

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF IMPLEMENTING THE INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM IN SHAPING AN INNOVATIVE GENERATION IN INDONESIA

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Abstrak

Kurikulum Merdeka, sebagai salah satu upaya pemerintah dalam meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan di Indonesia, diharapkan mampu melahirkan generasi yang inovatif dan adaptif terhadap perubahan zaman. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis efektivitas implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka dalam membentuk generasi inovatif di Indonesia. Melalui pendekatan kualitatif, penelitian ini melibatkan guru, siswa, dan kepala sekolah sebagai informan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Kurikulum Merdeka memiliki potensi besar dalam membentuk generasi inovatif. Fleksibilitas kurikulum memungkinkan guru untuk menyesuaikan materi pembelajaran dengan minat dan bakat siswa, serta mendorong pembelajaran yang aktif dan berpusat pada siswa. Selain itu, proyek-proyek pembelajaran yang menjadi ciri khas Kurikulum Merdeka juga memberikan ruang bagi siswa untuk mengembangkan kreativitas dan kemampuan pemecahan masalah. Namun, implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka masih menghadapi beberapa tantangan, seperti kurangnya kesiapan guru, keterbatasan sarana dan prasarana, serta kurangnya koordinasi antar stakeholder. Oleh karena itu, perlu dilakukan upaya yang lebih intensif untuk mengatasi tantangan-tantangan tersebut agar Kurikulum Merdeka dapat berjalan secara efektif dan optimal.

Kata Kunci: *Kurikulum Merdeka, generasi inovatif, pembelajaran aktif, proyek pembelajaran, pendidikan Indonesia*

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Abstract

The Independent Curriculum, as one of the government's efforts to improve the quality of education in Indonesia, is expected to produce a generation that is innovative and adaptable to the changing times. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in shaping an innovative generation in Indonesia. Using a qualitative approach, this research involves teachers, students, and school principals as informants. The findings indicate that the Independent Curriculum holds significant potential in shaping an innovative generation. The curriculum's flexibility allows teachers to tailor learning materials to students' interests and talents, while also promoting active and student-centered learning. Furthermore, the project-based learning characteristic of the Independent Curriculum provides opportunities for students to develop creativity and problem-solving skills. However, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum faces several challenges, including insufficient teacher preparedness, limited facilities and infrastructure, and a lack of coordination among stakeholders. Therefore, more intensive efforts are needed to address these challenges to ensure the Independent Curriculum can be implemented effectively and optimally.

Keywords: Independent Curriculum, innovative generation, active learning, project-based learning, Indonesian education

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of the modern era demands fundamental changes in the education system. Education is no longer merely about transferring knowledge but must also be capable of producing a generation that is innovative, creative, and ready to face future challenges (Resa, 2023). In response to these demands, the Indonesian government has launched the Independent Curriculum as an effort to reform the national education system. The Independent Curriculum is expected to provide flexibility for educational institutions to develop learning programs tailored to the characteristics and needs of students.

The Independent Curriculum introduces several innovations, including student-centered learning, project-based learning, and a reduction in the number of subjects. These concepts aim to encourage students to take a more active role in the learning process, develop critical thinking, creativity, and collaborative skills, and foster a deeper interest in



learning. Furthermore, the Independent Curriculum provides teachers with the flexibility to design learning materials that are relevant to local contexts and aligned with students' needs.

Grounded in constructivist theory, which emphasizes knowledge construction through active student engagement with their environment, this study explores how the Independent Curriculum's emphasis on student-centered learning and project-based learning aligns with these principles. According to constructivist theory, students build knowledge through interaction with their environment, making them central to the learning process. This framework is particularly relevant as the Independent Curriculum promotes an active, engaging, and personalized approach to learning, which encourages students to develop problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and creativity (Amsal Qori Dalimunthe et al., 2024; Muhammad Riza, 2023).

Existing literature on similar educational reforms in other countries, such as Finland's curriculum transformation or project-based learning in the United States, shows positive correlations between these pedagogical shifts and the development of student-centered learning outcomes (Muhlison, 2022). In the context of Indonesia, prior studies on the Independent Curriculum highlight both its successes and challenges, particularly in terms of teacher readiness and resource constraints (Muhammad Riza, 2023). By referencing these studies, this research aims to contextualize the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Indonesia and provide insights into the effectiveness of its strategies (Kurniati, et.al, 2022).

However, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the field continues to face various challenges. Among these are the lack of teacher readiness, limited facilities and infrastructure, and insufficient coordination between central and regional authorities. Therefore, it is essential to evaluate the effectiveness of the Independent Curriculum's implementation in achieving its primary goal of shaping an innovative generation (Iskandar, 2023).

This study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the effectiveness of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in shaping an innovative generation in Indonesia (Aisyah, et.al, 2023). The research focuses on aspects related to the development of students' creativity, critical



thinking skills, and problem-solving abilities. In addition, the study seeks to identify the factors influencing the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum in schools.

This study aims to provide empirical data that can serve as a basis for formulating better policy recommendations to enhance the quality of education in Indonesia. The findings of this study are also expected to contribute to the advancement of knowledge, particularly in the field of education. A qualitative approach with a case study method is employed in this research. The subjects of the study are schools that have implemented the Independent Curriculum. Data will be collected through in-depth interviews with teachers, students, and school principals, as well as through the analysis of relevant documents. Theoretically, this study is grounded in constructivist theory, which posits that knowledge is constructed by students themselves through interaction with their environment. Additionally, the research draws on various literature studies concerning educational innovation, the Independent Curriculum, and the development of student character.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research is based on the assumption that education plays a crucial role in shaping future generations. The curriculum, as the core of the education system, holds a vital role in achieving national educational goals (Nugraha, 2022). In the context of Indonesia, the Merdeka Curriculum emerges as an innovation designed to address contemporary challenges and produce competent, creative, and innovative graduates. The concept of educational innovation serves as the primary foundation for this study. Educational innovation can be defined as a transformative process aimed at improving the quality of education (Syauki, et, al, 202). As one form of educational innovation, the Merdeka Curriculum is expected to foster active, student-centered, and era-relevant learning.

Constructivist theory serves as a relevant framework for understanding the learning processes occurring within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. This theory posits that knowledge is not passively received by students but is actively constructed through their interactions with the environment. The Merdeka Curriculum, with its student-centered learning approach, aligns closely with the principles of constructivism. Constructivist theory, which emphasizes active learning and knowledge



construction through student interaction with the environment, directly informs the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on student-centered approaches. Teachers are encouraged to facilitate learning through activities such as project-based learning and collaborative problem-solving, where students engage in real-world tasks that require critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration—skills essential for 21st-century competencies.

The development of 21st-century competencies is one of the primary objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum. These competencies include critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration—skills essential for navigating the increasingly complex and dynamic challenges of the workforce. The Merdeka Curriculum is designed to foster these competencies through various learning activities that encourage students to think creatively and solve problems (Husna, 2022). The concept of **flexibility** is a hallmark of the Merdeka Curriculum. This curriculum provides autonomy for educational institutions to develop learning programs tailored to the characteristics and needs of their students. This flexibility is expected to encourage teachers to be more creative in designing engaging and meaningful learning activities for their students (Amaliah, et.al, 2023).

In addition to flexibility, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes the importance of strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile. This profile encompasses six dimensions: faith and devotion to God Almighty, global diversity, collaboration, independence, and critical reasoning (Alfaeni & Asbari, 2023). The Merdeka Curriculum is designed to integrate Pancasila values into all aspects of learning. Project-based learning is a key approach highlighted in the Merdeka Curriculum (Firmansyah, et.al, 2023). This method allows students to engage in deep and comprehensive exploration of a topic, enabling them to develop various skills such as problem-solving, presentation, and teamwork (Bahtiar & Sholeh, 2023). Teachers play a crucial role in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Beyond being mere conveyors of information, teachers serve as facilitators of learning (Haq, et.al, 2023). They must possess strong pedagogical competencies to create a conducive learning environment and motivate students to learn (Rachmawati, et.al, 2022).

The factors influencing the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum are multifaceted. Key considerations include support



from school principals, availability of facilities and infrastructure, and teachers' commitment to adopting the curriculum. Additionally, external factors such as government policies and societal conditions can significantly impact the curriculum's success. (Saesaputri, 2024)

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that the Merdeka Curriculum has significant potential to improve the quality of education in Indonesia. However, the success of its implementation depends on various internal and external factors. This study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation and provide recommendations for future improvements.

RESEARCH METHODS

The focus of this research is on the Merdeka Curriculum and its implementation in Indonesian schools, particularly in how the curriculum influences student learning, creativity, critical thinking, and character development. The unit of analysis in this study includes schools that have implemented the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers who actively engage with its methods, and students who are directly affected by the curriculum. Additionally, government policies and official documents that provide context for the curriculum's adoption are also considered. This study examines how these entities interact and contribute to the formation of an innovative generation, with a specific focus on the practical application of innovative learning strategies such as project-based learning and the integration of Pancasila values. The research investigates the challenges faced by teachers, students, and educational institutions in adapting to the curriculum and how they collectively impact the curriculum's success or failure.

This study adopts a qualitative research design, specifically a literature review method, aimed at synthesizing existing knowledge related to the Merdeka Curriculum, educational innovations, and the development of student character. A qualitative approach is appropriate for this research because it allows for a deep, context-rich understanding of the theoretical and practical implications of curriculum reforms. Rather than relying on quantitative data or empirical fieldwork, the research critically analyzes secondary sources, such as scholarly articles, books, and official government reports, to identify key themes and patterns that reveal insights into the Merdeka Curriculum's effectiveness in fostering an innovative and



competent generation. The literature review process will focus on understanding the broader context of educational reforms and how these innovations have been implemented in similar settings both within and outside Indonesia, particularly in countries with similar educational challenges.

The data for this research is primarily drawn from secondary sources, including scientific journals, books, official government documents, and relevant literature. These documents provide comprehensive insights into the Merdeka Curriculum, innovative educational practices, and the development of student character. Additionally, sources such as online databases (Google Scholar, Mendeley, JSTOR, ERIC) are used to gather scholarly articles and research findings that address the impact of the Merdeka Curriculum. The research also incorporates official reports and policy documents that describe the curriculum's objectives, implementation strategies, and challenges faced by schools and teachers. These sources collectively provide valuable information on the broader educational context and the role of innovation in shaping Indonesia's educational future.

The data collection process is conducted through a systematic literature review, where various relevant texts, academic journals, books, and official documents are reviewed and analyzed. This technique allows for the identification of key themes, patterns, and gaps in the existing research concerning the Merdeka Curriculum. Secondary data is primarily collected from academic databases and online sources, which provide access to peer-reviewed articles, government publications, and books. The literature review also incorporates analyses of educational reports, policy briefs, and other official documents that are relevant to the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation. The collected data is then categorized into themes related to innovation in education, curriculum flexibility, student character development, and the challenges faced by educators and students in adapting to new pedagogical methods.

The data analysis is conducted using a thematic analysis approach, which involves reading and interpreting the selected literature to identify recurring themes and patterns. This technique allows for a detailed understanding of how the Merdeka Curriculum aligns with educational reforms aimed at fostering creativity, critical thinking, and innovation. The



analysis will also include a critical discourse analysis to examine the ideological underpinnings of the Merdeka Curriculum and how these influence its implementation. The data is categorized according to key themes such as student-centered learning, project-based learning, and Pancasila integration. The findings from the thematic analysis will be synthesized to evaluate the curriculum's effectiveness and to identify factors that contribute to its successful or unsuccessful implementation in schools. The goal is to offer actionable insights and policy recommendations based on the comprehensive review of existing literature

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Merdeka Curriculum, implemented across various educational levels in Indonesia, is designed to provide flexibility for both teachers and students in the learning process. One of the primary objectives of this curriculum is to foster students' creativity through a learner-centered approach (Resa, 2023). Under the Merdeka Curriculum, students are given the opportunity to deeply explore their interests and talents through project-based learning that is relevant to real-life contexts (Koten, 2023). This approach enables students to think critically, solve problems creatively, and produce meaningful outputs, thereby contributing to the development of their creativity (Sumarmi, 2023).

The Merdeka Curriculum grants teachers the freedom to design learning activities tailored to the needs and potential of their students. Teachers are no longer bound by rigid textbooks or syllabi; instead, they can develop more contextual and engaging materials (Andari, 2022). This freedom fosters a conducive learning environment where students can experiment with new ideas without fear of making mistakes. Consequently, students are encouraged to explore various approaches in completing tasks or projects, ultimately enhancing their ability to think outside the box.

However, the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum in fostering students' creativity largely depends on the readiness of educators. Teachers must be able to adopt innovative teaching methods and understand the characteristics and needs of each student (Nisak & Anggraini, 2024). Unfortunately, not all teachers have received adequate training to implement this curriculum optimally. The lack of training can hinder the creation of truly creativity-stimulating learning experiences for students. Therefore, teacher training and mentoring programs are crucial factors in



ensuring the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Alimuddin, 2023).

In addition, the availability of facilities and technology plays a significant role in the successful implementation of this curriculum. Project-based learning often requires access to various resources, such as teaching aids, technological devices, and flexible learning spaces (Bungawati, 2022). In areas with limited facilities, teachers and students face challenges in conducting interactive and innovative learning activities. Nevertheless, creativity can still flourish by utilizing existing local resources if teachers are able to maximize their potential effectively (Fakhrudin, et.al, 2023).

From the students' perspective, their intrinsic motivation is also a determining factor in the success of the Merdeka Curriculum. Students with a strong enthusiasm for learning and a desire to explore new things tend to adapt more easily to this curriculum's approach. Conversely, less motivated students may struggle to actively engage in project-based learning. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers not only to facilitate but also to build supportive relationships that encourage students to develop their creativity (Tanggur, 2023).

In conclusion, the Merdeka Curriculum holds significant potential to foster students' creativity if implemented effectively. A combination of learning flexibility, technological support, teacher training, and student motivation serves as the key to its success. By addressing existing challenges, this curriculum can become a substantial step toward shaping a generation of young individuals who are creative, innovative, and well-prepared to face global challenges.

The Merdeka Curriculum is designed to address the challenges of 21st-century education, particularly in preparing students to navigate the uncertainties of global dynamics. One of the curriculum's main focuses is to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Idhartono, 2022). These competencies are essential elements in shaping individuals who are adaptive and innovative. By providing flexibility in teaching methods (Haq, 2023), the Merdeka Curriculum enables students to actively participate in the learning process and directly engage with complex situations that require deep analysis and careful decision-making (Quddus, 2024).

The project-based learning approach in the Merdeka Curriculum serves as one of the primary strategies for developing students' critical



thinking skills. Through engaging and challenging projects, students are encouraged to identify problems, gather information, analyze data, and devise appropriate solutions (Triastuti, et.al, 2023). This process fosters the ability to evaluate multiple perspectives, consider the consequences of each action, and formulate creative and practical solutions. In this way, students not only gain theoretical knowledge but also acquire real-world experience in solving problems relevant to everyday life (Alimuddin, 2023).

In addition, the competency-based approach in the Merdeka Curriculum provides space for students to continuously develop their problem-solving skills. In this model, learning focuses not only on achieving academic grades but also on mastering the competencies required to tackle specific challenges. Students are given opportunities to work both independently and collaboratively on tasks, fostering their ability to think logically, creatively, and systematically (Marisana et.al, 2023). Such a learning process not only enhances students' intellectual abilities but also shapes their character as responsible individuals who can effectively work in teams.

The effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum in developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills heavily depends on the quality of its implementation. Teachers play a pivotal role in creating a learning environment that encourages students to think critically (Qurniawati, 2023). They must be able to facilitate in-depth discussions, provide constructive feedback, and motivate students to explore new ideas. Without support from well-trained and competent teachers, efforts to cultivate these skills may not achieve optimal outcomes. Therefore, teacher training and mentoring are essential aspects that must be prioritized (Handayani, et.al, 2023).

On the other hand, challenges in providing learning resources and facilities also influence the success of the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation. Project-based learning often requires access to various learning media, such as teaching aids, technological tools, and reading materials. In schools with limited facilities, both students and teachers may struggle to conduct learning activities that support the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Marisana, et.al, 2021). Nevertheless, with teacher creativity and the optimization of local



resources, these challenges can be addressed to create meaningful learning experiences.

In addition, parental support significantly influences the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum. Parents who actively engage in their children's education, such as by providing encouragement or creating a supportive learning environment at home, can help students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Conversely, a lack of support from the family environment may hinder students from maximizing their potential. Therefore, synergy between schools, families, and communities is a crucial element in ensuring the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Student motivation is another factor that cannot be overlooked. Students with a strong interest in learning are more likely to engage in challenging learning processes that stimulate critical thinking skills (Yusuf, et.al, 2023). Conversely, less motivated students may struggle to participate in project-based learning or activities that require problem-solving. Therefore, teachers need to create an engaging and relevant learning environment to keep students motivated and encourage them to develop their abilities.

The outcomes of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum are becoming evident among students who have had opportunities to actively engage in learning. Many students have demonstrated improvements in their ability to analyze problems, devise creative solutions, and make evidence-based decisions. These skill developments are beneficial not only in academic contexts but also in everyday life, where students are better equipped to address challenges with confidence and effectiveness (Muktamar, et.al, 2023).

Nonetheless, continuous evaluation of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is essential to ensure that its objectives are fully achieved. The government and relevant stakeholders need to identify existing barriers, such as gaps in teacher training or disparities in facilities, and seek appropriate solutions to address them. Furthermore, a systematic monitoring mechanism is required to assess the ongoing development of students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Muktamar, et.al, 2023).

In conclusion, the Merdeka Curriculum offers significant opportunities to develop students' critical thinking and problem-solving



skills. With proper implementation, support from various stakeholders, and continuous evaluation, this curriculum can serve as a vital foundation for shaping a resilient, adaptive generation prepared to face future challenges. Collaborative efforts from teachers, students, parents, and the government are key to achieving these goals.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in schools is significantly influenced by various interrelated factors. One of the key factors is the quality of educators responsible for applying the curriculum. Teachers play a central role in delivering instructional content, managing classrooms, and fostering a supportive learning environment. Competent, creative, and innovative teachers are better equipped to adapt teaching approaches to meet students' needs. However, many teachers feel they do not fully understand the concept of the Merdeka Curriculum due to limited training. Therefore, intensive training, mentoring, and continuous professional development are essential to enhance teachers' capabilities in effectively implementing this curriculum (Astuti & Sari, 2020).

The availability of infrastructure and facilities is also a significant factor in the success of the Merdeka Curriculum. Project-based or exploratory learning often requires supporting resources, such as laboratories, creative spaces, technological devices, and access to digital learning materials. Schools with well-equipped facilities have a greater opportunity to implement this curriculum optimally compared to schools with limited resources. To address this disparity, the government must pay special attention to providing educational facilities, particularly in remote areas or regions with limited resources (Ramadhani & Hindun, 2023).

Support from school principals and management also plays a critical role in the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Visionary and proactive principals can serve as driving forces, guiding teachers, students, and the entire school community to support the curriculum (Dewi & Astuti, 2022). Effective school management can devise strategic plans, allocate budgets, and facilitate teacher training to optimize the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Without support from management, teachers' efforts to adopt innovative teaching methods may be hindered by administrative challenges or a lack of logistical support (Rohim, 2023).



Active participation from students and parents (Muktamar, 2023) is another crucial factor. The Merdeka Curriculum requires students to be more independent and active in the learning process. However, not all students possess the motivation or ability to adapt to this more flexible approach. On the other hand, parental involvement in supporting students' learning at home can help ensure the success of the curriculum. Parents who understand the goals and benefits of the Merdeka Curriculum are more likely to provide moral and material support, such as allocating additional study time or providing access to necessary resources.

The role of the government is equally crucial in supporting the success of the Merdeka Curriculum. Consistent policies, adequate budget allocation, and ongoing monitoring are key elements in ensuring the curriculum is effectively implemented (Hamida, 2022). The government must also provide clear guidelines and modules, as well as support schools facing challenges through specialized mentoring programs. Without sufficient intervention from the government, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum may be hindered by various technical and operational challenges.

In summary, the success of the Merdeka Curriculum also relies on continuous evaluation and adaptation. The evaluation process is essential to identify strengths and weaknesses in curriculum implementation, enabling timely improvements. As a dynamic curriculum, the Merdeka Curriculum requires flexibility in adjusting learning programs to meet the needs of students, teachers, and the community. With strong collaboration among teachers, school principals, parents, the community, and the government, the Merdeka Curriculum holds great potential to enhance the quality of education in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has had a positive impact on fostering students' creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. However, the success of its implementation varies between schools and is influenced by several factors. To enhance the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum, more intensive efforts are needed to improve teacher competencies through continuous training, develop engaging and relevant learning materials, and provide adequate facilities and infrastructure.



Additionally, full support from school principals and all school stakeholders is essential. This study is limited in its generalizability as it only involved a specific number of schools. Therefore, further research with larger and more diverse samples is needed to confirm these findings. Future research could explore in greater depth the impact of the Merdeka Curriculum on student learning outcomes and its influence on addressing achievement gaps among students.

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