is based on postpositivism philosophy and is used to examine the actual conditions of objects. Meanwhile, the single case study method was used to examine in depth the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in one institution, namely Sariputra School in Jambi. [26] states that single case studies are suitable for exploring specific phenomena in real contexts with various data sources.

The subjects in this study were Buddhist Education (PAB) teachers at Sariputra School in Jambi. These teachers acted as the main informants who provided data and information related to the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in Buddhist education. In addition, there were supporting informants, namely the Deputy Head of Curriculum, who was responsible for the preparation and implementation of the curriculum at the school. Both played an important role in providing a comprehensive picture of the actual conditions of curriculum implementation in the field.

The object of this study is the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in Buddhist Religious Education at Sariputra School in Jambi. The research focuses on two main things, namely how the curriculum is implemented in the context of Buddhist education, as well as the obstacles and efforts made by teachers in implementing it. With this object, this study is expected to answer key questions regarding the effectiveness, obstacles, and strategies for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in the field of Buddhist education.

The research design used in this study is a case study with a qualitative approach, which aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Buddhist Education at Sariputra School in Jambi. This research began with the formulation of research objectives, the design of the approach, and data collection through observation, interviews, and documentation [27]. Subsequently, the collected data was organised into coherent and integrated study units, which were then analysed and presented in a report accompanied by interpretations of the findings. This approach enabled the researcher to comprehensively describe the social reality and interactions between teachers, the curriculum, and students in the context of Merdeka Curriculum-based learning.

The research procedure consisted of three main stages, namely the pre-field stage, the field stage, and the data processing stage. In the pre-field stage, the researchers developed a research design, determined the location, obtained permits, explored field conditions, selected relevant informants, and prepared the instruments and equipment needed for the research. The researchers also paid attention to research ethics so that the study was conducted in accordance with scientific principles. The field stage included the researcher's activities in understanding the school environment context, approaching the

research subjects, and collecting data directly through observation and interviews. Then, in the data processing stage, the researcher reduced the data by filtering important information, presenting the data systematically, analysing the field findings, and drawing conclusions that were validated through a verification process.

The data collection techniques in this study included observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted participatively, using passive participatory observation in the preliminary study stage to obtain a general overview, and moderate participatory observation during the main data collection process to capture the dynamics occurring in the classroom. The interview technique was semi-structured, allowing researchers to explore in-depth information regarding the formulation of Learning Objectives (TP), Learning Outcomes (CP), and various obstacles faced by teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The interview guidelines were compiled based on two main sub-focuses, namely the formulation of learning objectives () and obstacles in curriculum implementation. Meanwhile, documentation techniques were used to complement and strengthen the data from observations and interviews by collecting important documents such as teaching tools, curriculum implementation reports, student learning outcome data, and reports on obstacles experienced by teachers. By using these three techniques in an integrated manner, the researchers obtained a comprehensive and factual picture of the reality of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation in the field. Data analysis in qualitative research is carried out continuously before, during, and after data collection [28], [29]. Before entering the field, analysis is carried out on secondary data or literature review results to determine the provisional focus of the research. In the field, researchers used Miles and Huberman's interactive data analysis model, which consists of three stages: data reduction (filtering and summarising important data), data presentation (organising data in narrative or visual form), and drawing conclusions and verification to ensure data validity. This process was carried out continuously until a complete and in-depth picture of the research object was obtained.

2.1. Data Analysis Stages

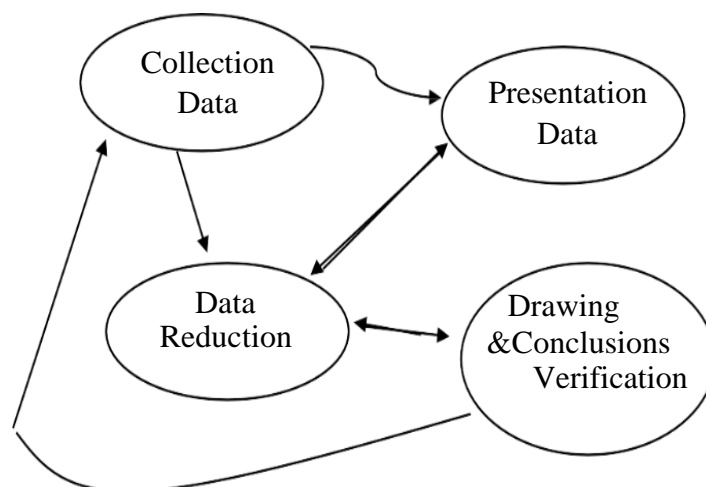


Figure 1. Data Analysis Stage

In this study, the researcher used three main techniques in data collection, namely observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted in a non-participatory manner with the aim of directly observing the Buddhist Education learning process, interactions between teachers and students, the use of teaching media, the implementation of Buddhist-based projects, and the condition of facilities and infrastructure that support curriculum implementation. This observation technique enabled the researcher to obtain in-depth contextual data and helped verify the suitability between the learning plan and its implementation in the classroom.

As explained above, before the researchers conducted their research, they observed the implementation of the independent curriculum at Sariputa School in Jambi. The results of the observation revealed the following data:

Table 1. Implementation of the Curriculum at Sariputra School in Jambi

Education level	Using the merdeka curriculum	Not using the merdeka curriculum
Primary	Yes	
Secondary	Yes	
Senior high school	Grades 10 and 11 have already adopted the independent curriculum	Grade 12 has not yet implemented the independent curriculum

Source: Observation Results

Based on the data in the table, it can be seen that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at Sariputra School in Jambi has been carried out gradually at all levels of education. At the primary school (SD) and junior high school (SMP) levels, all classes have used the Independent Curriculum, indicating that this curriculum has been implemented comprehensively and has become the main reference in Buddhist Religious Education. This shows the readiness of teachers and institutional support in optimally implementing the new curriculum policy at the primary and lower secondary education levels. This is in line with the principle in the Kalama Sutta which encourages reflection and critical reasoning: "When you know something is beneficial and does not cause harm, then do it." This encourages the curriculum to provide space for exploration without sacrificing ethical principles. "At the junior high school level, we feel more freedom in designing lessons because students are also more responsive to exploratory approaches and discussions." (PAB Teacher, 2024).

According to Kurniasari, the collaborative learning approach has proven effective in instilling an understanding of religious values because it encourages students to experience the learning process first-hand through interaction and practical application, rather than simply memorising theoretical concepts. This method provides space for students to share experiences, reflect on teachings, and apply them in the context of everyday life. This approach is in line with the spirit of Buddhist teachings in Dhammapada verse 25, which states that, "With effort, perseverance, discipline, and self-control, the wise build an island that cannot be washed away by floods." This verse underlines the importance of an active and mindful process in building a solid foundation

for life, as in collaborative learning that relies on active participation, cooperation, and character development through experience. Thus, collaborative learning not only enhances cognitive understanding but also fosters discipline, perseverance, and self-control, which are core values that form the basis of spiritual education in Buddhist teachings.

Meanwhile, at the Senior High School (SMA) level, the Merdeka Curriculum has been implemented in grades 10 and 11, while grade 12 still applies the previous curriculum (2013 Curriculum). This situation arises due to a national policy stipulating that the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented gradually and is not yet mandatory for final-year students who will face graduation assessments. Thus, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the senior high school level is still in a transitional process. This indicates the need for further adjustments in terms of learning planning, teaching tools, and evaluation so that the implementation of this curriculum can run evenly across all grade levels.

Buddhist Education (PAB) teachers at the senior high school level confirmed that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum provides them with more space to design learning that touches on the contemplative and spiritual aspects of students. One teacher stated, "We focus more on how students interpret the values of Buddhist teachings, not just memorising concepts" (PAB Teacher, 2024). This statement indicates a shift in approach from rote learning to learning that encourages understanding, reflection, and internalisation of values. This is in line with the findings of Wibisono and Handayan, who stated that reflective and project-based learning at the senior high school level has proven to be more effective in instilling a deep understanding of the concepts of virtue and self-control in Buddhist teachings. This strategy enables students to not only know the teachings, but also to experience and internalise them directly through meaningful activities. This reflective approach is also in line with the principles in the Satipatthāna Sutta (Majjhima Nikāya 10), which emphasises the importance of sati (mindfulness) towards the body, feelings, thoughts, and phenomena as the foundation for inner transformation. Thus, learning designed within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum not only serves as a means of delivering material, but also becomes a spiritual process that encourages students to develop their inner qualities in a holistic and contextual manner in accordance with Buddhist teachings.

In addition, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with six key informants, namely Buddhist Education teachers and Curriculum Coordinators from primary, junior high, and senior high schools. These interviews aimed to explore the informants' understanding and experiences regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, including the obstacles encountered. The interview process was recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis. Documentation techniques were used to collect supporting data such as syllabi, teaching modules, teacher notes, photos of learning activities, and student project results, all of which served to strengthen and validate the findings from the observations and interviews.

Data collection was obtained through interviews conducted with PAB teachers and curriculum coordinators at the primary, secondary, and high school levels.

Table 2. Research Informant Data

No.	Name	Position	Education Level
	Tri Ningsih	Buddhist Religion Teacher	Primary School
	Deni Tri Wahyuni	Deputy Head of Curriculum	Primary
	Diarto	Buddhist Religion Teacher	Secondary School
	Nili Yanti	Deputy Head of Curriculum	Secondary School
	Sumilah	Buddhist Religion Teacher	Secondary School
	Elisa Fitri	Deputy Head of Curriculum	Secondary School

Source: 2025 Observation Results

The data above is information obtained from informants interviewed by the researcher, along with their positions and educational levels.

During the analysis stage, the data obtained was then reduced to filter out relevant information in line with the research focus. Data reduction was carried out by summarising, selecting key points, and grouping data based on specific themes and patterns, particularly those related to the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum and the obstacles faced by teachers. This process also involved coding, which is grouping data into smaller categories of information and labelling them to facilitate presentation and further analysis. This coding was carried out in stages, starting with open coding to identify general themes, followed by axial coding to connect categories, and selective coding to find the core of the most relevant findings. Thus, the data reduction process helped researchers organise the data in a more systematic and focused manner in line with the research objectives. This stage also serves to avoid biased, repetitive, or irrelevant data, so that the analysis truly reflects the actual conditions in the field. In addition, the results of this reduction form the basis for compiling the research results narrative and presenting it in an easily understandable form, either narratively or in the form of tables or other data visualisations.[25], [28].

After the data has been reduced, the next stage is to present the data in the form of a descriptive narrative supported by charts, tables, or images to clarify the findings and patterns that emerge [30], [31]. This presentation helps researchers compile information systematically before drawing conclusions. Conclusions are drawn gradually and continuously verified throughout the research process. Conclusions in qualitative research are new findings that explain specific meanings, relationships, or patterns and must be supported by valid and consistent data. To ensure data validity, four tests are used, namely internal validity through triangulation of techniques and sources, external validity to measure consistency in other contexts, reliability through auditing by supervisors, and objectivity to ensure that the research results are free from researcher bias and are truly sourced from field data [31], [32], [33].

3. Results and Discussion

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Buddhist Education at Sariputra School in Jambi in the 2024/2025 academic year, particularly at the primary school level, has shown considerable progress, despite facing several technical and conceptual challenges. Teachers have begun to be able to adapt open teaching tools from the

PERGABI LMS to the characteristics of students, particularly in phase B (grades 7–8), and to carry out their role as facilitators who encourage students to learn actively through exploration and discussion based on Dharma values. Regular mentoring by external supervisors and internal training have strengthened teachers' readiness to understand and apply the essence of the Merdeka Curriculum. Various learning strategies have been used, such as religious practice projects in the form of altar preparation, meditation, paritta recitation, and video documentation, which also serve as a form of spiritual and character assessment. Assessment not only covers cognitive aspects but also emphasises students' attitudes, moral values, and spiritual appreciation in accordance with the teachings of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. Although the process of compiling Learning Objectives (TP) from Learning Outcomes (CP) remains a challenge due to the complexity of the new curriculum, collaboration through MGMP and school support has facilitated this adaptation. Other obstacles such as limited mentoring, administrative burdens, and differences in student abilities also arise, but these are overcome through a differentiated approach and the integration of Buddhist values such as upekkhā (inner balance), paññā (wisdom), and dāna (sharing). Thus, the Merdeka Curriculum at Sariputra School is not only implemented structurally but also in terms of values, making the learning process more meaningful and in line with the spiritual character development of students.

This study aims to identify the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Buddhist Education at Sariputra National Elementary, Junior High, and Senior High Schools in Jambi, focusing on the process of developing learning objectives (TP), teacher readiness, the influence on student character, as well as curriculum evaluation and development. At the primary school level, although teachers understood the Merdeka Curriculum and showed enthusiasm in developing Buddhist value-based learning, challenges still arose in terms of integrating Dhamma values with the flexibility of the new curriculum. The formulation of TP was carried out collaboratively through MGMP, and learning was directed towards spiritual practices such as making altars or reading paritta. Evaluation was carried out through reflective forums and regular training, which supported continuous curriculum development. At the junior high school level, teachers have a deeper understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum, with project-based learning approaches such as the "Journal of Virtue" and the screening of Jataka stories, which are considered effective in instilling moral values.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Buddhist Education at Sariputra School in Jambi in 2024/2025, particularly at the junior high school level, is going quite well, despite challenges such as the adaptation of teaching tools, administrative burdens, and differences in student abilities. In line with the research [33], teachers have played an active role as facilitators by applying project-based learning strategies and Buddhist values such as sammā-vāyāma, yoniso manasikāra, and upekkhā. Support in the form of training, external mentoring, and MGMP forums helped teachers develop Learning Objectives (TP) from Learning Outcomes (CP). Activities such as meditation, altar preparation, and paritta reading practices are incorporated into spiritual and character assessments, in line with the teachings of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. With a collaborative and

contextual approach, this school demonstrates its commitment to implementing the Merdeka Curriculum holistically and based on values.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Buddhist Education at Sariputra School in Jambi, particularly at the senior high school level, demonstrates a collaborative process of developing Learning Objectives (TP) through MGMP and learning community forums. Teachers from all levels, including primary, junior high, and senior high schools, actively analyse Learning Outcomes (CP) and develop them into TP that are appropriate to the character and developmental stage of the students. Although challenges are still felt in translating LOs into LOs, regular training and mentoring help improve teachers' understanding of the curriculum structure. Teachers' readiness is also strengthened by various internal and external training programmes, as well as support from learning communities such as PERGABI, which contribute to improving teachers' pedagogical and spiritual competencies. Teachers act as facilitators who encourage students to actively think critically and explore Dharma values contextually, through learning methods such as discussions, projects, screenings of Jataka stories, and hands-on practices such as making altars and meditating together. This approach has a positive influence on students' character, which is reflected in increased self-confidence, participation in religious activities, and a deeper spiritual understanding.

Table 3. Summary of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum for Buddhist Education in Sariputra Elementary, Junior High, and Senior High Schools in Jambi

Level	Teacher Understanding	Curriculum Development	Learning Strategies	Integration of Buddhist Values	Evaluation & Reflection
Primary	Fairly good, still adapting to the CP structure	Conducted through MGMP, still experiencing technical difficulties	Simple practices: basic meditation, making an altar, reciting paritta Collaborative projects	Focus on core values such as loving-kindness, morality, and tranquillity	Reflective forum & regular training
Secondary school	Good, understands CP and the principles of Merdeka Belajar	Active through MGMP, supported by a learning community	such as the "Journal of Virtue" and the screening of Jataka stories	Deepening the values of sīla, paññā, and social virtue	Student reflection, formative assessment based on attitude
Senior High School	Very good, more independent in designing learning	Conducted in collaboration with MGMP & PERGABI community	Reflective learning: journals, discussions, P5 spiritual projects	Integration of contemplative values such as paññā, samādhi, and upekkhā	Weekly evaluations, student feedback, teacher supervision

Source: Research Results/Findings in Research

Based on the table, it can be understood that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Buddhist Education at Sariputra School in Jambi has developed gradually and adapted to the characteristics of each level of education. At the primary school level, teachers have demonstrated a sufficient understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum concept, although they are still in the process of adapting to the new Learning Outcomes (CP) structure. The formulation of Learning Objectives (TP) is carried out collaboratively through MGMP forums, although a number of technical difficulties are still being faced. Therefore, the learning approach at this level focuses more on simple practices such as basic meditation, making altars, and reading paritta, which directly instil basic Buddhist values such as mettā, sīla, and tranquillity. The evaluation process is supported by reflective activities by teachers and regular training that helps to improve their capacity on an ongoing basis.

At the junior high school level, teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum has developed more strongly and deeply. Teachers not only actively participate in and contribute to the MGMP forum, but also receive ongoing support from learning communities such as PERGABI. This community plays an important role in improving teachers' pedagogical and spiritual capacity, including in developing Buddhist value-based teaching modules, adapting Learning Outcomes (CP), and designing assessments that are relevant to the character of the students. With this support, teachers are able to create a learning atmosphere that is more creative, contextual, and rooted in Dhamma values.

Learning at the junior high school level has begun to adopt a project-based and collaborative model that combines Buddhist values with practical literacy practices. Activities such as writing a "Journal of Virtue", analysing the values of Jataka stories, and writing Buddhist short stories by students are part of strengthening Buddhist literacy, namely the ability to read, understand, critique, and internalise Buddhist values through texts and life experiences. This literacy is not limited to reading scriptures or moral stories, but is expanded to forms of expression that allow students to reflect on and voice their understanding of virtue, compassion, and social ethics. The values of sīla (ethics), paññā (wisdom), and karuṇā (compassion) are not only learned but also constructed through the experience of writing and discussing, thereby fostering a deeper moral and spiritual awareness.

Learning assessment also reinforces these aspects of Buddhist literacy, with an emphasis on critical thinking, reflection, and self-awareness. Teachers assess students not only on their mastery of content, but also through project portfolios, reflection journals, and observations of participation in value discussions. This approach provides space for students to express their understanding in a personal and original way. In addition, Buddhist literacy activities encourage students to get used to re-reading their life experiences through the lens of Dhamma values, as taught in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, which is to build full attention to thoughts, feelings, and surrounding phenomena. Thus, literacy is not only an academic tool, but also a spiritual medium that strengthens the process of character building in students within the framework of the holistic and value-based Merdeka Curriculum. Meanwhile, at the secondary school level, the implementation of

the Merdeka Curriculum appears to be more mature and independent. Teachers are now able to develop Learning Objectives (TP) more flexibly by referring to the results of MGMP discussions and learning communities such as PERGABI. The learning approach used is reflective and in-depth, such as writing personal journals, discussing Buddhist teachings, and developing value-based projects in Pancasila Student Profile (P5) activities. Teachers no longer only play the role of conveying material, but also as facilitators who guide students' contemplative process towards Dharma values. Values such as *paññā* (wisdom), *samādhi* (mental concentration), and *upekkhā* (emotional balance) are the main foundations in the learning design, which is aimed at fostering students' self-awareness and spiritual maturity.

The integration of these values is not only theoretical but is actually applied concretely in various learning activities that touch on the affective and spiritual dimensions of students. Activities such as guided meditation, weekly reflection, observation of inner experiences through journaling, and group discussions that encourage empathy and mindfulness (*sati*) are an integral part of the learning process. Through these activities, students not only understand Buddhist concepts but also practise applying them in their daily lives, such as in controlling emotions, increasing self-awareness, and making wise decisions.

Evaluation is conducted comprehensively and continuously, including teacher supervision, direct feedback from students, and regular reflective forums to review the effectiveness of learning. This evaluation is not limited to academic achievement but also covers the spiritual, emotional, and behavioural dimensions of students' development during the learning process. This approach provides space for teachers to understand how students internalise Dhamma values personally and the extent to which learning contributes to their inner transformation. Thus, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the senior high school level does not merely fulfil administrative curriculum requirements, but is actually used as a means to shape students' characters in line with Buddhist values and prepare them to face life holistically, independently, and meaningfully. This shows that Buddhist religious education in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum is able to bridge the gap between national educational goals and the spiritual and moral development of students.

Table 4. Challenges and Solutions for the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum by Level

Level	Main challenges	Efforts/solutions undertaken
Primary	Teachers find it difficult to translate CP into TP	Collaborative MGMP
	Lack of media and training	Basic training and small group reflection
Secondary	High administrative burden	Simplification of administration through MGMP
	Variation in student abilities in practice	Project-based learning and group work
Secondary	Limited face-to-face time	Student reflective journals
	Availability of reflective learning resources	Integration of P5 projects based on Dharma values

Source: Research Results/Findings

At the primary school level, the main challenge faced by Buddhist Education teachers is the difficulty in translating Learning Outcomes (CP) into operational Learning Objectives (TP) that are appropriate for the developmental level of the students. In addition, limitations in learning media and a lack of technical training are also obstacles to the optimal implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. To overcome this, schools encourage teachers to actively participate in Subject Teacher Working Groups (MGMP) as a collaborative forum for analysing the curriculum and developing teaching tools. Teachers are also facilitated to attend basic training and reflection sessions in small groups, creating a space for exchanging experiences and strengthening their understanding of the concept of contextual and spiritually valuable independent learning.

At the junior high school level, the challenges that arise are the high administrative burden and differences in students' abilities to understand and practise Buddhist religious practices, such as meditation or paritta recitation. As a solution, the school strives to simplify administration through MGMP, so that teachers can focus more on the quality of learning and character development of students. In addition, project-based learning and group work methods are implemented, such as creating a "Journal of Virtue" or dramatising Jataka stories, to provide space for students with varying levels of understanding to remain actively involved and able to internalise Dharma values contextually.

Meanwhile, at the senior high school level, the challenges are more focused on limited face-to-face time and the lack of reflective learning resources that are appropriate for the psychological context of adolescents. Teachers find it difficult to design in-depth and contemplative learning within a limited time. To address this, teachers at Sariputra High School implement strategies such as the use of student reflective journals that encourage self-awareness and inner evaluation, as well as integrating the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) with Dhamma values such as compassion (*mettā*), wisdom (*paññā*), and self-control (*sīla*). This approach not only strengthens cross-curricular learning but also deepens students' spiritual understanding.

In terms of curriculum evaluation and development, all three levels actively involve teachers in reflective forums, regular training, and periodic evaluations of learning effectiveness. Schools provide discussion spaces for developing work programmes, assessing the effectiveness of assessments, and simplifying administration so that teachers can remain focused on the quality of learning. Sariputra High School has even formed a cross-subject team to develop a P5 project based on Buddhist spirituality, as part of strengthening student character. Supervision mechanisms are carried out systematically through classroom supervision, teacher reflection, and student feedback. However, challenges remain, particularly in terms of teaching equipment readiness and training time constraints. However, in general, Sariputra Jambi School has shown a strong commitment to integrating Buddhist values into the Merdeka Curriculum, with a holistic, contextual learning approach oriented towards strengthening student character.

Teachers are also active in training and learning communities, while learning evaluations include student reflection and character assessment, not just cognitive assessment. Meanwhile, implementation in senior high schools shows a more reflective

and in-depth approach, with the preparation of teaching plans emphasising values such as *paññā* and integration in the Pancasila Student Profile project. Teachers are given the freedom to design learning that touches on the contemplative aspects of students, although challenges remain in terms of time constraints and teaching resources. Curriculum evaluation is carried out continuously through supervision, student feedback, and teacher reflection. In general, all three levels have been successful in adapting the Merdeka Curriculum to Buddhist teachings, although structural support and capacity-building through the Teacher Professional Development Programme () are still needed to make the learning process more effective, contextual, and oriented towards the spiritual character development of students.

4. Conclusion

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Buddhist Religious Education at Sariputra School in Jambi in the 2024/2025 academic year shows significant progress at every level of education, despite still facing various structural and pedagogical challenges. At the primary school level, the learning approach has begun to shift from a conventional model to a participatory model that emphasises spiritual experience and character building in students. Simple practices such as reading *paritta*, making mini altars, and basic meditation are part of learning that integrates Buddhist values such as *mettā* (loving-kindness), *sīla* (morality), and mindfulness. However, teachers' understanding of the curriculum structure, particularly in translating Learning Outcomes (CP) into Learning Objectives (TP), remains a significant technical challenge. Limited training and learning resources also affect the effectiveness of curriculum implementation at the primary level.

At the junior high school level, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum demonstrates a more mature understanding on the part of teachers and the application of more contextual learning strategies, such as project-based learning and interdisciplinary collaboration. Teachers are able to integrate the spiritual and social values of Buddhist teachings through activities such as the "Weekly Virtue Journal" and discussions of *Jataka* stories, which have a positive impact on students' attitudes and social awareness. The evaluation not only emphasises cognitive aspects but also covers the affective and moral dimensions of students. Meanwhile, at the senior high school level, reflection- and contemplation-based learning is the main approach that encourages students to understand *Dhamma* values more deeply. Teachers are given the freedom to design project-based thematic learning, including the Pancasila Student Profile (P5) project, which is integrated with Buddhist values such as *paññā* (wisdom), *samādhi* (mental concentration), and *upekkhā* (mental balance). Evaluation is carried out continuously through students' reflective journals, teacher supervision, and feedback from students. In general, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Sariputra School in Jambi has brought Buddhist education in a more meaningful, contextual, and character-building direction, although it still needs strengthening in terms of training, learning time, and the provision of relevant learning resources.

Based on these conclusions, there are several strategic suggestions that can be applied to strengthen the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Buddhist Education in the future. First, teachers are advised to continue developing their professional capacity, not only in understanding the structure of the Merdeka Curriculum but also in designing creative, interactive, and meaningful learning. Teachers can explore more project-based, reflective, and contextual learning methods that are in line with Buddhist values, as well as use learning media such as videos, audio, and digital technology to increase the appeal of the teaching material. Strengthening the understanding of character- and spirituality-based assessment also needs to be a focus, so that assessment does not merely measure knowledge but also touches on the moral and spiritual dimensions of students.

Second, for future researchers, this study opens up space for more specific and in-depth follow-up studies, for example, on the dimensions of *Dharma-based* religious learning evaluation, the influence of the P5 project implementation on students' appreciation of Buddhist teachings, or the use of digital technology in teaching spiritual values in the era of the Merdeka Curriculum. Researchers can also develop comparative studies between regions or between types of schools (public and private) to see broader and more varied patterns of curriculum implementation.

Third, it is recommended that educational institutions provide more concrete and sustainable support to teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in the context of Buddhist Religious Education. This support can take the form of regular training that is not only technical but also deeply spiritual in nature, strengthening cross-level learning communities, and providing contextual teaching resources that are in line with Buddhist teachings. In addition, it is important for schools to simplify the administrative burden on teachers so that their energy and attention can be focused on developing the quality of learning and character building of students.

Furthermore, educational institutions can establish strategic partnerships with religious organisations such as PERGABI or local Sangha communities to enrich the process of curriculum development, teaching module creation, and teacher training based on Buddhist values. This collaboration can also serve as a bridge between national education policy and the uniqueness of religious education based on local spirituality. Thus, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is not only interpreted as an administrative policy change, but also as an educational transformation that touches the inner aspects of students, rooted in the noble values of Dhamma, and relevant to the challenges of today's life.

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