



Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Cirebon City and Regency Areas

Muhammad Iqbal Al Ghozali ^{1*}, Sitty Nur Syafa Bakri²

¹ Universitas Islam Bunga Bangsa Cirebon

² University Malaysia Sabah

Correspondence e-mail * : m.iqbal@bungabangsacirebon.ac.id

Abstract: The background of this research departs from the government's policy that establishes the Merdeka Curriculum as an alternative to the national curriculum to strengthen students' character and competence through contextual and flexible learning. This study aims to identify the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the Cirebon City and Regency areas, including implementation strategies, supporting factors, inhibitions, and implications. The research method uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques in the form of interviews, observations, and document studies from ten field reports. The subjects of the study include teachers, principals, and officials of the education office in Cirebon City and Regency. Data analysis is carried out through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The results of the study show that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the two regions has similarities in the gradual implementation, the implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), as well as teacher training support and infrastructure facilities. However, the challenges faced include limited teacher understanding, administrative burden, and limited teaching materials. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of continuous mentoring, the provision of adequate teaching materials, and the equitable distribution of infrastructure support.

Keyword : Implementation, Merdeka Curriculum, Cirebon

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INTRODUCTION

Educational curriculum reform has become a global phenomenon driven by the need to prepare young people for the challenges of the 21st century. Countries consider curriculum reform to be an important and necessary step to make schools enter the 21st century and respond quickly to a rapidly changing world (Fangestu & Marpuah, 2025; Fauzan & Arifin, 2022). The OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030 project has undertaken a comprehensive curriculum analysis through the co-creation of new knowledge with a wide range of stakeholders including policymakers, academics, school leaders, teachers, NGOs, social partners and most importantly, students. These global trends show that curriculum flexibility and school autonomy are key in improving the quality of education that is relevant to the local context and student needs.

In the Indonesian context, the Merdeka Curriculum exists as a response to the need for a more adaptive and contextual transformation of national education. The government's policy that establishes the Merdeka Curriculum as an alternative to the national curriculum aims to strengthen the character and competence of students through contextual and flexible learning. The curriculum emphasizes project-based learning, character building, and essential competency development in contrast to the more

structured 2013 Curriculum (Amiyatno et al., 2025; Muktamar et al., 2024).

This research has significant novelty compared to previous relevant studies. First, the research of Syahrir et al., (2024) which examines the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum to realize Indonesia's golden generation through a systematic literature review, focuses on evaluating the impact of the curriculum on the development of student character nationally, but has not explored specific implementations at the regional level with variations in geographical contexts. Second, the research of Al Arsyadhi et al., (2024) on the evaluation of teacher readiness in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools reveals the challenge of educator readiness, but is limited to aspects of teacher competence without comprehensively analyzing supporting and inhibiting factors in the context of certain regions.

The novelty of this research lies in a comprehensive approach that combines findings from ten field data sources covering various schools and administrative areas, so as to provide a comprehensive picture of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum across contexts in one study area. This research also integrates a multi-stakeholder perspective involving teachers, principals, and education office officials to provide a holistic analysis of the dynamics of implementation at the micro to macro levels.

The urgency of this research is very high considering that the Merdeka Curriculum is still in the initial implementation stage and requires continuous evaluation to ensure the effectiveness of its implementation. In the midst of global challenges such as digital transformation, changing job market needs, and the demands of 21st century skill development, the implementation of a flexible and contextual curriculum is critical for the success of Indonesia's education system (Ferdinand et al., 2025; Ihsan et al., 2025). Evaluation of implementation in the Cirebon City and Regency areas is important because it can provide insight into curriculum adaptation in areas with diverse geographical, social, and economic characteristics, which can then be a reference for implementation in other regions with similar characteristics.

This study aims to comprehensively analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools in the Cirebon City and Regency areas, focusing on identifying implementation strategies implemented by schools, mapping supporting and inhibiting factors of implementation, evaluating the effectiveness of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) program in project-based learning, and analyzing comparative implementation practices between city and city areas. regency. In addition, this research also aims to formulate policy

recommendations and best practices that can be used as a reference for optimizing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, both in terms of improving teacher competence, infrastructure development, and strengthening multi-stakeholder support in the education ecosystem.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method to describe in detail the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools in Cirebon City and Regency. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with principals, teachers, and Education Office officials, as well as direct observation in ten schools where the research was located. The selection of the location was carried out purposively by taking into account the variation in the condition of infrastructure facilities, school accreditation, and the background of the city and district area.

The research instrument is in the form of semi-structured interview guidelines that contain questions related to preparation, implementation, supporting and inhibiting factors, as well as a comparison between the Merdeka Curriculum and the 2013 Curriculum. The interview was recorded with the permission of the interviewee to ensure the accuracy of the transcript. Field observations were used to confirm the interview data, especially related to the implementation of project-based

learning and the integration of the Pancasila Student Profile.

The data collection process was carried out over a period of three months, involving direct interaction with teachers at various grade levels, starting from grade 1 to grade 6. Data was also obtained from school documentation such as teaching modules, learning tools, and photos of P5 activities. Data analysis follows the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing as described by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques, namely by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation.

This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to obtain a comprehensive contextual picture of the readiness, challenges, and good practices that arise in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The results of this methodology are expected to make relevant empirical contributions for policymakers, educators, and other related parties in the development and evaluation of the curriculum in the future.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The results of this research were obtained from ten elementary schools in the Cirebon City and Regency areas that have implemented the Merdeka Curriculum. Data was collected

through interviews, observations, and documentation that described in depth the process of preparation, implementation, and challenges faced.

1. At SD Sains Islam Alfarabi, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum began in 2022 with a focus on project-based learning designed through key questions and community involvement. Teachers integrate the values of the Pancasila Student Profile in the teaching module and involve parents in outing activities. Adequate support for facilities and infrastructure, but limited references are the main challenge. Al Farabi Islamic Science Elementary confirmed the importance of teacher training, local curriculum development, and the use of PMM. Parental support and adequate infrastructure are available, but limited referrals remain an obstacle.
2. SDN 1 Sutawinangun began implementing the Merdeka Curriculum three years ago. The school has complete facilities and the support of the local government which routinely provides assistance. The challenges faced are the limitations of the use of technology and the tendency of teachers to continue using the old methods. The administration of learning is also felt to be burdensome.
3. SDN 2 Putat implements the Merdeka Curriculum in the

- 2024/2025 school year for all classes. Creative projects such as growing melons and making works from second-hand items encourage student engagement. Parental support increased after seeing the learning results, even though there was resistance at first.
4. SDN 1 Wotgali implements P5 twice in one semester, involving students and parents. The implementation is carried out after the semester exam to focus on strengthening character. A collaborative approach between school principals, teachers, and the community is the main supporting factor.
 5. SDN 1 Panggangsari uses its status as an adiwiyata school to integrate project-based learning, such as making monuments from used bottles. Simple technological means are available, but government support is limited to BOS funds. The main challenges are the unruly behavior of students and the limitations of printed teaching materials.
 6. SDN Kartini 1 in Cirebon City began implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in 2023 for some classes and expanded in 2024. The project of making soap from environmental waste is an example of contextual learning that engages students in entrepreneurship. Facilities are adequate, but teachers need a deeper understanding to design relevant teaching modules.
 7. In group 4 schools in the district, the implementation will begin in 2021 in stages. The supporting factors are visionary leadership and a school culture that is open to innovation. Challenges include teachers' limited knowledge, resistance to change, and limitations of teaching materials.
 8. Group 2 schools in the district began implementation in the 2023/2024 school year. Environmental and entrepreneurial projects come into focus, with the support of active parents. However, some teachers still need intensive training to understand the curriculum as a whole.
 9. SDN 3 Sigong implements project-based learning with careful planning, especially for high grades. Community support is quite high, although parental involvement is still low. Adequate technological facilities, and the government supports it through training and BOS funds.
- Overall, the results of the study show that the success of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is greatly influenced by the readiness of teachers, the support of parents and the community, the availability of infrastructure, and the active role of the government in training and mentoring. The main challenges include limited understanding of the curriculum, resistance to new methods, limitations

of teaching materials, and high administrative burden.

Supporting Factors and Constraints

Based on the results of interviews in various elementary schools in the Cirebon City and Regency areas, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has taken place with various strategies and stages. In general, schools start the implementation gradually, starting from grades 1 and 4, then expand to all levels. Teacher training is the main preparation, facilitated by the Education Office and through the Independent Teaching Platform. Some schools integrate project-based learning (P5) with relevant themes such as entrepreneurship, environment, and artistic creativity, involving students in contextual activities such as product making, planting, and recycling of used goods.

The most dominant supporting factors are the principal's commitment, teacher readiness, adequate infrastructure, and support from parents and the community. Technological facilities such as laptops, projectors, and the internet have been used to support learning. Government support includes training, mentoring, facility assistance, and the provision of teaching modules.

However, there are a number of obstacles such as limited teachers' understanding of the concept of the Merdeka Curriculum, limited printed teaching materials, difficulties in

technology adaptation, and high administrative burden. Some schools also faced barriers to initial support from guardians, although support increased after seeing the positive impact of the program.

Discussion

1. Dynamics of the Preparation and Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum: Perspectives on the Theory of Educational Change

The findings of the study show that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the Cirebon City and Regency areas follows a gradual pattern starting from grades 1 and 4, then expanded to all levels. This implementation pattern is in line with the theory of educational change put forward by Fullan (2016), which emphasizes the importance of the initiation, implementation, and institutionalization stages in the process of curriculum change. Fullan asserts that implementation is "an effort to apply initial ideas and practices or a new set of activities and structures to people who are trying or expected to change into wider use." The gradual approach taken by schools in Cirebon reflects an intuitive understanding of the complexity of curriculum changes that require adequate adaptation time.

The preparation process involving teacher training through the Education Office and the Independent Teaching Platform shows conformity with the principles of effective teacher professional development. Darling-

Hammond et al., (2017) in their research on effective teacher professional development emphasized that continuous, collaborative, and practice-focused training is key to the successful implementation of the new curriculum. Findings in the field show that schools that pay intensive attention to teacher training, such as those conducted at SD Sains Islam Alfarabi and SDN 1 Sutawinangun, tend to experience smoother implementation compared to schools that have minimal preparation aspects.

The implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) as the core of the Merdeka Curriculum shows a variety of interesting approaches. Schools integrate P5 with contextual themes such as entrepreneurship, the environment, and artistic creativity, which are reflected in projects such as making soap from environmental waste at SDN Kartini 1, melon cultivation at SDN 2 Putat, and making monuments from used bottles at SDN 1 Panggangsari. This approach shows compatibility with the project-based learning theory put forward by Krajcik & Blumenfeld (2006), which emphasizes that effective project-based learning must be authentic, challenging, and connected to the student's real world.

2. Supporting Factor Analysis: Multi-Stakeholder Synergy in the Education Ecosystem

The supporting factors identified in this study show the importance of multi-stakeholder synergy in curriculum implementation. The principal's commitment as a change leader is in line with the findings of research on educational leadership conducted by Leithwood et al., (2008), which identified that the principal's transformational leadership plays a crucial role in creating a school culture that supports educational innovation. In schools such as group 4 in the district and SDN 1 Wotgali, visionary leadership and a school culture that is open to innovation is a key catalyst for successful implementation.

Adequate technology infrastructure support, including laptops, projectors, and internet access, demonstrates the school's understanding of the demands of educational digitalization. This is relevant to the concept of TPACK (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) developed by Mishra & Koehler (2006), which emphasizes that effective integration of technology in learning requires a convergence between technological knowledge, pedagogy, and content. The availability of technology in research schools provides the foundation for the implementation of more interactive and contextual learning.

The participation of parents and the community in supporting the implementation of P5 shows the realization of the concept of a holistic education ecosystem. Bronfenbrenner (1979) in the ecological theory of human development emphasized that optimal learning occurs when there is a synergy between the microsystem (school), the mesosystem (the relationship between school and family), and the macrosystem (educational policy). The increase in parental support after seeing the learning outcomes at SDN 2 Putat and the active involvement of the community in various schools shows the formation of a conducive educational ecosystem.

3. Implementation Challenges: The Complexity of Learning Paradigm Shifts

The barriers identified in this study reflect the complexity of the paradigm shift from teacher-centered to more flexible student-centered learning. The limited understanding of teachers on the concept of the Merdeka Curriculum is in line with the findings of Rogers' (2003) research on the diffusion of innovation, which shows that the adoption of educational innovations follows an adoption curve starting from early adopters to laggards. The resistance to new methods found in some schools is a manifestation of what Rogers calls "innovation resistance."

The high administrative burden complained by teachers shows an imbalance between bureaucratic demands and the actual implementation of learning. This is in line with the criticism made by Hargreaves & Goodson (2006) about "intensification" in the teaching profession, where teachers face pressure to do more at the same time without a proportionate increase in capacity. The limitations of printed teaching materials experienced by schools show the need for a more systematic transition from the conventional curriculum model to a more flexible and digital model.

The difficulties of technology adaptation faced by some teachers reflect the phenomenon of digital divide which is not only physical access to technology, but also pedagogical ability to integrate technology. According to Davis (1989) in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) explains that the acceptance of technology is influenced by perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Findings in the field show that although technological infrastructure is available, not all teachers have confidence in the usefulness and ease of use of technology in learning.

4. Curriculum Learning Transformation Comparison: Paradigm

The comparison between the Merdeka Curriculum and the 2013 Curriculum revealed in the research findings shows a fundamental paradigm shift. Greater flexibility in designing learning, an emphasis on character and competency development (not just academic achievement), and a project-based learning approach reflect the transition from a linear instructional design model to a more adaptive and responsive model. Tyler (1949) in the basic principles of the curriculum emphasizes the importance of conformity between educational objectives, learning experiences, learning organization, and evaluation. The Merdeka Curriculum demonstrates the evolution of the Tyler principle by providing a wider space for local contextualization in each component of the curriculum.

The finding that this flexibility requires qualified pedagogical and managerial competence is in line with the concept of "teacher agency" put forward by Priestley et al. (2015). Teacher agency refers to the capacity of teachers to act deliberately and reflexively in the context of their practice, which demands not only technical knowledge but also the ability to make complex professional decisions. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum requires teachers to become active "curriculum makers",

not just passive "curriculum implementers".

5. Theoretical and Practical Implications: Towards Sustainable Implementation

The findings of this study confirm the relevance of systems theory in curriculum implementation put forward by Ornstein and Hunkins (2017), who emphasize that the success of curriculum implementation depends on a harmonious interaction between input components (teachers, students, resources), processes (learning, assessment), and outputs (learning achievement). Schools that are successful in implementation demonstrate the ability to manage all components of the system in an integrated manner.

The sustainability of the implementation that is the focus of the research findings is in line with the concept of "institutionalization" in the theory of organizational change. Ely (1990) identified eight conditions that facilitate the implementation of educational innovation, including dissatisfaction with the status quo, availability of resources, adequate time, rewards and incentives, participation and commitment, leadership, and support. Schools that show more stable implementation tend to have most of these conditions, while schools that face challenges show deficiencies in some key conditions.

The findings on the importance of ongoing mentoring, adequate

provision of teaching materials, and equitable distribution of infrastructure support reflect the need for a systemic approach in curriculum reform. This is in line with the recommendations of contemporary research on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum conducted by Fajri (2023), which emphasizes that successful implementation requires a holistic approach that addresses challenges at multiple levels simultaneously. Thus, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Cirebon can be understood as a complex transformation process that requires systemic and sustainable support to achieve the goal of improving the quality of adaptive and contextual education.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Cirebon City and Regency has shown positive progress, although it still faces various challenges. The success of the implementation is supported by teacher training, community participation, and the provision of infrastructure, while the main obstacles include teacher understanding, administrative burden, and limited teaching materials. The limitation of this study lies in the scope of only ten schools, so the results cannot be generalized widely. Recommendations for follow-up include increasing the intensity of teacher mentoring, developing contextual and easily

accessible teaching materials, optimizing the use of technology, and further research in other areas and levels of education.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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