



The Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum at PENGGERAK School

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum at PENGGERAK School. The descriptive qualitative method (case study) was used in this research, which was conducted in detail on a matter under study in the form of programs, events, activities, and others to gain in-depth knowledge and information about it. The study shed light on and described the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum at Sekolah Dasar Unggulan Aisyiyah Taman Harapan Curup as a PENGGERAK school. The outcome of this study shows that the implementation of the curriculum in the PENGGERAK school has been carried out optimally and continuously, although in its implementation there are still some issues and obstacles in the first year. The main key to the successful implementation of the curriculum in the school is that the principal and teachers have the willingness to make changes. School principals, as leaders, must be able to change the mindset of human resources in schools to want to make changes so that the Merdeka curriculum can be implemented and to foster cooperation between teachers, parents, students, communities, and school stakeholders.

Keywords: Curriculum Implementation, Merdeka Curriculum, PENGGERAK School.

Introduction

There has been a change in the 2013 curriculum to an independent curriculum (the Merdeka curriculum). The government has made many efforts to introduce and implement the Merdeka curriculum in several schools. The school that became an example of implementing the Merdeka curriculum is called a driving school (PENGGERAK School). In addition, the government also provides special education training to certain teachers who pass the test to take part in the education program, namely the Pendidikan Guru Penggerak, to learn and



understand the Merdeka curriculum. The government hopes that this will accelerate the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in schools other than the PENGGERAK schools. After two years of implementing the Merdeka curriculum in PENGGERAK schools, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology has reopened registration for educational units wishing to implement the Merdeka curriculum independently for the academic year 2023-2024. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum offered is adjusted to the readiness of teachers and education staff (Arifa, 2022). For each educational unit that chooses to use the Merdeka Curriculum, there are three choices for the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum: independent learning, independent change, and independent sharing. The existence of a Merdeka curriculum is a re-formation of the Indonesian national education system, which implies that this statement will bring changes and progress to the country, enabling it to adapt to changing times (Yamin & Syahrir, 2020).

The Merdeka curriculum has several advantages compared to the previous curriculum, including: (1) It is more focused and simpler. The curriculum encourages students to focus more on essential material and skill development. The curriculum is also more detailed, important, and not rushed. (2) much more independent in terms of learning. It means that the curriculum gives students the students the freedom to choose subjects according to their passions, abilities, and aspirations. (3) A more interactive curriculum—an independent curriculum is also considered more meaningful and interactive. Learning through project activities (project-based learning) offers wider opportunities for students to be actively involved in the latest news, such as the environment, health, and other news (Nugraha, 2022).

The PENGGERAK School Program was launched by the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology on February 1, 2021. The PENGGERAK School Program



began in the 2021–2022 school year in 2,500 schools spread across 34 provinces and 111 districts and cities in Indonesia. The PENGGERAK School Program will later become the gateway to a curriculum that is oriented towards the needs of students based on the suitability of the student's character and the characteristics of the school environment in Indonesia. Meanwhile, the role of PENGGERAK School in implementing the Merdeka curriculum is to create a functional curriculum that meets students' learning needs. Schools also provide facilities and human resources to support the Merdeka curriculum process. Apart from that, the initiating school can share issues regarding the Merdeka curriculum with other schools that are not yet members of the initiating school. Thus, the Merdeka curriculum can be better known and understood by all schools, not just the PENGGERAK school, which initiated the implementation of the independent curriculum. This is important in preparation for 2024, when the Merdeka curriculum has been established as the national curriculum (Kusumawardani, 2022). It also relates to (Rahayu et al., 2022) that the PENGGERAK school program is the result of the evaluation of the transformation program at the at the school before. This program will support public and private schools to move up one or two levels. The program is conducted in phases and integrated into an ecosystem, so it is expected that all schools in Indonesia will be part of the PENGGERAK School Program.

The core of the Pengerak school programme is to build on great potential and develop the full range of students' learning outcomes, including skills (literacy and numeracy) and character. The learning concept in this Merdeka curriculum is independent learning. Maipita et al. (2020) said that through the concept of independent learning, the learning process focuses on deeper learning in a more real community environment. Teachers have played an important role in the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Mulyasa (2021) describes



that educators must be able to be good tutors and guides for students and continue to innovate so that it is useful in preparing for learning. As a teacher, you must be able to supervise learning as well as possible and bring about noteworthy changes in terms of creating a pleasant learning environment. In its development, a teacher should also be able to foster positive relationships between students and all school individuals by using a variety of educational strategies.

The PENGGERAK school aims to make students who have abilities in cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects develop optimally while still applying and upholding good manners in the learning process, as stated by Sonzarni et al. (2022). In relation to the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in PENGGERAK schools, especially in the scope of Rejang Lebong regency, the researcher wants to identify and obtain information about the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in Sekolah Dasar Unggulan Aisyiyah Taman Harapan Curup as one of the first generations of PENGGERAK schools in Rejang Lebong.

Research Methodology

The method used in the study was descriptive qualitative research. Fadli (2021) expressed that qualitative research is a study that examines the quality of relationships, activities, situations, or various conditions. This means that qualitative research places more emphasis on holistic descriptions, which can explain in detail what activities or situations are taking place rather than comparing the effects of certain treatments or explaining people's attitudes or behaviours. The approach used in the study was a case study. A case study is an approach that is carried out intensively, in detail, and in depth about a matter under study in the form of a program, events, activities, and others to gain in-depth knowledge or information about it (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The selected phenomenon is an actual thing (a real event),



ongoing, not something that has passed in the field study, namely the implementation of Merdeka curriculum. Data collection was done by interview, observation, and document analysis.

The sampling technique used in the study was a purposive sample based on knowledge of the population and research objectives (Sugiyono, 2020). The subjects of the research were Sekolah Dasar Unggulan Aisyiyah Taman Harapan Curup, which was included in the PENGGERAK School as one of the first generation PENGGERAK schools. Research procedures included instrument validation, collecting data, processing the data, and then presenting the data with useful information that is easily understood by the reader.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

Sekolah Dasar Unggulan Aisyiyah Taman Harapan Curup was selected as a first-generation PENGGERAK school that became a pioneer in implementing the independent curriculum because the principal participated in the PENGGERAK school programme selection, which was organised by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture. In May 2021, as a PENGGERAK school principal, the first step the principal took was to form a PENGGERAK school committee. It consists of four teachers from the school. They were a homeroom teacher who taught in the first grade, a fourth grade's homeroom teacher, a religious education teacher, and a physical education teacher. The principal and teachers who were members of the PENGGERAK school committee attended a 10-day school program training, known as Program Sekolah Penggerak (PSP), through the Zoom platform facilitated by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The PSP was attended by schools that have passed the



PENGGERAK school selections according to each level of education. Training in the PSP continued with the help of facilitators as mentors who have been recommended by the Ministry of Education and Culture to see the stages of implementing and developing the Merdeka curriculum in PENGGERAK schools.

Every month, the facilitator would lead a reflection activity on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum that has been implemented by the PENGGERAK School. The teachers who are members of the PENGGERAK School Committee will lead in-house training (IHT) in schools to share their understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum with their peers. Furthermore, teachers could improve their understanding of the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum independently through a platform called Platform Merdeka Mengajar (PMM), which has been facilitated by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The benefits of the PMM platform are not only as a learning management system but also as a place to share information and understanding of the independent curriculum for all teachers in Indonesia. Teachers' knowledge about Merdeka curriculum is important; this was in accordance with Prakoso et al. (2021). The teacher will be the center of material, the center of supervision, the facilitator of activities, and the development function of teaching. How teachers' positive perceptions of self-directed learning will greatly affect their readiness to implement it. Furthermore, it is important to explore teacher readiness for implementing the Merdeka Belajar policy. Like Suardana et al. (2022), the role of teachers was on the frontlines of implementing the Merdeka curriculum at the elementary school level.

There would certainly be some obstacles and difficulties faced by teachers in implementing the curriculum, such as not being used to analysing students' needs, conducting different learning activities, changing terms in learning administration, balancing curricular



and co-curricular activities, etc. This has been improved by the school's IHT program, continuous evaluation, and reflection on learning. Good teamwork between principals, teachers, school supervisors, students, parents, and school stakeholders has improved the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum at SDUA every semester. Abduh et al. (2022) noted that the implementation of the new curriculum requires specific skills and knowledge from teachers to facilitate the diversity of abilities in implementing teaching strategies in the context of educational curriculum reform.

The government also provided support in the form of textbooks for the first and fourth grades that implement the Merdeka curriculum, although these books were only support for some subjects, not all. Financial support was also supported by the government, such as providing educational funds in the form of Bantuan Operasional Sekolah (BOS) Kinerja, especially for the PENGGERAK School, in addition to the regular BOS that the school has been receiving. The principals and committees of the PENGGERAK schools also received internet data support that was used during the online meetings using the platform Zoom Meeting.

At the time the data was collected, Sekolah Dasar Unggulan Aisyiyah Taman Harapan Curup was implementing the Merdeka curriculum for the second year. The first year, during the 2021–2022 academic school year, the Merdeka curriculum was gradually implemented for the first and fourth grades. In the 2022-2023 academic school year, it has been implemented for first, second, fourth, and fifth grades. For the 2023–2024 academic years, there are three categories offered by the Ministry of Education and Culture in implementing the Merdeka curriculum, namely, independent learning, independent change, and independent sharing. Sekolah Dasar Unggulan Aisyiyah Taman Harapan Curup implements the Merdeka curriculum



for independent sharing, where Sekolah Dasar Unggulan Aisyiyah Taman Harapan Curup can provide mentoring to other schools that are just about to implement the Merdeka curriculum.

Before the beginning of the new school year, the school principal and the PENGGERAK school committee will conduct a briefing for teachers at the school to better understand the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum. The activity is called in-house training (IHT). IHT has been held by Sekolah Dasar Unggulan Aisyiyah Taman Harapan Curup every time before the new semester begins. This was carried out to see the readiness of teachers to implement the Merdeka curriculum. The school had also conducted a diagnostic assessment at the beginning of the school year to find out what the students would need when the Merdeka curriculum was implemented. This is also in accordance with the statement of Rahina and Syamsi (2023) that teachers agree on how to apply it in class learning that is thought of by students through various project-based programs.

In the Merdeka curriculum, students were expected to have six Pancasila students' profiles. The six Pancasila students' profile projects are: 1. believing, fearing God Almighty, and having noble character; 2. global diversity; 3. working together; 4. independence; 5. critical thinking; and 6. creativity. The Sekolah Dasar Unggulan Aisyiyah Taman Harapan Curup held an event called Pancasila students' project every Thursday. The students would be given a project assignment that could take up to 2 months to complete, depending on the assignment. This activity is known as the P5 (Proyek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila) Project to Strengthen the Pancasila Students' Profile. Furthermore, Sekolah Dasar Unggulan Aisyiyah Taman Harapan Curup held an exhibition of student work from P5 at least once each academic year or every semester. The harvest of P5's work will be displayed on a large scale in conjunction with Sekolah Dasar Unggulan Aisyiyah Taman Harapan Curup 's annual event



called "SDUA Got Tallent". The SDUA Got Talent event is one of the school programs held annually to provide a platform for each student to express their talents and interests on stage. The interests and talents displayed are also very diverse, ranging from arts, sports, religion, etc.

Discussion

The implementation of the Merdeka curriculum at Sekolah Dasar Unggulan Aisyiyah Taman Harapan Curup was "independent sharing". This refers to schools implementing the Merdeka Curriculum structure in developing the education unit curriculum and applying Merdeka Curriculum principles in implementing learning and assessment, with a commitment to share best practices with other education units. The school principal and teachers have implemented the Merdeka curriculum by developing various learning tools themselves in the first, second, fourth, and fifth grades. The Sekolah Dasar Unggulan Aisyiyah Taman Harapan Curup is an Islamic-based school, so the development of learning tools for religious subjects is also adjusted to the Merdeka curriculum. Sharing best practices had also been carried out by Sekolah Dasar Unggulan Aisyiyah Taman Harapan Curup such as sharing their "Best practices" that had been implemented on social media or through platforms provided by the government's PMM (platform merdeka Mengajar), independent learning platform.

The aspects of the Merdeka curriculum implementation used by Sekolah Dasar Unggulan Aisyiyah Taman Harapan Curup were as follows: First, design an operational curriculum for educational units. Second, design the flow of learning objectives. Third, designing, planning, learning, and assessment. Fourth, use and develop learning tools. Fifth, plan the project to strengthen the Pancasila student profile. Sixth, implement the Pancasila Students' Profile Strengthening Project. Seventh, implement student-centered learning. Eighth,



integrate the assessment into learning. Ninth, learning was appropriate to the stage of the students' learning level (primary and secondary education). Tenth, collaboration between teachers for curriculum and learning purposes, Eleventh, collaboration with parents or family in learning. Collaboration with parents or family in learning. Twelfth, collaboration with the community, business, or industry. The last aspect was reflection, evaluation, and quality improvement of curriculum implementation (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

There were some activities carried out in the training of the PSP as PENGGERAK school. The first activity was to give participants an explanation of the purpose and agenda of strengthening learning committees and class agreements. The second activity was called “starting from yourself”, in which participants reflected on their personal experiences by answering reflective questions. The third activity was concept exploration, where participants should have the same perception of knowledge about document management and share their best practices through stories. The best practices that have been carried out will be documented. It was important to do this because the documentation can be used as a repository of learning resources for community members and as a medium of reflection for members. In addition, community members could identify which best practices should be maintained and which aspects should be improved, and knowledge gained from key activities in the learning community is not lost (training outcomes, sharing best practices, etc.). Best practice was a term used to describe the best experience of someone's success in carrying out their professional duties. In the context of education, best practice means the best experience in solving a problem faced by educators and education personnel so that they are able to improve the quality of education and learning services. Teachers, principals, and school supervisors certainly have a lot of experience successfully overcoming various educational problems while carrying out



their duties. Sharing stories about best practices in the learning community will make it easier for colleagues or other members to map out strategies or things that have been tried so far to overcome problems or challenges in education. This makes it easier for other colleagues to identify all the efforts that have been made, whether successful or not.

The fourth activity was concept exploration (review), in which the participants reviewed guided independent learning, explored questions based on participant experience, explained the concept material for managing learning resource documents, explored existing systems in their respective schools, and explained best practices and structured writing techniques with STAR (situasi, tantangan, aksi nyata, refleksi) groove. STAR is an acronym for Situation, Challenge, Action, and Reflection. This method was generally used to respond to questions related to experiences and problems that have been encountered in a job interview. But we can also use this format or approach to construct a structured story outline so that we can convey “Best practice” experiences more effectively.

a. Situation

The conditions that were the background to the problem, why this practice needs to be shared, and what is your role and responsibility in that situation. Telling the duties and responsibilities of members of the practicing community (teachers, principals, and supervisors). Tell me the goal you want to achieve.

b. Challenge

The part that described the challenges or difficulties that must be solved to achieve these goals or overcome these problems What are the challenges to achieving this goal? Anyone involved

c. Action



The part that described the strategy to respond to these challenges What steps were taken to deal with these challenges? What strategy was used? What was the process? Who was involved? What resources or materials were needed to implement this strategy?

d. Reflection (results)

The part that talked about the changes and lessons learned after the action was carried out What is the impact of the action taken? Are the results effective? Or not effective? Why? How are other people's responses related to the strategy being carried out? What are the success or failure factors of the strategy carried out? What are the lessons from the whole process?

The fifth activity was the Collaboration Room, where participants hold group discussions to develop strategies for managing learning resource documents and how community members can use them. Participants also made presentations for each group, discussing the results of group discussions. The sixth activity was a contextual demonstration where participants create stories of "Best practices" with the STAR plot, carry out simulations of Best practices in pairs, and simulate telling stories of classical Best practices.

The seventh activity was guided reflection, where participants reflect on two new things they have learned, two things that are most interesting to them, one thing that was still a challenge in following the material, and two things that they want to know. The eighth activity was "Connection between Materials," where participants must know the reasons for managing learning resource documents and share best practices through important stories for the development of a community of practitioners and any activities in the community of practitioners that can be documented.

The ninth activity was Plan (real action), where participants made one real action plan to be involved in managing learning resource documents. as well as making a real action plan



to document best practices. The last activity is the sharing of best practices for implementing new paradigms through learning and reflection, where participants share best practices and reflections. It is hoped that this learning committee strengthening activity for the school principal, school supervisor, and teachers for the PENGGERAK School Program can be useful to improve the quality of learning committee strengthening in the PENGGERAK School Program and ultimately improve the quality of education in Indonesia.

The development of teaching modules was based on student diagnostic results and student needs. Learning activities were centered on the students and were aligned with the interests and talents of each student. Differentiated lesson plans become an option for learning activities that suit students' interests and talents in the hope that learning outcomes can be achieved well. Teachers maintained communication in the making of this teaching module; this was also related to the results of the Pancasila student profile project expected from students. At the beginning of the implementation, teachers felt a bit inconvenienced by the changes in teaching administration but were satisfied with the assessment system in this curriculum. The teacher reflected on the learning that had been done so that the next learning would be better at the end of each learning session. Teachers found it challenging to implement the Merdeka curriculum in the first year of implementation, but teachers became more familiar with the curriculum in the second year.

Mentoring activities were carried out regularly, once a month, by facilitators who had been assigned by the government. The purpose of the strengthening learning committee was for school principals, school supervisors, and teachers in the PENGGERAK School Program to enable the learning committees to solve daily challenges as learning leaders in education units.



The Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project is also a sign that learning between curricular, intra-curricular and extracurricular activities were balanced. According to the Ministry of Research and Technology No.56/M/2022, The Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project is a project-based co-curricular activity designed to strengthen efforts to achieve competence and character in accordance with the Pancasila learner profile created based on the Graduate Competency Standards.

The development and implementation of the curriculum have improved every year in Sekolah Dasar Unggulan Aisyiyah Taman Harapan Curup. Teachers also have a positive attitude towards the Merdeka curriculum. In previous research conducted by Nurzen (2022), teachers had confidence and enthusiasm for implementing the Merdeka curriculum. The teachers at Sekolah Dasar Unggulan Aisyiyah Taman Harapan Curup were also enthusiastic about the implementation of the curriculum, especially student assessment, which was considered easier to implement than the previous curriculum.

The principal of the school continuously encourages and supports the teachers to improve their understanding of the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum. For example, by giving teachers the opportunity to join the Program Guru Penggerak organized by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The result of this program was that Sekolah Dasar Unggulan Aisyiyah Taman Harapan Curup has one PENGGERAK teacher in the fifth batch of the PENGGERAK teacher education program, Currently, six teachers are still undergoing the seventh batch of the PENGGERAK teacher education programme, and one teacher has advanced to the second phase of the selection of candidates for the ninth batch of the PENGGERAK teacher education programme. This is the same as Supriatna et al. (2023), who



noted that teachers need training and workshops that focus on professional development to be linked to curriculum development.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Sekolah Dasar Unggulan Aisyiyah Taman Harapan Curup faced many challenges and obstacles in implementing the Merdeka curriculum. Therefore, SDUA THC can adjust to the challenges and obstacles faced with good organisation and execution in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum by taking the first-hand experience that has been gained during the PENGGERAK school programme. The biggest challenge in actualizing the Merdeka curriculum is the habituation of school culture to be more active and creative in utilising existing school assets to encourage students to maximise their potential and develop their competencies to face the challenges of the times. The hard work of the principal of Sekolah Dasar Unggulan Aisyiyah Taman Harapan Curup, who continuously invites and builds good communication between teachers, teaching staff, and all school members, ensures that the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum runs optimally. The PENGGERAK school program within the created arrangement takes place as anticipated. The role of parents is additionally one of the qualities necessary for the effective execution of the Merdeka Curriculum. The role of parents who support this implementation can be seen in the success of the Pancasila student profile development project. In previous studies, numerous things were clear from the investigation, where the centre of the execution of the PENGGERAK school program was the creation of superior-quality learning with programs planned by the school by including related parties. (Sumarsih et al., 2022).



It can be concluded that the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in schools can be carried out well if all parties collaboratively support the implementation of learning activities in accordance with the Merdeka curriculum. For this reason, the role of parents, the community, and other stakeholders also determines the implementation of this independent curriculum at school, apart from the main role of the school principal and teachers.

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