

ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' MANAGERIAL COMPETENCE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Fatimah^{1*}, Ruslaini², Sumarno³

¹Universitas Almuslim

²Universitas Iskandar Muda

³Universitas Negeri Medan

¹icut.unimus88@gmail.com

Abstract

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools requires school principals to possess adequate managerial competencies to manage changes in a more flexible learning system that is based on students' needs. The managerial competencies of school principals play a key role in the successful implementation of educational policies, including the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes flexibility, differentiated learning, and independent learning. This study aims to analyze the managerial competencies of school principals in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools in Central Aceh Regency. The research method used is a qualitative descriptive approach with data collection techniques through questionnaires, observations, and interviews. The subjects of the study consist of school principals and teachers from nine elementary schools in Central Aceh Regency. The results indicate that school principals have adequate managerial competencies in managing schools, covering the stages of planning, organizing, implementing, supervising and evaluating, decision-making, and leadership in educational innovation. However, there are still several competencies that need improvement, particularly in the execution of administrative management and documentation aspects required to ensure that all students benefit optimally and to facilitate changes in student-centered learning methods by the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. This study recommends enhancing training and support for school principals in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Thus, the improvement of managerial competencies among school principals is expected to support the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools.

Keywords: managerial competencies; school principals; merdeka curriculum; elementary schools

Abstrak

Penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka di sekolah dasar menuntut kepala sekolah untuk memiliki kompetensi manajerial yang memadai guna mengelola perubahan dalam sistem pembelajaran yang lebih fleksibel dan berbasis pada kebutuhan siswa. Kompetensi manajerial kepala sekolah memegang peranan kunci dalam kesuksesan penerapan kebijakan pendidikan, termasuk Kurikulum Merdeka yang menekankan fleksibilitas, diferensiasi pembelajaran, dan merdeka belajar. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kompetensi manajerial kepala sekolah dalam implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di sekolah dasar di Kabupaten Aceh Tengah. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui angket, observasi dan wawancara. Subjek penelitian terdiri dari kepala sekolah dan guru pada 9 (sembilan) sekolah dasar di Kabupaten Aceh Tengah. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepala sekolah telah memiliki kompetensi manajerial yang memadai dalam mengelola sekolah mulai dari tahapan perencanaan, pengorganisasian, pelaksanaan, pengawasan dan evaluasi, pengambilan keputusan serta kepemimpinan dalam inovasi pendidikan. Namun, masih terdapat beberapa kompetensi yang perlu ditingkatkan, khususnya pada kompetensi pelaksanaan aspek pengelolaan administrasi dan dokumentasi yang diperlukan, memastikan semua siswa mendapat manfaat optimal serta memfasilitasi perubahan metode pembelajaran yang berpusat pada siswa sesuai dengan prinsip Kurikulum Merdeka. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan adanya peningkatan pelatihan dan pendampingan untuk kepala sekolah dalam pelaksanaan Kurikulum Merdeka. Dengan demikian, peningkatan kompetensi manajerial kepala sekolah diharapkan dapat mendukung suksesnya implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di sekolah dasar.

Kata Kunci: kompetensi manajerial; kepala sekolah; kurikulum merdeka; sekolah dasar

Received : 2024-10-27
 Revises : 2025-01-29

Approved : 2025-01-30
 Published : 2025-01-31



Jurnal Cakrawala Pendas is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Introduction

Education in Indonesia has undergone various phases of change aimed at improving the quality of learning, the relevance of the curriculum, and the effectiveness of teaching. One of the most significant changes in the last decade is the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which aims to provide greater autonomy to schools in designing learning programs tailored to the potential and needs of students. This curriculum emphasizes the importance of a competency-based learning approach and character development, aligning with the national education vision to build a generation that is adaptive, creative, and innovative. (Kemendikbud, 2021).

The Merdeka Curriculum is designed to replace an educational model that is considered too rigid and bureaucratic. The old model often restricts the flexibility of teachers and schools in implementing teaching innovations. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes the importance of independent learning, where teachers and students are given the freedom to determine the direction and methods of learning that are relevant and meaningful. Within this framework, schools not only act as implementers of the curriculum but also as agents of change that are expected to foster creativity and active participation in the learning process (Susanto et al., 2022).

In this case, the school principal plays a strategic role in ensuring the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools. They not only act as administrative leaders but also as managers and instructional leaders responsible for resource management, teacher capacity development, and providing a conducive learning environment for students (Leithwood et al., 2020).

However, the role of the school principal in the implementation of this curriculum faces various challenges, ranging from a lack of deep understanding of the philosophy of the Merdeka Curriculum to technical issues such as insufficient supporting resources. Principals are also expected to facilitate collaboration among teachers, as well as encourage innovation and student-centered learning. Therefore, an analysis of the managerial competencies of school principals in the application of the Merdeka Curriculum is crucial to identify areas that need improvement and strategies that can be implemented to strengthen the managerial capabilities of school principals. (Nurhemah, 2018).

Managerial competence is a set of skills necessary for effectively managing an organization. In the context of education, school leaders must possess the ability to manage human resources, lead change, and ensure that national educational goals can be achieved through the implementation of an appropriate curriculum. Previous research has shown that the managerial competence of school leaders is closely related to school effectiveness and student achievement. (Harris & Jones, 2018).

In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, school principals are faced with more complex tasks. They must possess the ability to adapt to changes in education policy, manage resistance to change, and ensure support from the entire school community in implementing a more flexible learning approach. A study by Day, Gu, and Sammons (Day et al., 2016) shows that school leaders with strong managerial competencies can encourage teacher involvement in learning innovations, which in turn has a positive impact on student achievement.

Although the Merdeka Curriculum promises greater flexibility for schools, its implementation is not without challenges. One of the main challenges is the readiness of human resources, particularly teachers and school principals. Many school principals do not yet have a deep understanding of the competency-based learning approach and how to apply it in everyday contexts. Additionally, resistance to change often arises from teachers who are accustomed to a more structured and patterned system (Mcgill, 2006).

This study has a strong empirical basis in highlighting the importance of principal managerial competence in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. The principal has a central role as a leader who not only manages administrative aspects but is also responsible for inspiring, motivating, and leading change in schools. Transformational leadership introduced by Bass (1985) is one of the relevant theories in this context (Day et al., 2016). Principals who adopt a transformational leadership style are able to create a positive organizational culture, facilitate collaboration, and encourage innovation in the learning process. Hallinger and Heck's (2018) research shows that transformational leaders in education can increase teacher involvement in curriculum innovation, which is very relevant to the demands of flexibility and student-based learning in the Merdeka Curriculum (Junanto, 2019).

In addition, the theory of change management by Kotter (1996) emphasizes the importance of leadership in managing resistance to change and ensuring the active involvement of all stakeholders (Hitt et al., 2018). In implementing the Independent Curriculum, principals are faced with challenges such as lack of teacher training, resistance to new teaching methods, and limited resources. A study by Hitt (2018) shows that the success of educational change is highly dependent on the principal's ability to manage these changes in a planned and gradual manner.

Many previous studies have shown that the managerial competencies of school principals remain an issue that needs to be improved in various regions, including Central Aceh. The lack of relevant training, limited resources, and minimal structural support often become obstacles in the implementation of educational policies. Therefore, it is important to conduct an analysis of the managerial competencies of school principals in Central Aceh Regency in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This analysis is expected to provide a clear picture of the readiness of school principals to manage curriculum changes and to identify the factors that support and hinder its implementation.

Research by Haq & Wakidi (2024) indicates that the lack of comprehensive training for school principals and teachers is one of the biggest obstacles to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The insufficient support in terms of resources, both in budget and facilities, further exacerbates the situation. This highlights the need for improving the managerial competencies of school principals in aspects of change management and the empowerment of school resources to support the implementation of this curriculum (Haq, 2024).

Other empirical studies show a significant relationship between school principals' managerial competence and the successful implementation of educational policies. According to Leithwood et al. (Leithwood et al., 2020), principals who have good managerial skills can create a collaborative school environment where teachers feel supported in carrying out their duties and students are allowed to learn optimally. This is also confirmed by research conducted by Harris and Jones (Harris & Jones, 2018), who found that principals who play an active role in managing change have a positive impact on school climate and student performance.

In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, principals' managerial competencies include the ability to conduct strategic planning, manage teacher development programs, and ensure

the involvement of all stakeholders in the change process. Principals who can adapt to curriculum changes will be more successful in leading their schools towards effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Robinson et al., 2008).

Given the important role of school principals in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, it is necessary to conduct an in-depth analysis of the extent to which their managerial competencies influence the successful implementation of this curriculum in primary schools. This analysis is important not only to assess the readiness of school principals but also to identify areas that require further improvement or intervention.

This research is expected to contribute to the development of strategies to strengthen the managerial competence of school principals, which in turn will support the creation of a better and more inclusive learning environment for students. In addition, the results of this study can also serve as a reference for policymakers in designing principal training and development programs that are more in line with the demands of the Merdeka Curriculum, especially in primary schools in the Central Aceh District area.

This research will use a theoretical framework based on transformational leadership theory and change management. Transformational leadership theory emphasizes the importance of leaders in motivating and inspiring change within organizations. In the context of education, principals who act as transformational leaders are expected to be able to influence positive changes in schools, including in the implementation of a more flexible curriculum such as the Merdeka Curriculum (Junanto, 2019).

Previous studies have shown that the principal's transformational leadership plays an important role in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. A study by Efendi et al. (2023) found that the transformational leadership style applied by the principal was able to increase teachers' work commitment in the implementation of Merdeka Belajar, which in turn improved teacher performance in the process (Efendi et al., 2023).

Furthermore, research by Botutihe et al. (2023) examined the transformational leadership of principals in implementing the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools (Botutihe P et al., 2023). The results of the study showed that principals who implemented transformational leadership succeeded in encouraging active participation from teachers, students, and parents in the curriculum implementation process.

These findings support the importance of developing principals' managerial competencies in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Thus, this study is expected to provide practical and theoretical contributions in efforts to improve the quality of education by strengthening the role of principals as transformational leaders and agents of change.

Research Methods

This study began with the formulation of the problem related to the principal's managerial competence in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Central Aceh Regency. After that, a descriptive quantitative approach was determined with a survey method to describe the extent to which these competencies have been implemented and their influence on the success of curriculum implementation. This approach is in accordance with Creswell's (2018) view which states that descriptive quantitative research aims to describe phenomena and measure the relationship between variables in a particular population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The next step is the selection of research locations, namely nine elementary schools in Central Aceh Regency that have implemented the Merdeka Curriculum. The selection of these schools was carried out based on the diversity of backgrounds of the principals and the schools

themselves, which allows for a broader analysis of the application of managerial competence in various conditions. The study population included all elementary school principals and representatives of the school committee in the nine schools. The purposive sampling technique was used to select principals who had participated in training or socialization of the Merdeka Curriculum so that they had relevant experience in curriculum implementation.

Data collection was carried out using a questionnaire as the main instrument. This questionnaire was adapted from the principal's managerial competency assessment model and covers aspects of planning, organizing, monitoring and evaluation, decision-making, and leadership in educational innovation. In addition to the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with several principals to explore more deeply the challenges they face in implementing the Independent Curriculum.

After the data was collected, the analysis stage was carried out using descriptive statistical analysis techniques. The results of this analysis are used to provide an overview of the principal's managerial competency and the factors that support or hinder the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Thus, this study contributes to identifying aspects that need to be strengthened in the development of principal managerial competency so that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum can run more effectively.

Result and Discussion

The main instrument used in this study is a questionnaire adapted from the principal's managerial competency assessment model including planning competence, organizing competence, supervision and evaluation competence, decision-making competence, and leadership competence in educational innovation.

In addition to questionnaires, semi-structured interviews will also be conducted with several school principals to deepen understanding of the challenges faced in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The data collected from the questionnaire will be analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis techniques.

Planning Competence in Implementing Merdeka Curriculum

Planning competence is the principal's ability to design, organize, and plan various learning and school management activities by considering internal and external conditions. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes flexibility and school autonomy, so principals must be able to develop lesson plans that support students' independence and creativity and involve various parties, including teachers and parents.

In this study, it was found that principals in Central Aceh generally have good planning skills, especially in formulating the school's vision and mission, preparing the school's annual strategic plan, identifying school needs to implement the Merdeka Curriculum effectively, preparing teacher training programs and allocating the school budget to support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. More details regarding planning competencies can be seen in Figure 1.

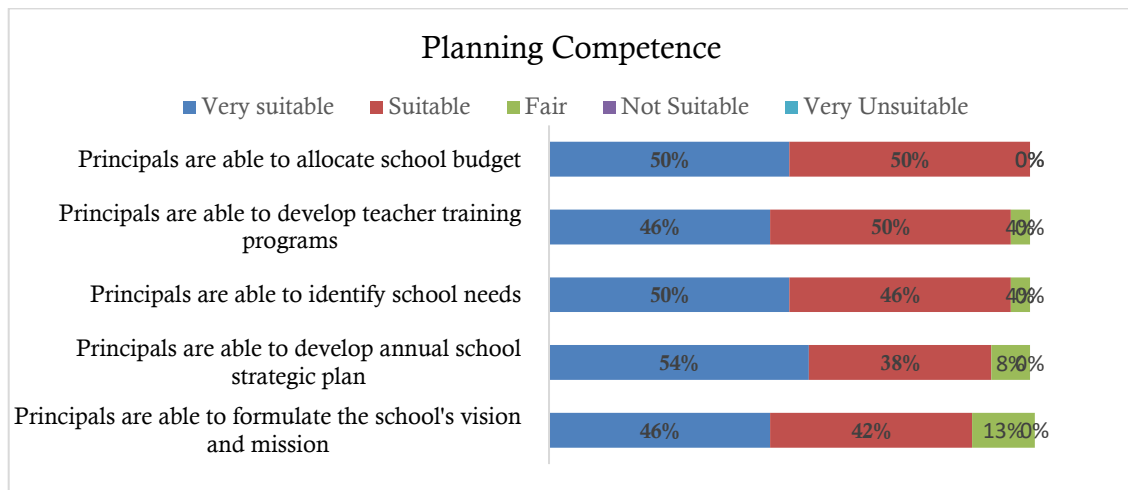


Figure 1. Principal's managerial competence in planning

In general, all planning competencies have been implemented by school principals, it can be seen from the percentage of each competency indicator dominated by the very appropriate and appropriate categories. But here it can be seen that, in formulating the vision and mission, there are obstacles where the preparation of the vision and mission still does not involve the school community such as parents of students.

Good planning competencies enable school principals to prepare a mature strategy in dealing with curriculum transitions. Comprehensive planning should include an assessment of school conditions, the availability of resources, and the ability of educators to implement new learning methods. Given the importance of data-based and participatory planning, principals need to involve all education stakeholders in the planning process (Hitt et al., 2018).

A study by Isnawan and Sudirman (2022) showed that planning involving collaboration between principals and teachers significantly improved the effectiveness of new curriculum implementation, especially when teachers felt involved in the development of learning materials (Isnawan & Sudirman, 2022).

In line with this, Utaminingsih et al (2023) also highlighted the importance of careful planning in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Through their research, they found that principals who are effective in planning are able to identify school needs and formulate appropriate strategies to achieve the desired educational goals (Utaminingsih et al., 2023). In addition, Hidayat et al. (2023) emphasized that effective planning must involve the active participation of all stakeholders, including teachers, students, and parents (Hidayat et al., 2023). This participatory approach ensures that the plans drawn up are in accordance with the needs and expectations of all parties involved in the educational process (Karim et al., 2023).

Organizing Competence in Implementing the Independent Curriculum

Organizing is the principal's ability to manage human and material resources to achieve educational goals effectively. This competency is important to ensure that the roles and responsibilities of each school component, such as teachers, administrative staff, and students, are well distributed and support the achievement of learning targets. In a study conducted by Fitriani et al. (2024), it was found that the principal plays an important role in organizing by

making a clear division of tasks so that each teacher understands their role and responsibilities. This includes class division and adjusting teaching actions according to student needs (Fitriani et al., 2024).

In the context of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in primary schools, it was found that principals generally have good abilities in organizing teachers to work collaboratively in developing project-based learning modules. In some schools, principals have formed internal curriculum development teams consisting of experienced teachers to design project-based learning programs. More details of the research results related to organizing competence are as follows.

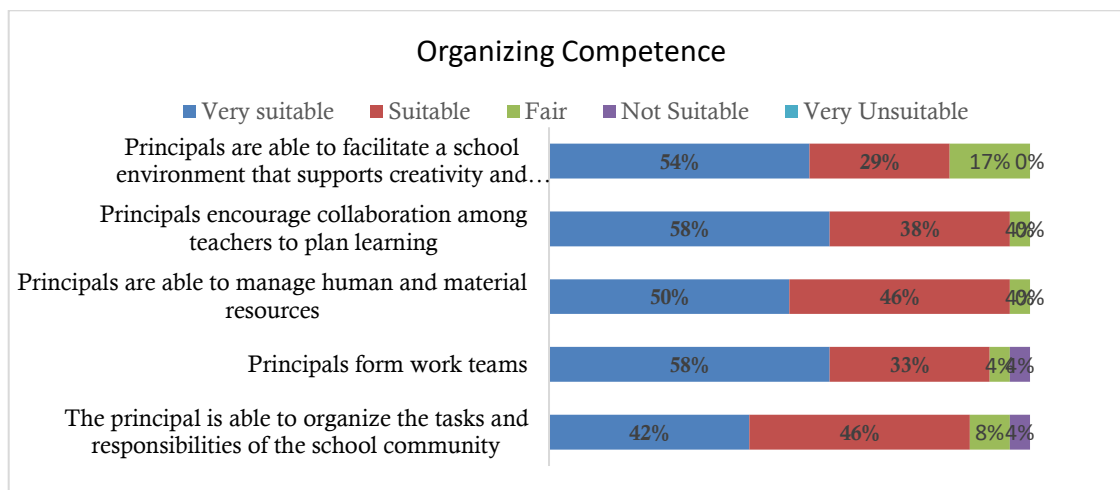


Figure 2. Principal's managerial competence in organizing the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum.

From the data above, it can be seen that overall the organizing competence of elementary school principals in implementing the independent curriculum has been carried out very well, which includes the competence of school principals in organizing the duties and responsibilities of school members according to the needs of the Merdeka Curriculum, forming work teams to support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at school, managing human and material resources well in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, encouraging collaboration between teachers to plan learning in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum and facilitating a school environment that supports creativity and innovation in the Merdeka Curriculum. However, there is a problem with the uneven distribution of tasks. Some teachers who have higher competencies tend to be burdened with additional tasks, while teachers who are less familiar with the new curriculum are less involved in the design process.

According to Wardana (2021), good organization in schools requires a fair distribution of tasks, as well as continuous training for all teachers so that they can adapt to the demands of the new curriculum (Wardana, 2020). Effective organization requires principals to have a deep understanding of each teacher's abilities and potential (Brundrett et al., 2003). Principals who can organize and empower teachers will maximize collaboration among teaching staff, leading to improved learning quality (Isnawan & Sudirman, 2022). A study by Sunbanu (2019) shows that collaborative team-based organizations not only increase efficiency but also encourage innovation in learning development (Sunbanu et al., 2019).

To maximize the potential of the Merdeka Curriculum, principals must be able to build an inclusive and collaborative work environment, where every school member feels valued and plays an important role in curriculum implementation (Sunbanu et al., 2019).

Implementation Competencies in Implementing Merdeka Curriculum

Implementation competence relates to the principal's ability to implement the plans that have been prepared and ensure that the learning process runs according to the set targets. In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, implementation competencies include implementing project-based learning, using educational technology, and implementing formative assessments. Research by Nursalam et al. (2023) highlighted that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum through project-based learning involves three main stages: the initial stage, the development stage, and the conclusion stage (Nursalam et al., 2023). Each stage requires an active role from the principal in directing and supporting teachers and students to achieve optimal learning outcomes (Muljawan, 2018).

Based on the research results, principals in several elementary schools in Central Aceh have been able to implement the independent curriculum implementation very well. More details regarding the competencies in implementing the independent curriculum owned by school principals can be seen in the following diagram.

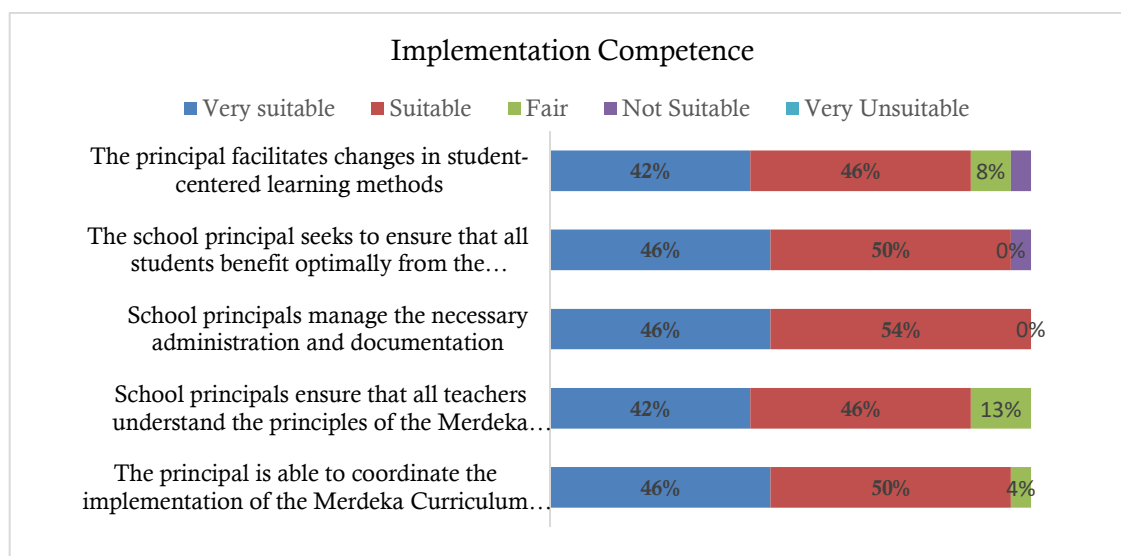


Figure 3. Principal's managerial competence in terms of implementation in implementing an independent curriculum

However, in some schools, principals could not fully ascertain whether teachers in their schools had understood the principles of the independent curriculum in learning. This can be seen from the limitations of teachers in understanding how to integrate projects into daily learning, especially in exact subjects.

According to research by Putra and Widodo (2022), principals who act as facilitators in curriculum implementation should be able to provide resources and an environment conducive to project-based learning. However, often the lack of ongoing training becomes an obstacle in the implementation of new methods. Good implementation competence requires the principal to not only supervise but also ensure that each component of the curriculum is effectively implemented. This includes providing support to teachers in the form of ongoing training,

mentoring, and providing facilities that support the implementation of project-based learning. Principals must ensure that the curriculum is implemented consistently and any obstacles that arise in the implementation can be addressed immediately.

In addition, Dinanty and Ramadan (2023) found that principals face challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools. One of the problems faced is the lack of teacher understanding of the principles of the Independent Curriculum, which has an impact on the implementation of project-based learning (Dinanty & Ramadan, 2024). To address these issues, training and professional development are needed for teachers and principals. The training aims to strengthen their understanding of the concepts and practices of the Merdeka Curriculum so that they can integrate the project into daily learning more effectively (Day et al., 2016; Wardana, 2020).

Supervision and Evaluation Competencies in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

Supervision and evaluation is the process of monitoring and evaluating curriculum implementation to ensure that the stated objectives are achieved. Good supervision and evaluation allow principals to make adjustments and improvements if there are problems in curriculum implementation.

The results showed that some principals in Central Aceh have implemented a periodic supervision system to monitor curriculum implementation. Principals conduct supervision through classroom observations, discussions with teachers, and monitoring student learning outcomes. Some schools have used the evaluation results to make improvements in the implementation of learning in accordance with the principles of an independent curriculum.

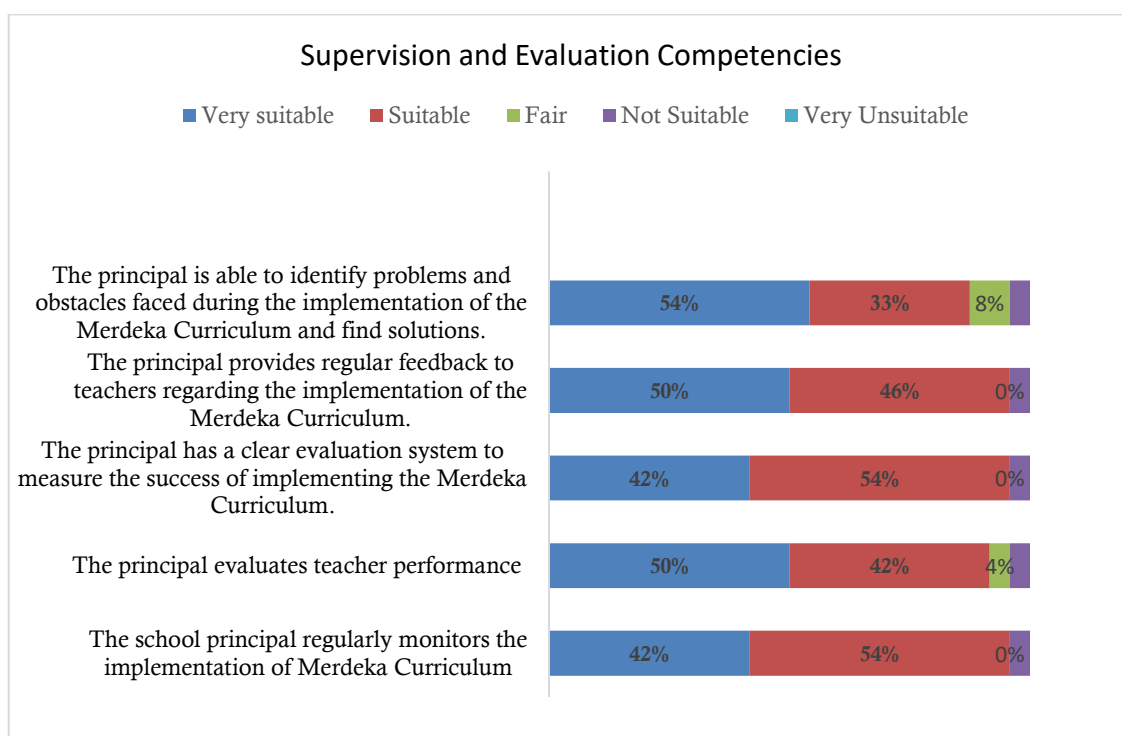


Figure 4. Principal's managerial competence in supervision and evaluation in implementing the independent curriculum

From the data above, it can be seen that all indicators of supervision and evaluation competencies are very good. However, not all schools have optimally utilized technology-based evaluation data. Many schools still conduct manual evaluations, which often take longer and do not provide a comprehensive picture of student achievement. According to Sari and Arif (2021), regularly conducted data-based evaluations are essential for measuring the success of new curriculum implementation. This data can also be used to make better decisions in subsequent planning and organizing processes.

Good supervision requires principals to actively monitor curriculum implementation and conduct regular evaluations of student learning outcomes and the effectiveness of teaching methods. The use of technology in monitoring and evaluation, such as online evaluation platforms, will help speed up the data analysis process and provide faster feedback to teachers and students. Principals also need to ensure that evaluation is not only done on the cognitive aspect but also on the affective and psychomotor aspects of students.

Hartini (2020) emphasized that supervision, control, and evaluation of curriculum implementation aim to ensure the accuracy and use of the curriculum and syllabus that have been set in the implementation of education (Hartini et al., 2022). Khotimah and Noor (2023) stated that the role of the principal as a supervisor is very important in the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum (Khotimah & Noor, 2024). Through effective supervision, the principal can monitor the implementation of the curriculum and provide feedback for improvement. Wullur et al. (2025) highlighted that supervision management by the principal contributes significantly to the quality of learning (Wullur et al., 2025). With good supervision, the principal can ensure that the implementation of the curriculum goes according to plan and make adjustments if necessary. Utaminingsih et al. (2023) found that the leadership of the principal in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools plays an important role in ensuring that the objectives of the curriculum are achieved through effective supervision and evaluation (Utaminingsih et al., 2023).

Decision-Making Competencies in Implementing Merdeka Curriculum

Decision-making is a very important competency in school management, especially in the context of ever-changing education policies. Principals are faced with various situations that require quick and precise decisions, both related to internal school policies and external policies involving the education office or the community.

This study found that school principals in Central Aceh generally have a good ability to make decisions, especially in facing the challenges of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum (Figure 5). Many principals make decisions based on evaluation results and input from teachers and parents.

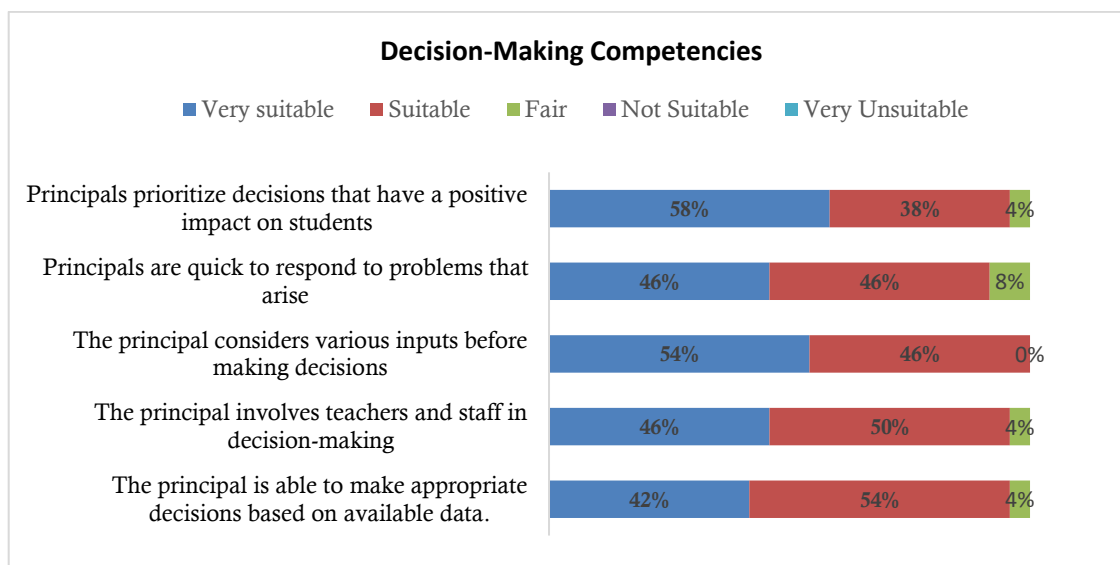


Figure 5. Principal's managerial competence in decision-making in implementing the independent curriculum

However, budget constraints are often a factor that affects the quality of decisions made. For example, when it comes to purchasing equipment or developing infrastructure, principals often have to prioritize certain needs, causing other aspects to be neglected. According to Putra (2020), data-driven decision-making is very important in the context of education, especially in terms of resource allocation and curriculum implementation strategies.

Good decision-making requires accurate data and the involvement of all school stakeholders. A wise principal must be able to prioritize school needs in accordance with the established vision and mission and consider the long-term impact of each decision made. In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, quick and precise decision-making is needed to overcome various obstacles that arise during the implementation process.

According to Rasyid et al. (2024), the principal's decision-making policies and actions are very important components in determining the level of ability and skills of educators in order to develop teacher professional competence (Rasyid et al., 2024). In addition, research by Khotimah and Noor (2023) shows that the role of the principal as a supervisor is very important in the implementation of the Merdeka Learning Curriculum (Khotimah & Noor, 2024). Through effective supervision, the principal can monitor the implementation of the curriculum and provide feedback for improvement (Avsec et al., 2022; Hitt et al., 2018).

Leadership in Education Innovation

Principal leadership is critical in driving innovation in the school environment. Principals need to be visionary leaders, initiate change, and support innovation in learning methods and school management (Figure 6). This study found that principals with strong leadership skills tend to be more successful in initiating educational innovations. However, resistance from teachers who are still accustomed to traditional learning methods is one of the challenges in implementing these innovations. The lack of technical training and ongoing support from the education office also hindered the overall implementation of the innovations.

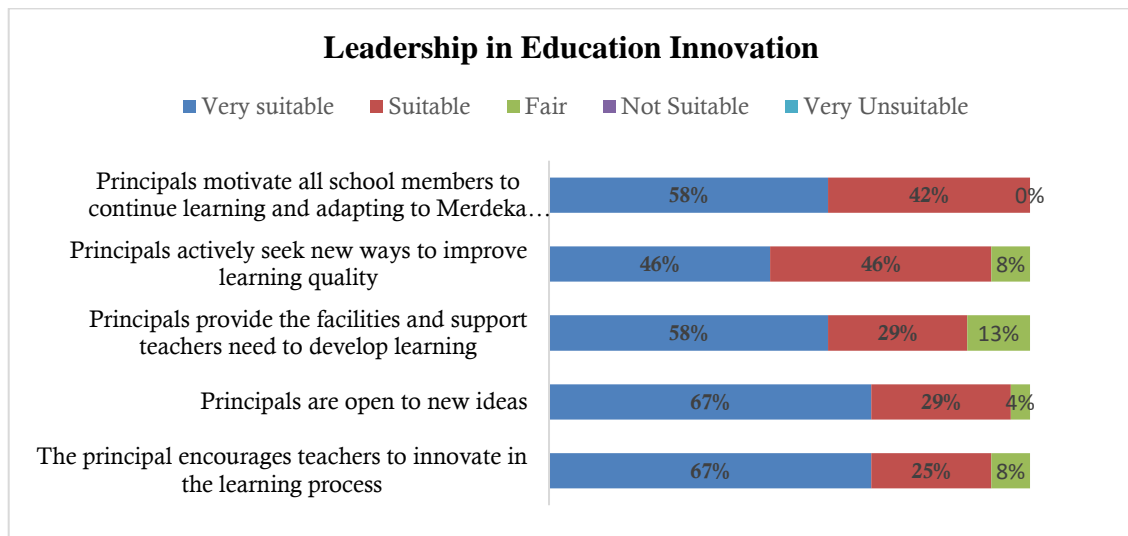


Figure 6. Principal's managerial competence in educational innovation

According to Widodo and Susilo (2023), innovation in education can only be successful if the principal is able to build a culture of innovation that involves all stakeholders, including teachers, students, and parents. Innovative leadership is indispensable in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, especially in facing the challenges of globalization and technological development. Principals must be able to create a culture of innovation in schools that supports experimentation and change. Support for teacher professional development and access to innovative resources will encourage a dynamic and adaptive learning environment.

According to research by Hasanah and Mustofa (2024), principals who have innovative leadership can develop superior schools through various initiatives, including technology integration in education and teacher professional development (Hasanah & Mustofa, 2024). In addition, research by Harly et al. (2023) shows that principals who implement technology-based leadership innovations can build superior education by improving the learning process and creating a positive school culture (Harly & Hasri, 2024). Suyitno (2021) also highlights the importance of innovative leadership of principals in dealing with major changes, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, by developing communication and collaboration networks to support productivity and formulate the best solutions in solving essential problems of school organizations (Suyitno, 2021). Thus, principals who have innovative and visionary leadership can drive significant changes and innovations in learning methods and school management, thereby improving the overall quality of education.

In general, it can be concluded that principals in Central Aceh district have good managerial competencies in planning, organizing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating, decision-making, and leadership in educational innovation (Figure 7). However, there are some challenges that need to be overcome, such as lack of technical training, limited resources, and resistance to change. Principals who are successful in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum are those who are able to lead innovatively, make the right decisions based on data, and involve all parties in the decision-making and planning process.

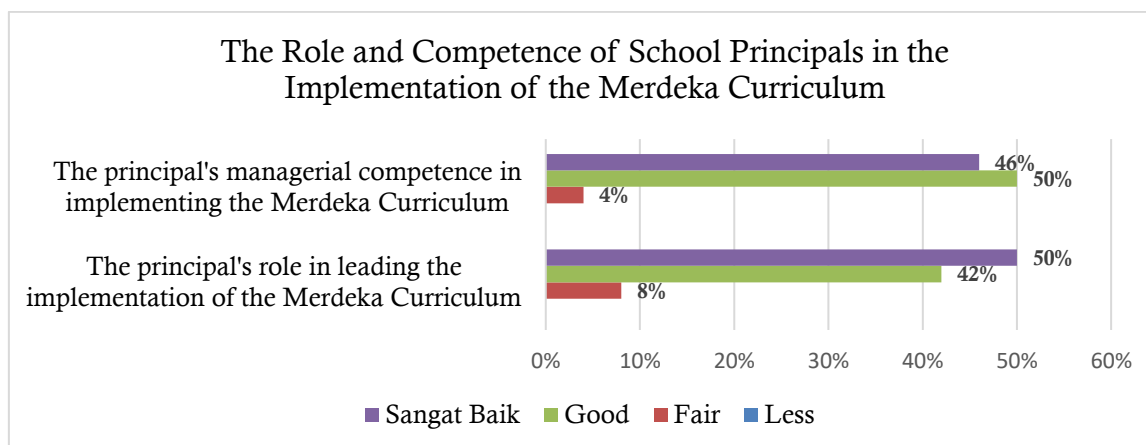


Figure 7. Roles and competencies of school principals in leading the implementation of an independent curriculum

Conclusion

From the results of the study, it can be concluded that Elementary School Principals in Central Aceh District generally have adequate managerial competencies in managing schools starting from the stages of planning, organizing, implementing, supervising and evaluating, decision making, and leadership in educational innovation. However, in each of these competencies, there are still some competencies that need to be improved, especially in the competency of implementing aspects of administrative management and required documentation, ensuring that all students benefit optimally and facilitating changes in student-centered learning methods in accordance with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. In general, principals have been able to carry out administrative tasks, manage resources, and lead change but still need improvement in innovation and adaptation to the latest education policies.

References

- Avsec, S., Jagiełło-Kowalczyk, M., & Żabicka, A. (2022). Enhancing Transformative Learning and Innovation Skills Using Remote Learning for Sustainable Architecture Design. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 14(7). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14073928>
- Botutihe P, Masaong A, & Marhawati B. (2023). Kepemimpinan Transformasional Kepala Sekolah Dalam Penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka Sekolah Dasar. *INNOVATIVE: Journal Of Social Science Research*, 3(2), 6424–6436.
- Brundrett, M., Burton, N., & Smith, R. (2003). Leadership in education. *Leadership in Education*, 400(Icream 2019), 1–202. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446215036>
- Creswell, W. J., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches. In *Journal of Chemical Information and Modeling* (Vol. 53, Issue 9).
- Day, C., Gu, Q., & Sammons, P. (2016). The Impact of Leadership on Student Outcomes: How Successful School Leaders Use Transformational and Instructional Strategies to Make a Difference. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 52(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X15616863>

- Dinanty, P. D., & Ramadan, Z. H. (2024). Problematika kepala sekolah mengimplementasikan kurikulum merdeka belajar di sekolah dasar. *SCHOULID: Indonesian Journal of School Counseling*, 9, 61–70. <https://doi.org/10.23916/084219011>
- Efendi, F., Sunaryo, H., & Harijanto, D. (2023). Efektivitas Kepemimpinan Transformasional Kepala Sekolah melalui Komitmen Kerja terhadap Kinerja Guru Merdeka Belajar. *Jurnal Akuntabilitas Manajemen Pendidikan*, 11(2). <https://doi.org/10.21831/jamp.v11i2.60605>
- Fitriani, Siraj, & Marisa, R. (2024). *Manajemen Kepala Sekolah Dalam Meningkatkan Mutu Pembelajaran Era Digitalisasi Pada Sekolah Penggerak Jenjang Sd Di Kabupaten Aceh Utara*. 7, 12463–12469.
- Haq, H. (2024). *Evaluation of the Implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in Secondary Schools in the Digital Era*. 2(4), 215–228.
- Harly, M. R., & Hasri, S. (2024). *Peran Kepala Sekolah Dalam Membangun Pendidikan Unggul Melalui Inovasi Kepemimpinan Berbasis Teknologi*. 10(1), 24–29.
- Harris, A., & Jones, M. (2018). Leading schools as learning organizations. *School Leadership and Management*, 38(4), 351–354. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2018.1483553>
- Hartini, H., Rugaiyah, R., & Madhakomala, R. (2022). Pengawasan, Pengendalian Dan Evaluasi Implementasi Kurikulum Pada Pendidikan Dan Pengembangan Umum Sekolah Staf Dan Pimpinan Menengah Kepolisian Negara Republik Indonesia. *JISIP (Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Pendidikan)*, 6(2), 2494–2501. <https://doi.org/10.58258/jisip.v6i2.3157>
- Hasanah, N., & Mustofa, T. A. (2024). Inovasi Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah dalam Mengembangkan Sekolah Unggul di SMP Al-Qolam Gemolong. *Didaktika: Jurnal Kependidikan*, 13(3), 2951–2962.
- Hidayat, E., Pardosi, A., & Zulkarnaen, I. (2023). Efektivitas Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah Dalam Penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka. *Jurnal Studi Guru Dan Pembelajaran*, 6(1), 9–18. <https://doi.org/10.30605/jsgp.6.1.2023.2339>
- Hitt, D. H., Woodruff, D., Meyers, C. V., & Zhu, G. (2018). Principal Competencies that Make a Difference. *Journal of School Leadership*, 28(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/105268461802800103>
- Isnawan, M. G., & Sudirman, S. (2022). Principal competency model development: Phenomenological design with coaching techniques in Sekolah Penggerak. *Tarbawi: Jurnal Keilmuan Manajemen Pendidikan*, 8(01). <https://doi.org/10.32678/tarbawi.v8i01.5867>
- Junanto, S. (2019). Evaluation Model of Expertise Practice Programs for Early Childhood Educator Teachers. *JPUD - Jurnal Pendidikan Usia Dini*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.21009/10.21009/jpud.131.10>
- Karim, A., Siregar, B., Prayoga, B. I., Suyitno, S., & Kartiko, A. (2023). Pengaruh Kompetensi Kepala Sekolah Dan Komitmen Organisasi Terhadap Motivasi Kerja Guru Pada Madrasah Tsanawiyah. *Munaddhomah: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, 3(3). <https://doi.org/10.31538/munaddhomah.v3i3.287>
- Kemendikbud. (2021). *Program Guru dan sekolah Penggerak: Langkah Maju Dukung Transformasi Pendidikan* ((Media Komunikasi dan Inspirasi) Jendela Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan (ed.)).

Biro Kerja Sama dan Hubungan Masyarakat, Kemendikbud.

- Khotimah, S., & Noor, T. R. (2024). Peran Kepala Sekolah dalam Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar. *Nuris Journal of Education and Islamic Studies*, 4(1), 33–42. <https://doi.org/10.52620/jeis.v4i1.64>
- Leithwood, K., Sun, J., & Schumacker, R. (2020). How School Leadership Influences Student Learning: A Test of “The Four Paths Model.” *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 56(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X19878772>
- Mcgill, M. V. (2006). Leadership & Sustainability: System Thinkers in Action. *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education*, 108(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146810610800104>
- Muljawan, A. (2018). Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah dalam Mengelola Sekolah Efektif. *Jurnal Asy-Syukriyyah*, 19(1), 146–157. <https://doi.org/10.36769/asy.v19i1.29>
- Nurhemah, N. (2018). Pengaruh Lingkungan Organisasi Dan Kompetensi Profesional Terhadap Efektivitas Manajerial Kepala Sekolah. *Jurnal Penelitian Kebijakan Pendidikan*, 10(2). <https://doi.org/10.24832/jpkp.v10i2.174>
- Nursalam, N., Sulaeman, S., & Latuapo, R. (2023). Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka melalui Pembelajaran Berbasis Proyek pada Sekolah Penggerak Kelompok Bermain Terpadu Nurul Falah dan Ar-Rasyid Banda. *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Kebudayaan*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.24832/jpnk.v8i1.3769>
- Rasyid, M., Khabib, M. A., Qonita, N., Yetri, Y., & Junaidah, J. (2024). Analisis Kebijakan Kepala Sekolah dalam Meningkatkan Kompetensi Guru. *Al-Madrasah Jurnal Pendidikan Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*, 8(2), 603. <https://doi.org/10.35931/am.v8i2.3094>
- Robinson, V. M. J., Lloyd, C. A., & Rowe, K. J. (2008). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: An analysis of the differential effects of leadership types. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44(5). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X08321509>
- Sunbanu, H. F., Mawardi, M., & Wardani, K. W. (2019). Peningkatan Keterampilan Kolaborasi Siswa Menggunakan Model Pembelajaran Kooperatif Two Stay Two Stray Di Sekolah Dasar. *Jurnal Basicedu*. <https://doi.org/10.31004/basicedu.v3i4.260>
- Susanto, F., Rahmad Hidayat, Endang M. Rahayu, Hertiki, Armelia Nungki, Joesasono O. Soelistijowati, & Claudia Fira Inne P. (2022). Strategi Penyusunan Perangkat Pembelajaran Mata Pelajaran Bahasa Inggris Melalui Peta Konsep Dalam Kurikulum Merdeka. *Kanigara*, 2(2). <https://doi.org/10.36456/kanigara.v2i2.5905>
- Suyitno, S. (2021). Kepemimpinan Inovatif dalam Penyelenggaraan Pendidikan di Masa Pandemi Covid-19. *Edukatif: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, 3(6), 4245–4253. <https://doi.org/10.31004/edukatif.v3i6.1432>
- Utaminingsih, S., Setiadi, G., & Suad, S. (2023). Analisis Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah dalam Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di Sekolah Dasar. *WASIS: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan*, 4(2). <https://doi.org/10.24176/wasis.v4i2.10804>
- Wardana, L. W. (2020). Model Supervisi Kepala Sekolah Di Era Merdeka Belajar. In ... *Seminar Nasional “Menyongsong Era Merdeka*

Wullur, M. M., Gaspersz, S., Galancy, T., Hatibie, M. J., Oley, M. C., Wullur, M. M., Gaspersz, S., Kerap, T. G., Hatibie, M. J., & Oley, M. C. (2025). *Manajemen Supervisi Kepala Sekolah Kurikulum Merdeka (Studi Literatur) Dalam Implementasi*. 6(1), 251–259.