EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION REFORM: A CASE STUDY ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM

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Abstract

The implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia represents an important effort in reforming education administration to improve learning quality. This research highlights curriculum flexibility as key in building a learning environment that is more adaptive and responsive to students' needs. The freedom for educators to customise teaching materials and methods facilitates more relevant and contextualised learning. However, significant challenges remain, including limited infrastructure and educator readiness. The results of this study emphasise the need for ongoing support and training for teachers for the reforms to be effective. Ultimately, Merdeka Curriculum has the potential to be a catalyst for positive change if supported by adequate management and resources.

Keywords: Reform, Education Administration, Independent Curriculum Implementation

Introduction

Education has a strategic role in creating high quality and competitive human resources. The Indonesian government continues to make various efforts to improve the quality of education, one of which is through curriculum reform (Sitopu et al., 2024) ; (Guna et al., 2024) ; (Fawait et al., 2024) .

Curriculum reform is a systematic effort made by the government or educational institutions to update and develop the curriculum to make it more relevant to the needs of the times, the demands of the world of work, and technological developments. The main objective of curriculum reform is to improve the quality of education by providing learning experiences that are more contextual, functional, and in accordance with the needs of students (Nuraeni et al., 2020) . This process includes adjusting competency standards, teaching methods, evaluation, and teaching materials that are more adaptive and innovative. With curriculum reform, it is expected that students will not

only gain academic knowledge, but also critical, creative, collaborative and communicative thinking skills relevant to the challenges of the 21st century (Kim, 2020).

In 2022, the government through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology launched the Merdeka Curriculum as an effort to provide flexibility to education units in developing learning in accordance with student needs, local potential, and the times (Huang, 2024) .

The Merdeka Curriculum aims to encourage learners to have relevant competencies and 21st century skills, such as critical, creative, collaborative and communicative thinking. This change requires a new approach in education administration, especially in the aspects of planning, implementing, and evaluating learning. However, the implementation of this curriculum is not easy and faces various challenges, both in terms of teacher readiness, facilities and infrastructure, parental support, and supporting regulations (Nketekete ., 2021)

Curriculum changes require significant adaptations in the existing education administration system. Good education administration is the key to successful curriculum policy implementation, as it involves managing various educational resources effectively and efficiently. Without good administration, the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum may not be achieved optimally (Makokotlela & Nxumalo, 2021) .

Given the importance of education administration in this reform process, this research will focus on a case study of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation. By conducting an in-depth study of educational administration practices in a number of schools that have implemented the Merdeka Curriculum, this research aims to explore how the administrative system supports or hinders the implementation of the new curriculum, as well as what factors influence the effectiveness of implementation (Kennedy, 2021) .

This research is expected to provide a clear picture of the challenges and opportunities in educational administration reform in the Merdeka Curriculum era. In addition, the results of this study are expected to provide recommendations for stakeholders in formulating more effective policies and strategies to support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the future.

Thus, this research is important to understand more about the dynamics of education administration in the context of curriculum change and make a real contribution to improving the quality of education in Indonesia.

Research Methods

The study in this research uses the literature method. The literature research method, or often called literature review, is a research approach that involves in-depth examination and analysis of written sources relevant to the research topic. This method aims to identify, review, and criticise theories, concepts, and findings from previous studies to build a solid theoretical foundation, as well as find research gaps that can be

filled by new research. Literature research is conducted by collecting data from books, journals, scientific articles, research reports, and other reliable sources. Through this method, researchers can formulate strong arguments, develop hypotheses, and design fundamental conceptual frameworks for further research (Suyitno, 2021) ; (Adlini et al., 2022) ; (Raco, 2018) .

Results and Discussion
Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

Merdeka Curriculum is an innovative idea introduced by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology. This curriculum aims to provide flexibility to schools, teachers, and students in determining the direction of learning that suits the needs and potential of each individual. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum not only pays attention to academic aspects, but also prioritises character development, 21st century skills, and the use of technology in the learning process (Wanti & Chastanti ., 2023)

The first step in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum involves a paradigm shift in lesson plan preparation. Teachers no longer only act as teachers, but also as facilitators who direct students to develop their interests and talents independently. Teachers are given the freedom to develop lesson plans (RPP) that are simpler and orientated to student needs. In addition, learning evaluation in the Merdeka Curriculum also prioritises continuous formative assessment to reflect students' learning process comprehensively (Gusteti et al., 2022) .

The use of technology is an integral part of this implementation. Digital learning resources such as Merdeka Belajar platform and other educational applications are utilised to enrich teaching materials and methods. The use of technology allows for more interactive, engaging learning, and supports distance learning, which is especially important during the pandemic. Technology also provides wider accessibility to students in various regions, so that the education gap can be suppressed (Syah et al., 2023) .

Collaboration among stakeholders is key to the successful implementation of Merdeka Curriculum. The government, schools, teachers, parents and communities must work together to create a conducive learning environment. The government is tasked with providing policy support and adequate resources, while schools and teachers must be proactive in implementing the curriculum and innovating teaching methods. Parents and communities also need to be involved to provide moral and material support to children in the learning process (Limiansi et al., 2023) .

Overall, the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum is expected to improve the quality of education in Indonesia by providing more space for students to explore their potential. Through a more personalised and contextual approach, students are expected to not only gain academic knowledge, but also the life skills and character

needed to face global challenges. Although challenges in implementing this curriculum still exist, with good cooperation between all parties, Merdeka Curriculum has great potential to produce a more innovative, creative, and highly competitive generation.

Supporting and inhibiting factors for implementing the Merdeka curriculum

The implementation of Merdeka Curriculum is supported by several significant factors, one of which is a proactive government policy in formulating regulations and providing the necessary resources. With a clear policy and sufficient budget support, schools can more easily adapt this curriculum. In addition, teacher training and capacity building are also crucial supporting factors. Teachers who have good competence and understanding of the concept of Merdeka Belajar are able to apply more creative and innovative teaching methods (Iksal et al., 2024) ; (Judijanto & Aslan, 2024) ; (Irwan et al., 2024) .

The use of technology in education is another major contributing factor. Access to the internet and technological devices such as computers and tablets facilitate the implementation of a flexible and personalised curriculum. Available digital learning resources allow students to learn at their own pace and learning style. Technology also enables more effective learning evaluation through digital platforms, so teachers can monitor students' progress in real-time and provide constructive feedback (Wu & Zhao, 2024) .

However, there are also several inhibiting factors that can hinder the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. One of the biggest challenges is unequal access to technology and educational infrastructure. In remote and less developed areas, limited access to internet and technological devices is still a significant problem. This causes disparities in curriculum implementation, where students in disadvantaged areas do not get the same opportunities as students in urban areas (Lathif, 2023) .

Resistance to change is also an inhibiting factor that needs to be observed. Some teachers who are used to conventional learning patterns may find it difficult and uncomfortable with the changes offered by Merdeka Curriculum. Lack of understanding and skills in using educational technology can also hinder effective implementation. Therefore, continuous efforts are needed to provide training and support to educators so that they are ready and able to adapt to change (Samier, 2021) .

In addition, the involvement of parents and the community in supporting the concept of Merdeka Belajar is still not optimal in some areas. Ignorance or lack of understanding of the goals and benefits of Merdeka Curriculum can lead to a lack of support from the surrounding environment. To overcome this, more intensive and collaborative socialisation between schools, parents, and the community is needed so that all parties can support the implementation of this curriculum to the fullest, thus creating an educational ecosystem that is conducive to children's development (Lv ., 2023)

In addition, effective school management and governance are also key to the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Visionary and adaptive leadership can encourage innovation in the school environment and create an inclusive and collaborative learning culture . Clear division of roles and good communication between various parties in the school environment, such as teachers, students, parents and the community, can increase the effectiveness of the curriculum implementation. A participatory and supportive management model will ensure that every element involved feels a shared responsibility in creating an optimal learning environment (Irmayanti & Wijayanti ., 2020)

Partnerships between schools and external parties such as universities, industries and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can also strengthen the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum. These collaborations can open up access for students to additional resources, real-world learning experiences, internships and collaborative projects relevant to industry and community needs. Thus, the curriculum not only focuses on classroom learning, but also includes practical experiences that equip students with relevant skills for the future (Carter, 2021) .

Thus, implementing Merdeka Curriculum requires support from various aspects, from government policies, teacher readiness, technology utilisation, to collaboration with external parties. The success of this curriculum cannot be separated from efforts to overcome challenges such as gaps in access to technology, resistance to change, and lack of parental and community involvement. With optimal support and collaboration between all relevant parties, Merdeka Curriculum has great potential to create an educational ecosystem that is more inclusive, adaptive, and relevant to the needs of the times. Thus, it is expected to help produce a generation that is more critical, creative, and ready to face future challenges.

Impact of Independent Curriculum Implementation

The implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia has brought various significant impacts on the education system. One of the positive impacts is increased flexibility in the learning process. Teachers have the freedom to design and customise teaching approaches that suit students' needs and interests. This allows learning to be more contextualised and relevant, so that students can more easily understand the material being taught. This flexibility also provides room for innovation and creativity in teaching methods, which can increase student motivation and engagement in learning (Gao & Liu, 2021) .

Furthermore, Merdeka Curriculum also encourages the development of 21st century skills among students, such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and effective communication. With problem-based projects and collaborative learning, students are encouraged to work together, think critically, and find innovative solutions to the problems they face. These activities not only enhance their understanding of the

subject matter but also equip them with practical skills that are much needed in the modern world of work (Mogashoa, 2023).

However, the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum also faces challenges such as gaps in access to technology. Despite technology being one of the important aspects of this curriculum, not all schools in Indonesia have adequate technology infrastructure. This leads to inequalities in access and quality of learning between schools in urban areas and those in rural or remote areas. Students and teachers in areas with limited access to technology may struggle to fully utilise the potential of Merdeka Curriculum (Noviantari & Agustina, 2023).

Then, the aspect of teacher readiness and competence is also a crucial factor in implementing this curriculum. Not all teachers feel ready or have sufficient ability to adapt the new teaching methods implemented in Merdeka Curriculum. Therefore, continuous teacher training and mentoring are needed to ensure that they can carry out their roles effectively. Improving teacher competence not only supports curriculum implementation but also improves the overall quality of education (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2022).

Overall, the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum has had complex and diverse impacts on the education system in Indonesia. While it has brought positive improvements in the flexibility and relevance of learning and the development of students' skills, it has also faced challenges such as gaps in technology access and teacher readiness. To optimise the positive impact and overcome the challenges, collaboration between the government, schools, teachers, parents and other stakeholders is needed. Thus, Merdeka Curriculum can be a step forward in creating education that is more inclusive, adaptive, and in line with future needs.

Conclusion

The reform of education administration in Indonesia through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum represents a significant effort to adapt the education system to the needs of the times and improve the quality of learning. One of the main conclusions of this case study is that a more flexible approach to administration and teaching can facilitate a learning environment that is more adaptive and responsive to students' needs. The freedom for teachers to customise teaching materials and methods allows for more relevant and contextualised learning, accommodates individual differences and encourages active student engagement.

However, the study also revealed the challenges faced in this reform, particularly in relation to resource gaps and system readiness. In some areas, limited technological infrastructure and educational resources hamper schools' ability to fully implement the principles of Merdeka Curriculum. In addition, preparation and training for educators is a crucial aspect that needs to be improved to ensure that teachers can implement the

curriculum effectively. Without adequate support and training, the potential benefits of this reform may not be maximised.

Overall, the education administration reform through the Merdeka Curriculum is a progressive step and a catalyst for positive change in education. However, its successful implementation is highly dependent on the commitment of all stakeholders to overcome obstacles and strengthen supporting aspects such as access to technology, teacher training and education funding. With proper management and support, this transformation in the education system has great potential to improve the quality of education and prepare Indonesia's young generation to face future global challenges.

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