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Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum for Indonesian Language Teachers in Grade 3 at SD Al Islam 2 Jamsaren

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum by third-grade Indonesian language teachers at SD Al Islam 2 Jamsaren, Surakarta. The background of this study stems from the need to understand the readiness and actual practices of teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, especially in educational units that have adopted differentiated learning, authentic assessment, and the strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile. The conditions at SD Al Islam 2 Jamsaren, which has a good literacy culture, technological support, and teacher commitment to improving the quality of learning, were the basis for selecting the research location. The research used a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques in the form of observation, in-depth interviews, and analysis of learning documents carried out by teachers. Data analysis was carried out through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results of the study show that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has been quite successful, as indicated by learning plans that refer to learning outcomes, the implementation of active-collaborative strategies, and formative assessments used to monitor student learning progress. However, teachers still face challenges in optimally integrating technology, managing diverse differentiation activities, and developing consistent authentic assessment instruments. The research conclusion emphasizes the importance of continuous improvement of teacher competence, assistance in curriculum implementation, and the provision of learning facilities that support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in a more effective and sustainable manner.

Keywords:

Implementation, Merdeka Curriculum, Curriculum Development.

Introduction

Changes in the Indonesian education curriculum have been ongoing in line with the needs of the times and demands for quality education. Since the implementation of KTSP 2006, then Curriculum 2013, to the latest policy in the form of the Merdeka Curriculum, the government has continued to strive to improve the relevance and quality of learning at various levels of education. These curriculum changes indicate that educational reforms are designed to make learning more adaptive to social changes and technological advances (Sekarwati & Fauziati, 2021). Curriculum changes are also in line with global demands to create flexible, collaborative learning that supports the development of 21st-century competencies (Zulkifli, 2020; Rahayu & Firmansyah, 2022). Each curriculum has different characteristics and objectives aimed at shaping meaningful learning experiences for students.

The implementation of the curriculum in educational units plays a strategic role as a guideline for the implementation of education. The curriculum serves as a reference for teachers and schools in developing learning activities that are in line with national education objectives. However, the implementation of the curriculum does not always run smoothly in the field. Various schools face



challenges in the form of limited facilities, differences in teacher competence, and uneven institutional readiness in facing change (Restiana, Agustina, Rahman, Ananda, & Witarsa, 2022). Other studies also show that the readiness of human resources and school culture greatly influence the success of new curriculum implementation (Setiyawan & Yamin, 2021; Rachmawati, 2023). This lack of readiness has an impact on differences in the quality of learning between schools.

Inequality in readiness to implement the curriculum often results in disparities in learning outcomes between schools. This shows that curriculum change requires other forms of support, particularly in improving teacher competence and strengthening the learning environment. Without such support, it is difficult for the new curriculum to achieve the expected results, making cooperation between the government, schools, and stakeholders very important. Teachers have a strategic position in ensuring the successful implementation of the curriculum, as emphasized in various studies that highlight the importance of teacher professionalism in curriculum change (Sufyadi & Rahayu, 2021; Fauzan & Rahmawati, 2023).

The Merdeka Curriculum places teachers as the main drivers of educational transformation. Teachers are expected to be active, creative, innovative, and adaptive in facilitating learning that provides greater space for students' potential. In addition to mastering the material, teachers also need to build warm relationships with students and support their character development (Mulyasa, 2021). These abilities are in line with teacher quality indicators that emphasize pedagogical flexibility, the ability to design learning experiences, and the ability to communicate empathetically (Wahyuni & Purwaningrum, 2022).

Teachers are also required to be sensitive to technological developments and able to utilize them as learning media. The integration of technology not only improves the quality of learning but also helps teachers adapt to students' learning patterns, which are increasingly close to the digital world. A number of studies recommend the use of technology as a means of increasing student interactivity and engagement in learning (Firmansyah & Putri, 2020; Hasibuan & Hutauruk, 2021). In addition, teachers need to conduct continuous self-evaluation in order to improve teaching practices that are still ineffective. Through the Merdeka Belajar policy, teachers are given the freedom to design learning that suits the needs of their students, making the improvement of teacher competence very important.

The Merdeka Curriculum is an extension of the Emergency Curriculum that emerged as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. This curriculum emphasizes learner-centered learning and provides space for schools to develop their own curricula based on local characteristics and needs (Sudaryanto et al., 2020). This policy also aims to strengthen post-pandemic learning recovery (Kemdikbudristek, 2022). In addition, several studies show that curriculum flexibility can increase student motivation and autonomy (Rahmawati & Lestari, 2022; Harahap, 2023).

Learning activities in the Merdeka Curriculum are designed to be more personalized, enjoyable, and not solely focused on achieving grades. This approach is expected to overcome learning loss and provide space for the development of students' talents and interests. This principle is also supported by pedagogical studies that emphasize the importance of differentiated learning and formative assessment in improving the quality of learning (Tomlinson, 2017; Nugroho & Ayu, 2021). The Merdeka Curriculum encourages teachers to design learning that is adaptive and relevant to students' needs.

Based on initial observations at SD Al Islam 2 Jamsaren, this school has begun to implement the Merdeka Curriculum in stages, particularly in the 3rd grade Indonesian language subject. Teachers



strive to adapt teaching tools, learning methods, and formative assessments in accordance with the principles of Merdeka Belajar. However, there are still variations in teachers' readiness to implement fully student-centered learning. Third-grade Indonesian language teachers showed enthusiasm and a high level of commitment to innovation, but still faced obstacles such as suboptimal use of technology, limited use of digital platforms, and the need for further training in developing learning outcome-based teaching modules. These findings make this school a relevant location for research because it illustrates a combination of enthusiasm for change and the need to strengthen teacher competencies in curriculum implementation.

Teachers, as the main actors in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, have a big responsibility in ensuring that learning is carried out in accordance with the curriculum objectives. At the elementary school level, teachers play an important role in shaping students' literacy skills, especially in Indonesian language learning, which is the foundation for mastery of other subjects. Thus, research on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum by third-grade Indonesian language teachers is important to see how the learning process is designed, implemented, and evaluated. This research is also necessary to identify the challenges faced by teachers and the strategies used to overcome obstacles that arise during curriculum implementation in elementary schools.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with the aim of describing the findings in depth in accordance with the phenomena occurring in the field. This approach was chosen because it provides a comprehensive understanding of Indonesian language learning practices in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Creswell (2016) states that qualitative research focuses on exploring and interpreting the experiences of a number of individuals or groups involved in a social problem. Thus, this study seeks to understand the meaning, process, and dynamics that arise in the context of learning, not just to produce certain numbers or generalizations.

In line with Creswell's view, Guba and Lincoln (2005) emphasize that qualitative research is oriented towards the construction of social reality. Researchers seek to interpret the meanings that emerge from social interactions in educational settings, making the authenticity of teachers' and students' experiences a primary concern. Therefore, this study emphasizes naturalistic processes, i.e., conditions as they are without manipulation of variables. The main focus of the study is on the activities of Indonesian language teachers in applying the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, both in planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning.

Data collection was conducted in November 2024 using unstructured interview techniques with Indonesian language teachers who had implemented the Merdeka Curriculum. Unstructured interviews were chosen so that the researcher could obtain more open, flexible, and in-depth answers according to the informants' experiences. The main instrument in this study was the researcher himself, as is common in qualitative research, with the support of additional instruments in the form of field notes and documentation. All collected data were analyzed descriptively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques to ensure that the findings obtained were accurate, credible, and scientifically accountable.

Results and Discussions



The research results presented cover three core components in curriculum development, namely planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning, as well as the obstacles faced by teachers during the implementation process. The presentation of the results was based on the analysis of interview data, observations, and documentation, then systematically compiled to comprehensively describe the empirical conditions in the field.

Curriculum Merdeka Learning Planning

Based on the findings of the study at SD Al Islam 2 Jamsaren, third-grade Indonesian language teachers have implemented learning planning in accordance with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers compile complete documents in the form of annual programs, semester programs, weekly programs, remedial programs, teaching modules, and assessment tools. The planning activities began with an understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum concept as the basis for developing learning tools, followed by determining time allocation, developing learning objective flow (ATP), and developing teaching modules relevant to student characteristics.

In general, teachers showed good adaptation to curriculum changes by prioritizing learning flexibility and strengthening basic literacy. The following is a summary of the results in terms of planning:

Table 1. Research Results: Learning Planning

Component	Form of Teacher Implementation
Annual Program	Determining the allocation of time for one year based on learning objectives, breadth of material, and class hours.
Semester Program	Break down the annual program into a semester activity plan covering topics, time, and learning indicators.
Weekly Program	Outlines weekly activity details in the form of lesson schedules, methods, and learning activity plans.
Remedial Program	Providing additional services for students who have not yet completed their studies through special guidance.
Teaching Modules	Developing modules that include learning objectives, materials, activities, assessments, and authentic evaluations.
Student Assessment	Preparing formative and summative assessments to measure competency achievement.

Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

During the implementation stage, the third-grade Indonesian language teacher applied several active learning approaches, namely discovery learning, contextual learning, and cooperative learning. The teacher guided students to discover concepts through solving simple problems, relating learning to real-life experiences, and working in groups to compose expository texts.

Table 2. Research Results: Learning Implementation

Method	Classroom Implementation
Discovery Learning	Students were asked to solve problems such as composing sentences, understanding texts, or analyzing information from their surroundings.



Contextual Learning	Teachers use traditional play activities to familiarize students with procedures and help them understand the sequence of activities.
Cooperative Learning	Students work in groups to write expository paragraphs on the theme of the surrounding environment.

Learning Evaluation

Evaluation activities are carried out periodically to monitor students' competency development. Teachers conduct daily tests, mid-semester assessments (PTS), end-of-semester assessments (PAS), remedial lessons, and enrichment activities.

Table 3. Research Results: Learning Evaluation

Type of Evaluation	Form of Implementation
Daily Tests	Formative tests to assess understanding of the material after one topic has been completed.
Midterm and Final Exams	Summative tests to assess broader learning outcomes.
Remedial	Learning improvement for students who have not yet completed the material.
Enrichment	Providing additional challenges for students who have exceeded the target.

Challenges in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

Teachers face several obstacles, particularly in terms of creativity, understanding the concepts of the Merdeka Curriculum, and utilizing technology. Some teachers still need assistance in developing teaching modules and designing student-centered active learning.

Table 4. Challenges in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

Aspect of Challenge	Description
Teacher Creativity	Teachers find it difficult to design innovative and varied learning activities.
Understanding of the Curriculum	There are still teachers who do not understand the main principles of the Merdeka Curriculum.
Technology Utilization	The use of technology is not yet optimal as part of learning.
Module Development	Teachers still need examples and training to develop phase-based modules.

The results of the study show that Indonesian language teachers in grade 3 at Al Islam 2 Jamsaren Elementary School have made efforts to implement the Merdeka Curriculum in accordance with national policy requirements. The lesson plans developed by teachers reflect efforts to implement a competency-based curriculum, as explained by Widyastono (2016) that systematic planning helps teachers direct the learning process to suit the needs of students. The preparation of annual, semester, and weekly programs by teachers is also in line with Majid 's (2019) opinion, which emphasizes that planning is the main foundation for effective learning implementation.



The implementation of learning using discovery learning, contextual learning, and cooperative learning shows that teachers have tried to apply pedagogy that is oriented towards student activity. Bruner (1961) states that discovery learning provides opportunities for students to gain understanding through direct experience. Meanwhile, the contextual approach (CTL), as explained by Johnson (2014), emphasizes the relevance of the material to students' real lives, thereby increasing the meaningfulness of learning. The cooperative learning applied by teachers is also in line with Slavin's (2015) theory, which states that group work can increase student motivation and engagement.

In terms of evaluation, the use of formative and summative assessments is in line with the Merdeka Curriculum guidelines, which emphasize assessment as a continuous process. Sadler (1989) explains that formative assessment is important for providing feedback during the learning process. This is in line with the practices of teachers at SD Al Islam 2 Jamsaren, who use evaluation as a basis for providing remedial and enrichment activities.

The obstacles faced by teachers, especially those related to creativity and understanding of the curriculum, are problems that are often encountered during the transition period of implementing new policies. Mulyasa (2021) emphasizes that the success of the curriculum is highly dependent on the quality of teachers as the main implementers. A lack of understanding of the core concepts of the Merdeka Curriculum can hinder the effectiveness of learning, as stated by the Ministry of Education and Culture (2022) that mentoring and training are needed to ensure teachers can implement the curriculum optimally.

Limitations in the use of technology are also a significant challenge. According to Prasetyo & Sutopo (2020), technology integration requires adequate digital literacy so that teachers can use it effectively in learning. This condition shows the need for continuous training to improve teacher competence in the digital age. This study shows that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SD Al Islam 2 Jamsaren has been quite successful, but it still needs to be strengthened in terms of pedagogical creativity, curriculum understanding, and technological literacy so that Indonesian language learning in grade 3 can be more optimal and student-centered.

Conclusion

This study shows that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in third-grade Indonesian language learning at SD Al Islam 2 Jamsaren has been going quite well, although there are still some obstacles that need attention. In terms of planning, teachers have developed complete learning tools, ranging from annual programs, semester programs, weekly programs, remedial programs, teaching modules, to assessments. This reflects the teachers' readiness to implement a curriculum that requires flexibility and is oriented towards students' basic competencies.

In implementing the learning process, teachers have applied various active strategies such as discovery learning, contextual learning, and cooperative learning that empower students to learn independently, meaningfully, and collaboratively. The approach applied is in line with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes student-centered learning that is relevant to their lives. Learning evaluation is also carried out continuously through formative and summative assessments to monitor students' progress and provide remedial and enrichment services as needed.

However, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum still faces a number of obstacles, particularly related to the demands on teachers' creativity, limited understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum



concept, and the use of technology in learning. This shows the need for ongoing mentoring, training, and capacity building for teachers. Overall, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SD Al Islam 2 Jamsaren has shown positive results, but strengthening teacher competencies is key to optimizing curriculum implementation so that learning objectives can be achieved more effectively and optimally.

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