

Innovation in Curriculum: Merdeka Curriculum and its Implementation

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Article History Received : April 16th 2023
Revision : June 19th 2023
Publication : Sept 30th 2023

ABSTRACT

This research is motivated by the importance of implementing a new curriculum and aims to analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMAIT Miftahul Khoir Bandung. This research method uses qualitative research with a case study research type. The focus of this research is at SMAIT Miftahul Khoir Bandung and the focus of this research is to analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMAIT Miftahul Khoir Bandung. The data sources used in this study are primary data (school principals, teachers, and parties who can provide information) and secondary data (data already in the school in the form of documents, learning tools, and so on). Data analysis techniques using observation, interviews, and documentation. The research results show 1) The concept of an Merdeka Curriculum is an idea that carries the vision of freeing the curriculum from dependence on an established education system that seems rigid and has too many rules. 2) Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMAIT Miftahul Khoir Bandung through 4 approaches namely; a. Intracurricular Curriculum, in which the management system uses a regular system, a block system, a collaboration system, and a class transfer system. b. Project to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students. c. Extracurricular. 3) The problems faced by SMAIT Mifathul Khoir Bandung are that not all teachers respond quickly to curriculum changes so the Merdeka Curriculum is considered more difficult and troublesome, teachers have not been able to develop students' creativity as expected, lack of teacher innovation in the learning process, lack of facilities and infrastructure school.

Keywords: *Learning Innovation, Curriculum Development, Merdeka Curriculum.*

INTRODUCTION

Education is the most important thing for the development of a nation. Education is the main key to opening a bright future. Education is one of the needs that gets top priority in human life. This is because education is something that supports human survival. So it is undeniable that strategies, methods, learning media, and curricula in education have an important role because they are a bridge that connects education with students toward educational goals both in general and Islamically. As for education according RI Law Number 20 of 2003 reads;

“Education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and learning process so that students actively develop their potential to have religious spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and the skills needed by themselves, society, nation, and state.” (Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2003).

Education is an absolute requirement for the ability to progress, with education we can keep up with global progress that will leave incompetent people to follow. Education is closely related to the icons of actors, supporters, and the educational process, one of which is also utilizing the curriculum innovation process model in order to improve the quality of education which needs to be continuously improved according to the provisions of the times, besides that in improving the world of education it needs to be supported by improving the quality of human resources (HR). where the quality of educational human resources has a very large influence on the quality of education itself (Syamsudin et al., 2021).

Education, especially in Indonesia, also needs innovation in its implementation in educational institutions, because education innovation in Indonesia will increase towards the desired educational goals. Innovation here is not only in management but also in terms of learning methods, strategies, media, and even in terms of curriculum. Indonesia has provided innovations in the field of curriculum, and we know that the curriculum in Indonesia has replaced the curriculum several times with a new curriculum. The following is the journey of the existing curriculum in Indonesia from the beginning to the present; 1) Curriculum 1947 (1947 Lesson Plan), 2) Curriculum 1952 (Unraveled Lesson Plan 1952), 3) Curriculum 1964 (Education Plan 1964), 4) Curriculum 1968, 5) Curriculum 1975, 6) Curriculum 1984, 7) Curriculum 1994 and 1999 Curriculum Supplement, 8) Competency-Based Curriculum (KBK) 2004, 9) Education Unit Level Curriculum (KTSP) 2006, 10) 2013 Curriculum and, 11) Free Learning Curriculum.

The independent or independent learning curriculum was initiated by the Ministry of Education and Culture by Nadiem Makarim which has the following definition. According to Syukri (2020), Merdeka Learning is one of the initiatives of the Minister of Education and Culture Nadiem Anwar Makarim who wants to create a happy learning atmosphere. The purpose of independent learning is so that educators, students, and parents can have a happy atmosphere. The concept of Freedom to Learn is an educational process that must create happy atmospheres. According to Prayogo (2020), Independent Learning is a natural learning process to achieve independence. It is necessary to learn to be independent first because there may still be things that shackle the sense of independence, the feeling of not yet being independent, and the narrow space for independence. The essence of Independent Learning is to explore the greatest potential of educators and students to innovate and improve the quality of learning independently. Mandiri is not only

following the educational bureaucratic process but truly educational innovation (Miladiyah et al., 2023, p. 314).

In its application, an Merdeka Curriculum requires the involvement of all relevant parties, such as teachers, students, parents, and the surrounding community. Teachers need to understand that a flexible curriculum allows students the freedom to explore more specific topics and adapt their learning to their interests. Students also need to be invited to participate actively in the learning process, so that they are not only recipients but also creators and innovators.

SMAIT Miftahul Khoir Bandung is one of the schools that has implemented an Merdeka Curriculum in the 2022/2023 school year, this was reinforced by a decree from the Head of the Curriculum Standards and Education Assessment Agency, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology Number 044/H/KR/2022 concerning Units Education for Implementing Merdeka Curriculum Implementation in the 2022/2023 Academic Year (KEMDIKBUDRISTEK, 2022). SMAIT Miftahul Khoir also implements an integrated curriculum at school, this is to achieve the school's vision and mission. The integrated curriculum at SMAIT Miftahul Khoir Bandung includes; 1) The content of the National Education curriculum which still refers to the curriculum set by the Ministry of National Education, 2) The religious curriculum set by the school to provide provisions for the basics of Islam and the solidity of belief, 3) The local content curriculum set by the school in the realm of leadership and entrepreneurship.

Based on the data above, innovation in the field of education, especially in the curriculum, is very important so that education in Indonesia can achieve better, more effective, and more efficient goals. From this, the researcher aims to conduct research related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMAIT Miftahul Khoir and what are the problems faced by teachers or students in implementing it at school.

METHOD

This research method uses qualitative research with a case study research type. According to Bagdan and Taylor, qualitative methodology is a research procedure that produces qualitative descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observed behavior. (Prastowo, 2011, p. 22). The location of this research is at SMAIT Miftahul Khoir Bandung and the focus of this research is to analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMAIT Miftahul Khoir Bandung. The data sources used in this study are primary data (school principals, teachers, and parties who can provide information) and secondary data (data already in the school in the form of documents, learning tools, and so on). Data analysis techniques using observation, interviews, and documentation. The observations used in this study were participant observation,

namely collecting data through observing the object of observation by directly living together, feeling, and being in the life activities of the object of observation (Bungin, 2007, p. 116). Interviews are a form of direct communication between researchers and respondents in the form of face-to-face question-answer relationships so that the movements and expressions of the respondents are media patterns that complement words verbally (Gulo, 2002, p. 119). Documents are written records of various activities or events which can be in the form of notes, transcripts, books, newspapers, magazines, inscriptions, minutes, meetings, agendas, and so on. (Arikunto, 2013, p. 206).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Freedom Curriculum/Merdeka Curriculum

1. Definition of Curriculum

Etymologically, the curriculum comes from Greek, namely *curir* which means runner, and *curare* which means a place to race. So, the term curriculum comes from the world of sports in Ancient Roman times in Greece, which means the distance that must be traveled by runners from the starting line to the finish line. It can be understood that the distance that must be traveled here means the curriculum with the contents and subject matter which is used as the period of time that must be taken by students to obtain a diploma. In Arabic, the word curriculum that is commonly used is *manhaj*, which means the bright path traversed by humans in various fields of life. While the educational curriculum (*manhaj al-dirāsah*) in the Tarbiyah dictionary is a set of plans and media that are used as a reference by educational institutions in realizing educational goals (Desy Aulia, Nurul Hasanah, 2022, p. 72).

According to Hasbulloh (2007), the curriculum is the entire program, facilities, and activities of an educational or training institution to realize its vision, mission, and institution. Therefore, the implementation of the curriculum to support the success of an educational institution must be supported by the following things. First, there are competent personnel. Second, there are adequate facilities. Third, the existence of auxiliary facilities as a support. Fourth, the existence of educational support staff such as administrative staff, supervisors, librarians, and laboratories. Fifth, there is adequate funding, sixth, there is good management. Seventh, maintenance of supporting culture; religious, moral, national, and others, eighth, transparent and accountable visionary leadership (Barlian & Solekah, 2022).

According to Oemar Hamalik, said that curriculum implementation includes three main activities, namely program development, implementation of learning, and evaluation. Program development includes learning programs, guidance, and counseling or remedial programs. The implementation of learning includes the process of interaction between students and their environment so

that there is a change in behavior for the better. While evaluation is an assessment process carried out throughout the implementation of the curriculum (Hamalik, 2007, p. 238).

Based on the understanding of curriculum from experts, researchers can conclude that curriculum is a set of plans and arrangements regarding objectives, content, and learning methods as well as evaluation of learning outcomes that are used as guidelines in the educational process in an educational institution. In other words, a curriculum is a concept or model that guides the learning and teaching process in an educational institution. The curriculum can cover various aspects, such as subject matter, learning methods, skills development, values that must be held, and methods of assessment and evaluation. This curriculum can be made by the educational institution itself or prepared by the government.

2. Definition of Independent/Merdeka Curriculum

The Merdeka Curriculum is a curriculum with various intra-curricular learning where the content will be more optimal so that students have enough time to explore concepts and strengthen competence. Teachers have the flexibility to choose various teaching tools so that learning can be adapted to the learning needs and interests of students. Projects to strengthen the achievement of Pancasila student profiles are developed based on certain themes set by the government. The project is not directed to achieve certain learning achievement targets, so it is not tied to subject content (Direktorat PAUD Dikdas dan Dikmen, 2021).

The Merdeka curriculum has been tested in 2,500 driving schools. Not only driving schools, this curriculum was also launched in other schools. According to data from the Ministry of Education and Culture and Research and Technology, to date, there have been 143,265 schools that have used the Merdeka Curriculum. This number will continue to increase as the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum begins in the 2022/2023 academic year at the Kindergarten, Elementary, Middle School, and High School levels. (Swawikanti, 2022).

The Merdeka Curriculum is an idea launched by the Ministry of Education, namely Nadiem Makariem, which aims to encourage innovation in the world of education. In this case, the curriculum is no longer a tool that is forced on students, but a tool that can be adapted to the needs of students and is able to encourage creativity and innovation. The application of this concept is expected to provide freedom for students to explore their interests more broadly.

The focus of the independent learning curriculum is the freedom to think creatively and independently. Teachers are expected to be the driving force behind actions that bring positive things to students. The conclusion on the learning concept is a form of the proposal for restructuring the national education system. The reorganization was carried out to respond to changes and progress

in the country and to adapt to changing times. Thus, students can develop according to their potential and abilities. Independent learning is characterized as learning that is critical, high quality, fast, applicable, expressive, progressive, and diverse. Students learn on their own initiative can be seen from their attitude and way of thinking. One of them is energetic, optimistic, positive, creative, and not worried about trying new things (Susilowati, 2022, p. 121).

3. The Concept of The Independent/Merdeka Curruculum

The concept of the Merdeka Curriculum is an idea that carries the vision of freeing the curriculum from dependence on an established education system that seems rigid and has too many rules. This concept wants to give freedom to each student and teacher in designing a curriculum that suits their needs and potential interests and talents.

In the current era of digitalization, technological developments affect the quality of education. Where in every activity carried out both teachers and students are inseparable from digital-based devices. The concept of independent learning curriculum education integrates literacy skills, knowledge skills, skills, and attitudes as well as mastery of technology. Well, through this concept students are given the freedom to think to maximize the knowledge that must be taken. The concept of the 21st-century curriculum requires students to be independent in acquiring knowledge in both formal and non-formal education. The freedom applied in the 21st-century concept will provide opportunities for students to explore as much knowledge as possible. One of the things that can be done is through literacy activities, developing talents through skills and positive things that support the development of each student (Manalu et al., 2022, p. 84).

The concept of the Freedom to Learn curriculum, according to the opinion of Heppy S & Bagja, (2022), explains that: 1) Project-based learning aims to develop soft skills and character according to the Pancasila student profile. 2) Focus on essential material, so that there is time for in-depth learning of basic competencies such as literacy and numeracy. 3) The flexibility of the teacher to carry out differentiated learning based on the abilities of the students. The advantages gained by using the Merdeka Curriculum in the Merdeka Curriculum Question and Answer Pocket Book include the following; 1) The material becomes simpler, deeper, and focuses on essential material, therefore, students can learn more deeply and not in a hurry. 2) More independent or the teacher has the flexibility to teach according to the stage of achievement and development of students. Schools also have the authority to develop curricula according to educational units and students. 3) More relevant and interactive where learning through project activities provides opportunities for students to be more active and explore actual issues (Kurniati et al., 2022, p. 420).

In supporting the policy of implementing an Merdeka Curriculum there are three important stages that need to be considered by the education unit. (1) Building a technology-based education ecosystem. Technology-supported educational ecosystems are of course very important to encourage creativity, and innovation as well as driving character for educators. (2) Collaboration with various lines. In the current era of global digitalization, other parties are not absolutely rivals, but other parties can become collaborative partners who complement each other with their respective strengths and support each other with ideas and resources. (3) Inventory and data maintenance. Prepare the best human resources and infrastructure to support the implementation of government policies (Miladiah et al., 2023).

It can be concluded that the concept of the Merdeka Learning curriculum has several main components, namely project-based learning to develop soft skills and character according to the profile of Pancasila students, focusing on essential materials that enable in-depth learning in basic competencies such as literacy and numeracy, as well as teacher flexibility in conducting learning differentiated based on the abilities of students. The use of an Merdeka Curriculum has several advantages, such as material that is simpler, more in-depth, and focuses on essential material, the flexibility of teachers in teaching according to the stages of achievement and development of students, as well as more relevant and interactive learning through project activities that encourage students to become more active and explore actual issues.

Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMAIT Miftahul Khoir Bandung

1. Readiness of Schools and Teachers at SMAIT Mifathul Khoir in Merdeka Curriculum implementation

Based on the findings of observations at SMAIT Miftahul Khoir, it was found that the school was ready to implement the Merdeka Curriculum for the 2022-2023 school year. This is evidenced by the seriousness of the school before the curriculum implementation stage was carried out, namely by providing access and facilities to teachers for each subject to participate in socialization carried out both by the government and related agencies online through webinars and offline through in-person training. In this case, the school sent several teachers to take part in the Merdeka Curriculum training activities organized by the West Java Provincial Education Office. The results obtained from the training will later be socialized back to all teachers at SMAIT Miftahul Khoir.

SMAIT Miftahul Khoir chose the Independent Changing category according to the provisions, namely, it was implemented in Class X and Class XI. In this category, schools and teachers at SMAIT Miftahul Khoir are given the flexibility to choose learning tools which are then adjusted according to Learning Outcomes (CP), Learning Objectives (TP), and Learning Objective Flow (ATP).

The results of the interview with Triastuti Wahyu Utami, S.Si, M.T. As the principal of SMAIT Miftahul Khoir, every teacher at SMAIT Miftahul Khoir is required to own and install the Merdeka Teaching application to take part in the Merdeka Curriculum online training independently. In this independent training, each teacher is required to follow the stages sequentially starting from themes, modules and learning videos, as well as evaluations in the form of assignments that must be done and all of them will be assessed to see the readiness of the teacher. Based on the results of the observations and interviews above, it can be concluded that schools and teachers are ready to implement the Merdeka Curriculum in the 2022-2023 school year (Wawancara Peneliti, 2023).

2. Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMAIT Miftahul Khoir Bandung

In implementing an integrated curriculum in schools, SMAIT Miftahul Khoir is oriented toward achieving the school's Vision and Mission. The integrated curriculum at SMAIT Miftahul Khoir Bandung includes; 1) The content of the National Education curriculum which still refers to the curriculum set by the Ministry of National Education, 2) The religious curriculum set by the school to provide provisions for the basics of Islam and the solidity of belief, 3) The local content curriculum set by the school in the realm of leadership and entrepreneurship.

a. Intracurricular Curriculum

The intracurricular curriculum structure at SMAIT Miftahul Khoir Bandung consists of the curriculum structure of Phase E for class X and Phase F for class XI. Learning in schools includes intracurricular allocations and project allocations for strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile.

The intracurricular curriculum in the 2022/2023 school year in phase E is allocated for 36 weeks in one school year which consists of 1584 hours of lessons. While the curriculum structure in Phase F is allocated for 36 weeks with a total of 720-900 study hours. The learning management system at SMAIT Miftahul Khoir consists of (Hasil Observasi Peneliti, 2023).

- 1) Regular System. The implementation of the regular learning system in question is the implementation of learning that occurs routinely every week with a certain time allocation by fulfilling the time allocation provided per year.
- 2) Block System. The implementation of the block system in question is that the implementation of learning occurs at a certain time and month allocation while still fulfilling the learning allocation per year. Each year learning activities are divided into 2 blocks, namely block 1 from July to November 2022 and block 2 from December 2022 to May 2023.
- 3) Collaboration System. The collaboration system in question is the implementation of learning by collaborating learning activities on certain

subjects with learning objectives that are in accordance with learning outcomes that intersect each other.

- 4) Moving Class. Moving class at SMAIT Miftahul Khoir organizes a moving class system where each subject teacher is ready to teach in a classroom that has been determined according to the subject they teach.

According to the Principal of SMAIT Miftahul Khoir, one of the advantages of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is that it is easier for teachers to understand students. Most of the teachers at Miftahul Khoir High School stated that they were easy to adapt to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This was explained by the Principal that all teachers and stakeholders received continuous guidance and supervision from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

b. Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project

The main themes in the project to strengthen the Pancasila Student Profile in the 2022/2033 academic year in class X are Sustainable Lifestyles, environmental and natural resource conservation, and entrepreneurship. While in class XI, namely, wake up the body and soul, and engineering technology.

Table 1 - The theme of the Project for Strengthening Pancasila Class X Student Profiles.

Project	Project Theme	Implementation	Target Elements of the Pancasila Student Profile
I	Sustainable Lifestyle	October 2022	Worked together Critical Reasoning
II	Conservation of the Environment/Natural Resources	February 2023	Independent, Creative
III	Entrepreneurship	April 2023	Faith, Faith in the One and Only God with Global Diversity

c. Extracurricular

The extracurricular group consists of sports, arts and academics. The sports group consists of futsal and archery, the arts group consists of multimedia extracurriculars, and the academic group consists of youth scientific work.

Extracurriculars at school have a very important role in the holistic development and skills of students outside the academic curriculum. Extracurriculars provide opportunities for students to develop their interests

and talents in various fields such as sports, art, music, debate, and so on. Extracurricular activities also help build students' social, leadership, teamwork, and time management skills. In addition, through extracurriculars, students can explore their interests in greater depth, develop self-confidence, and broaden their social networks. Thus, extracurriculars play an important role in shaping students who have character, are competent, and are ready to face challenges in the real world.

3. Problems in the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMAIT Miftahul Khoir Bandung

In implementing the policy, it certainly has a process to achieve the goals set by the policymakers, one of which is the policy of implementing an Merdeka Curriculum in schools. The Minister of Education and Culture, Nadiem Makarim, issued a curriculum renewal policy in Indonesia, which of course caused pros and cons. Because in its implementation many schools are not ready for the renewal of the curriculum.

The problems faced by SMAIT Mifathul Khoir Bandung in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum are that not all teachers respond quickly to curriculum changes so the Merdeka Curriculum is considered more difficult and troublesome. In addition, a small number of teachers consider this curriculum change confusing, teachers have not been able to develop students' creativity as expected, lack of teacher innovation in the learning process, and school facilities have not been able to reach everything needed in implementing an Merdeka Curriculum in schools, and teacher development carried out outside of teaching hours so they have to sacrifice a few teacher holidays. The problem of implementing Merdeka Curriculum was also felt to be difficult to implement, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic due to constraints in supervising the learning process.

But besides the problems that exist in the implementation of this Merdeka Curriculum, of course, it has several advantages in implementing it in schools. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in schools has several advantages that can be added value to the education system. Following are some of the advantages of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum:

1. More student-centered learning: The Merdeka Curriculum focuses on the needs and abilities of individual students. This approach provides space for students to develop their potential, interests, and talents more optimally.
2. Skills and character development: The Merdeka curriculum emphasizes the development of skills (soft skills) and student characteristics that are in accordance with the profile of Pancasila students. Through project-based learning, students are given the opportunity to develop skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, creativity, and leadership.

3. Flexibility in learning: Teachers have the freedom and flexibility to carry out differentiated learning according to the abilities and needs of students. This allows for a more personal and adaptive approach to maximizing student learning outcomes.
4. Develop literacy and numeracy skills: The focus on essential material in the Merdeka Curriculum allows more time for in-depth learning in basic competencies such as literacy and numeracy. This helps students gain a better understanding of these areas.
5. Increase student independence and self-confidence: In the Merdeka Curriculum, students are encouraged to take an active role in the learning process. This helps increase students' independence, confidence, and sense of responsibility toward their own learning and development.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in schools provides an opportunity for students to develop their full potential and be ready to face real-world challenges.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Miftahul Khoir High School provides a new paradigm for stakeholders, teachers, and students. Free learning programmed in the Merdeka Curriculum provides opportunities for teachers and students to be able to explore their potential in a sustainable manner. The Merdeka Curriculum in its implementation is considered easy to implement, although there are definitely some obstacles. The problem faced is that not all teachers respond quickly to curriculum changes, so there is a perception that the Merdeka Curriculum is more difficult and troublesome. In addition, the lack of development of student creativity as expected, lack of innovation in learning, limited school facilities, and teacher development outside of teaching hours are obstacles to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. To overcome this challenge, better support is needed for teachers in understanding and implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, improving school facilities, developing student creativity, and effectively monitoring the learning process. In addition, updating this curriculum also requires time and patience in dealing with the changes needed to achieve educational goals that are more holistic and responsive to the needs of students.

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