

# Improving Learning Quality through Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in Elementary Schools

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## Abstract

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### Keywords:

Quality of Learning,  
Curriculum,  
Freedom of Learning.

This study analyzes curriculum evaluation management in implementing the Merdeka Belajar program at Sekolah Penggerak SDNU Mutiara Insani Mojo Kediri. This research employs a qualitative approach with data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings indicate that implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka at SDNU Mutiara Insani Mojo Kediri has been implemented effectively and under sound evaluation principles. Curriculum evaluation is conducted periodically, involving various stakeholders, and the results of these evaluations are used to improve and develop the curriculum continuously. These findings suggest that evaluation management has positively contributed to enhancing learning quality at the school.

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## Abstrak

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### Kata kunci:

Kualitas  
Pembelajaran,  
Kurikulum Merdeka,  
Merdeka Belajar.

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji manajemen evaluasi kurikulum dalam pelaksanaan program Merdeka Belajar di Sekolah Penggerak SDNU Mutiara Insani Mojo Kediri. Penelitian ini menerapkan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode pengumpulan data melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka di SDNU Mutiara Insani Mojo Kediri telah berjalan dengan baik, sesuai dengan prinsip-prinsip evaluasi yang efektif. Evaluasi kurikulum dilakukan secara berkala dengan melibatkan berbagai pemangku kepentingan, dan hasil evaluasi digunakan untuk perbaikan dan pengembangan kurikulum yang berkelanjutan. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa manajemen evaluasi yang diterapkan telah memberikan kontribusi positif terhadap peningkatan kualitas pembelajaran di sekolah tersebut.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the Preamble of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, specifically in the fourth paragraph, it states, "To advance the general welfare, to educate the nation's life, and to participate in the establishment of a world order based on freedom, lasting peace, and social justice." To utilize the potential and preserve Indonesia's cultural diversity, a good quality workforce is required. One of the ways to produce a quality workforce is through education. According to the Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 2 of 2022 concerning National Education Standards, education is considered of high quality if the learning process in educational institutions is conducted in an interactive, inspiring, enjoyable, and

challenging manner and motivates students to actively achieve. Therefore, education in Indonesia plays a crucial role in achieving these national goals by developing competencies in thinking, acting, and living that align with global demands (Annisa et al., 2020; Sabariah et al., 2023). The Education 4.0 Program aims to strengthen and disseminate the quality of education and expand its access and relevance through technology to achieve global education that fosters collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity. Hence, researchers must be able to provide solutions to schools to aid in developing the curriculum being implemented (Ansori, 2020; Haryadi & Widodo, 2020).

One of the government's efforts to improve the quality of education is to introduce new policies related to the curriculum, allowing schools to develop more in line with expectations. The current curriculum introduced by the government, specifically, is the Merdeka Curriculum, implemented by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Anggraeni & Purnomo, 2023; Samsudi et al., 2024). The goal of the Merdeka Curriculum is to facilitate students in becoming more active and independent in learning and enabling them to explore their potential to the fullest (Al-Shanawani, 2019). To implement the Merdeka Curriculum, the government emphasizes principles such as flexibility, diversity, and community involvement in education. This curriculum is designed to adapt to the needs and potential of each student, maximizing learning outcomes. Below is an example of a literature review related to the Merdeka Curriculum (Gea et al., 2022; Septantiningtyas & Subaida, 2023).

The first study, "Issues in the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Mathematics Learning at SMK Negeri 2 Pacitan," aims to provide an analysis and information on the phenomena occurring in the implementation of mathematics learning under the Merdeka Curriculum at SMK Negeri 2 Pacitan. The research method used is a qualitative descriptive survey method. The study's findings indicate that the learning process has not yet achieved the expected goals. This shortfall is due to several factors affecting students, teachers, parents, schools, and other elements that support education. These factors include students' poor perceptions of mathematics, inappropriate teaching methods, unengaging learning media, monotonous learning processes, the school's lack of supportive learning facilities, teachers' inability to keep up with IT developments in the learning process, and the improper application of the Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) concept for students.

The second study, "Analysis of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Public High Schools in Padangsidempuan," aims to examine the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in public high schools across Padangsidempuan. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method. The findings indicate that the development of effective, efficient, and student-oriented Lesson Plans (RPP) at public high schools in Padangsidempuan has been fully implemented in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers have the freedom to choose, create, use, and develop the format of Lesson Plans (RPP) according to the situation and conditions. The preparation of

Lesson Plans (R.P.P.) is done efficiently and effectively, allowing teachers more time to prepare and evaluate the learning process itself.

Therefore, the hope is that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum can be properly applied to bring about positive changes in Indonesia's educational landscape. It encourages teachers, students, and schools to adopt learning that aligns with the Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) program, aiming to improve education quality and minimize learning process challenges.

Through the Merdeka Curriculum, it is expected that students will become more independent, creative, and innovative, as well as capable of fully developing their potential. As a result, the future will see the creation of a high-quality workforce capable of competing in the era of globalization. The evaluation management of the Merdeka Curriculum at Sekolah Penggerak S.D.N.U. Mutiara Insani Mojo Kediri is a process aimed at ensuring that the curriculum implemented at the school successfully achieves its intended goals. Regular efforts to improve the quality of education through implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at Sekolah Penggerak S.D.N.U. Mutiara Insani Mojo Kediri are necessary to ensure that the educational programs provided are effective and efficient, and that they offer optimal benefits to the students.

## **METHODS**

This research employs a qualitative approach with data collection methods, including interviews, observations, and documentation. The information was gathered from the curriculum coordinator, and the documentation was recorded. Data collection involves gathering the necessary information to address the research questions or meet the study's objectives at Sekolah Penggerak SDNU Mutiara Insani Mojo Kediri. Assessing data validity is the process of evaluating the credibility or trustworthiness of the data obtained from the study. The researcher also employs data triangulation to cross-check and compare relevant data to ensure accuracy. This step demands careful attention in processing the data to resolve any issues. The collected data is processed and evaluated to identify patterns, themes, or conclusions that can help answer the research questions or achieve the study's objectives at Sekolah Penggerak SDNU Mutiara Insani Mojo Kediri.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum**

Education is vital in shaping various aspects of human life, enabling individuals to fully develop their potential, enhance their character, and improve their overall quality of life. The Merdeka Curriculum, introduced as the 15th episode of the Merdeka Belajar program by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia (Kemdikbudristek RI), was launched alongside the Merdeka Teaching Platform (P.M.M.). This curriculum aims to foster a student-centered learning environment that is adaptable to the specific needs and characteristics of students in different regions (Siti Wahyuni, 2022; Sri et al., 2021).

The Merdeka Curriculum's impact is more definite and measurable, reflecting an educational approach that grants institutions the autonomy to develop curricula tailored to student needs (Fuadi & Aswita, 2021; Sahibuddin et al., 2024).

In practice, the Merdeka Curriculum promotes more active, creative, and life-relevant learning experiences. SDNU Mutiara Insani Mojo Kediri has been chosen as one of the institutions to implement the Sekolah Penggerak (Driving School) program, which requires all participating institutions to use the Merdeka Curriculum in their educational activities. The Sekolah Penggerak program, the 7th episode of Merdeka Belajar, acts as a catalyst for advancing Indonesian education by focusing on the holistic development of students through the leadership of school principals and teachers, ultimately aiming to cultivate the Pancasila Student Profile (Anggraeni & Purnomo, 2023).

Based on the interview results, SDNU Mutiara Insani Mojo Kediri has implemented differentiated learning based on students' learning needs, encouraged active student participation in the learning process, and provided them with opportunities to play a larger role in directing the course of learning. The school has also adopted a more integrated and contextual approach, focusing on project-based learning, group discussions, and experiments through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5).

The curriculum comprises interconnected and mutually supportive components, including goals, learning materials, methods, and evaluation. As a system, it works to achieve educational objectives through coordination among all its subsystems. If any component of the curriculum does not function properly, the entire system will not operate effectively and optimally. The curriculum is a crucial tool in the learning process (Halim, 2022; Sopiensyah et al., 2022).

Local governments can influence curriculum implementation through support in the form of policies and commitments. Such support can impact the success of curriculum implementation (Ahmadi et al., 2022). The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes freedom of thought and movement for students in the 4.0 era. To achieve this, it is essential to maximize the potential of both students and teachers through collaboration and effective management of human resources. This approach aims to produce outstanding individuals in the future (Zahwa et al., 2022).

This program encourages students to be more active, creative, and independent in their learning process. The school has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum with various initiatives based on interview data. It has also integrated the principles and concepts of the Merdeka Curriculum into our curriculum by adopting a more contextual, interactive, and project-based approach. The government has also granted teachers the freedom to design and implement lessons that are relevant to students' needs and to utilize available educational resources and technologies (Fathurrochman, 2017).

Research findings indicate that teachers' employment status at Sekolah Penggerak SDNU Mutiara Insani Mojo Kediri significantly impacts teaching performance. With a clear status, teachers feel recognized and valued, and they take responsibility for students' learning outcomes. The Merdeka Belajar program was launched to create a pleasant and happy learning environment for both students and teachers. This program was motivated by numerous complaints from parents about the current national education system, including varying minimum completion scores across subjects. With Merdeka Belajar, it is hoped that the quality of education can be improved and tailored to each student's needs and abilities, and that technology can be utilized to support a more effective and efficient learning process. Merdeka Belajar represents freedom of thought and must first be embraced by teachers. Without teachers possessing this freedom of thought, students can unlikely achieve it (Bhakti et al., 2022; Firmansyah et al., 2023).

**Table 1.** Summary of research results

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Details</b>
Introduction	The Merdeka Curriculum, the 15th episode of the Merdeka Belajar program, was launched by Kemdikbudristek RI alongside the Merdeka Teaching Platform (P.M.M.) to foster a student-centered learning environment.
Goals of the Curriculum	To create a learning environment adaptable to students' needs, emphasizing active, creative, and relevant learning experiences.
Impact and Approach	The Merdeka Curriculum allows institutions to develop curricula tailored to student needs, promoting holistic student development through leadership of principals and teachers.
Implementation at SDNU Mutiara Insani Mojo Kediri	The school has adopted differentiated learning, encouraged active student participation, and integrated project-based learning, group discussions, and experiments.
Components of the Curriculum	Includes goals, learning materials, methods, and evaluation. All components are interconnected to achieve educational objectives.
Role of Local Government	Local governments influence curriculum implementation through supportive policies and commitments, impacting overall success.
Emphasis	Freedom of thought and movement for students requires effective collaboration and resource management to maximize potential.
Teacher Employment Status	Clear employment status impacts teaching performance, with teachers feeling recognized and responsible for students' outcomes.
Merdeka Belajar Program	Launched to improve the learning environment and address issues in the national education system,

	aiming to enhance education quality and adapt to student needs and abilities.
Freedom of Thought	Essential for both teachers and students; teachers must first embrace this freedom for it to be realized by students.

### **Merdeka Curriculum Program**

The Permendikbudristek No. 17 of 2021 regulates the National Assessment (AN), a program designed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology to monitor and evaluate the education system at the primary and secondary levels. This program aims to encourage students to be more active, creative, and independent in their learning process (Azzukhrufi, Zainuddin, & Maburur, 2023). Based on interview data, the school has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum through various initiatives, integrating its principles and concepts into the curriculum by adopting a more contextual, interactive, and project-based approach. The government has also granted teachers the freedom to design and implement lessons that are relevant to students' needs and to utilize available educational resources and technologies.

The Merdeka Curriculum is an initiative introduced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) Indonesia. This program aims to transform the learning approach to be more flexible, inclusive, and focused on the needs and interests of students. It emphasizes students' freedom in choosing subjects, learning methods, and the time and place of learning. Research also indicates that the employment status of teachers at Sekolah Penggerak SDNU Mutiara Insani Mojo Kediri significantly impacts teaching performance. With a clear status, teachers feel recognized, valued, and accountable for students' learning outcomes. The Merdeka Belajar program was launched to create a pleasant and enjoyable learning environment for both students and teachers. This initiative arose from numerous complaints from parents about the current national education system, including varying minimum completion scores across subjects. With Merdeka Belajar, the goal is to enhance education quality and tailor it to each student's needs and abilities while leveraging technology for a more effective and efficient learning process. Merdeka Belajar represents freedom of thought that must first be embraced by teachers. Without this freedom being possessed by teachers, it is unlikely to be realized by students (Azizah et al., 2023; Rosyadi, Aprilianto, & Rofiq, 2023).

Based on interview data, the Merdeka Curriculum program strongly supports the development of students' skills beyond academic aspects. The school has emphasized 21st-century skills such as communication, collaboration, problem-solving, creativity, and critical thinking. The school also encourages students to participate in extracurricular activities, internships, or community service programs to enhance their social and leadership skills.

The development of skills beyond academic aspects aims to prepare students to become well-rounded individuals who are ready to face real-world challenges and contribute positively to society (Julhadi et al., 2022; Suhermanto et al., 2024). Three types of response factors can influence the ability and willingness of implementers to execute policies. First is knowledge and understanding of the policy, including its content and objectives. Second, the direction of the response, which includes acceptance, neutrality, or rejection of the policy. Third, the intensity of the implementers' involvement with the policy (Fatchurochman, 2021). Understanding both the general and specific goals of the policy is crucial, as successful policy implementation can be hindered if implementers do not have a sufficient understanding of the standards and objectives of the policy. There is also an improvement in the quality of learning, as follows:

**Implementing effective and innovative teaching methods:** Utilizing teaching methods that are both effective and innovative is crucial for enhancing students' understanding of the material and their motivation to learn. Approaches such as problem-based learning, cooperative learning, and flipped classrooms have been shown to significantly boost student learning. **Using diverse learning media:** A variety of learning media, such as audiovisual aids, the internet, and educational games, can help improve students' comprehension and add enjoyment to the learning process.

**Employing appropriate assessments:** Incorporating various types of assessments can motivate students to learn more effectively and enhance the quality of education. Examples include written tests, oral exams, project assignments, and portfolios as assessment methods.

**Creating a positive classroom environment:** A positive classroom atmosphere greatly benefits student motivation and enjoyment in learning. Teachers can foster a positive environment by giving praise and rewards, addressing individual student needs, and building strong relationships between teachers and students.

**Engaging students in learning:** Involving students in the learning process will increase their level of engagement. Teachers can encourage student involvement by providing opportunities to ask questions, participate in discussions, and engage in learning activities. The Merdeka Belajar policy program, initiated by the Minister of Education and Culture of Indonesia, aims to return the national education system to the essence of the law by granting schools, teachers, and students the freedom to innovate and learn independently and creatively. However, this freedom to innovate and learn independently must start with teachers as the primary drivers of national education.

**Merdeka Belajar:** At the event "Achieving Advanced Indonesia 2045" held at Jakarta State University on 10 March 2020, four Merdeka Belajar policy programs were explained as follows:

**Table 2. National Education Policy on Merdeka Belajar**

No.	Kebijakan	Penjelasan
1	USBN becomes an assessment by schools	Assess student competencies, through written tests and other comprehensive forms of assessment. Teachers and schools are more independent in assessing student learning outcomes. The USBN budget is used to develop the capacity of teachers and school
2	UN changed to Minimum Competency Assessment and Character Survey	Does not measure mastery of subject matter in the curriculum as measured through the UN so far. UN in the future is done for mapping the minimum competencies of student literacy & numeracy and strengthening learning applications as measured by PISA and TIMSS. Conducted in the middle of school level (grades 4, 8 and 11)
3	Learning Implementation Plan (RPP)	Teachers are free to choose, create, develop and use lesson plan formats on their own initiative and innovation. Shortened lesson plans that contain activity objectives and learning assessments. Writing lesson plans is efficient and effective so that teachers have time to prepare and evaluate the learning process in a directed manner.
4	Zoning system for PPDB is implemented flexibly	Addressing inequalities in access and quality across regions. There is a standard PPDB benchmark between regions, namely: zoning pathway accepts students at least 50%, affirmation pathway at least 15%, transfer pathway maximum 5%, and achievement pathway or remaining 0-30%, according to regional conditions. Regions are authorized to determine the final proportion and establish zoning areas.

Both concepts highlight the importance of educational institutions in providing students with the freedom and opportunities to fully develop their diverse abilities and potentials (Anjelina, Silvia, & Gitituati, 2021). In these concepts, students are expected to develop naturally and experience hands-on learning as the best stimulation for the learning process. Consequently, research findings show that the programs developed by the school have been implemented as anticipated and agreed upon. The role of teachers as effective guides and facilitators is crucial in helping students reach their full potential and work independently (Silaen, 2023). Educational institutions are also expected to serve as laboratories that drive positive change in students and integrate activities inside and outside the classroom. Education is also responsible for fostering students to become mature, courageous, and independent individuals.



## CONCLUSION

The Merdeka Curriculum in educational institutions is a collaborative process aimed at achieving learning objectives, focusing on enhancing the quality of interactions. Managing the Merdeka Curriculum involves planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating using all available resources to achieve the predetermined goals. In the Merdeka Curriculum program, educational management plays a crucial role, where educators must create engaging and non-boring learning experiences as a key characteristic of the freedom to learn, enabling students to meet future challenges. The Merdeka Curriculum seeks to improve the established programs collectively and regularly.

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