

Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in Primary Schools in Manggarai

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ABSTRACT

The problem in this study is related to the fact that most teachers have difficulty implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. This study aims to describe the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in primary schools in Manggarai. This research uses a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods. The data sources consisted of 7 principals and 30 primary school teachers. The data obtained from in-depth interviews is then analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) with stages: (1) reading and re-reading; (2) initial noting; (3) developing emergent themes; (4) searching for connections across emergent themes; (5) moving the next cases; and (6) looking for patterns across cases. The results showed that in general, the school's preparation was quite good because there were several things that had begun to be done, such as participating in socialisation, training, and workshops, attending In House Trainings related to the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, and holding good practice sharing activities with colleagues. Implementation in the field is manifested in activities such as, implementing the Independent Pathway Merdeka Curriculum, implementing a differentiated learning model system, following the independent path of change, gradually implementing target classes 1 and 4, in the 2023 school year classes 1, 2, 4 and 5 while in the upcoming 2024 school year the target is grades 1-6, and focusing on preparing the flow of learning objectives, studying the criteria for achieving learning objectives and so on. However, there are still so many obstacles experienced by teachers in the field. Thus, the implementation of the independent curriculum in primary schools in Manggarai has not been optimal.

Keywords: independent curriculum; primary school; implementation

ABSTRAK

Masalah dalam penelitian ini terkait dengan sebagian besar guru berkesulitan dalam menerapkan Kurikulum Merdeka. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka pada sekolah dasar di Manggarai. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode fenomenologi. Sumber data terdiri dari 7 orang kepala sekolah dan 30 orang guru sekolah dasar. Data yang diperolah dari in-depth interview ini selanjutnya dianalisis dengan menggunakan Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) dengan tahapan : (1) reading and re-reading; (2) initial noting; (3) developing emergent themes; (4) searching for connections acros emergent themes; (5) moving the next cases.; dan (6) looking for patterns acros cases.

Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa secara umum persiapan sekolah cukup bagus karena terdapat beberapa hal yang telah mulai dilakukan seperti, mengikuti sosialisasi, pelatihan, dan workshop mengikuti In House Trainning terkait penerapan kurikulum Merdeka, dan mengadakan kegiatan berbagi praktik baik bersama rekan. Pelaksanaan di lapangan terwujud pada kegiatan seperti, menerapkan Kurikulum Merdeka jalur mandiri, menerapkan sistem model pembelajaran berdiferensiasi, mengikuti jalur mandiri berubah, menerapkan secara bertahap kelas sasaran 1 dan 4, tahun ajaran 2023 kelas 1, 2,4 dan 5 sedangkan pada tahun ajaran 2024 yang akan datang sasaranya kelas 1-6, dan fokus pada menyiapkan alur tujuan pembelajaran, mempelajari kriteria ketercapaian tujuan pembelajaran dan sebagainya. Akan tetapi, masih begitu banyak hambatan yang dialami para guru di lapangan. Dengan demikian, penerapan kurikulum merdeka pada SD di Manggarai belum optimal.

Kata Kunci : kurikulum merdeka; sekolah dasar; implementasi

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of technology can impact all aspects of human life including education. Education is needed in improving the quality of human resources. This is because the basis of education development is the ability to think critically (Talevski & Shalevska, 2021). For this reason, learning in schools must be oriented towards developing students' thinking skills and creativity. In addition, learning is carried out according to the applicable curriculum so that it is directed and systematic (Sobri et al., 2023). In this case, the curriculum is used as a reference in the implementation of various activities in the school. The curriculum can be implemented optimally if it is supported by various facilities and infrastructure, professional educators and educational staff, and the cooperation of various parties involved in education. (Indriani et al., 2023). Based on this, curriculum changes continue to be made because they must be adapted to the demands of the times. The changes are also made based on the results of the evaluation of the implementation of a curriculum. According to Garner and Bradley (Chan, 2022), Several things need to be considered when evaluating the curriculum, namely 1) socialising the evaluation plan; 2) formulating an evaluation plan; 3) compiling evaluation instruments; 4) applying evaluation instruments; 5) asking for responses from various parties related to the evaluation results; 6) using the evaluation results to modify the curriculum. Furthermore, the results of these modifications are used as a new curriculum to replace the previous curriculum.

Curriculum changes in Indonesia have been carried out since 1947, 1964, 1968, 1973, 1975, 1984, 1994, 1997, 2004, 2006, 2013, and 2022, known as the Merdeka learning curriculum. (Ulinniam, et al., 2021). Merdeka Belajar is a curriculum whose implementation emphasises mastery of content and learner competencies as well as diversified learning, so that students are always required to be creative and active. This means that students are not seen as targets in learning but as the main actors because they are believed to have the ability to learn independently. Therefore, the teacher's

role in learning is a source of learning, a guide and a director. (Hasmiati, et al., 2024). This role can be carried out if it is supported by the teacher's skills in various aspects including personality, social, pedagogical and professional. These four aspects are very important for a teacher to have because in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, students are not only required to participate in classroom learning but also to carry out various projects. This activity is separate from the extra-curricular activities. This is because its purpose, content, and implementation have nothing to do with subjects in primary school. (Safitri & Rahim, 2023). For this reason, the implementation of these activities is scheduled specifically so that it does not interfere with the learning process in the classroom.

Intracurricular and extracurricular activities in the Merdeka Curriculum can enhance students' character education so that it fits the profile of Pancasila (Neliwati, et al., 2023). For this reason, the description of the dimensions, elements and learning outcomes in the Merdeka Curriculum include various characters that students must achieve and master, such as religion, tolerance, cooperation, independence, environmental protection, critical thinking and creativity. The emphasis on these different traits is in line with the characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum. The characteristics of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum are (Deliana et al., 2024); 1) skills and character development. Different skills and characters can be developed through different activities in school. Therefore, teachers need to design learning tools that meet the needs of students; 2) focus on the main subject. In this case, the material taught to students is basic material that is considered important. This is done so that learning is more focused and students concentrate more on the material. Thus, learning is focused more on mastering and understanding the material rather than on completing the school hours; 3) learning is flexible. This flexible characteristic is relevant to the concept of independence, which is free to choose and not rigid. This means that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is adapted to the conditions of the school.

In addition to paying attention to some of the characteristics above, in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, each educator and education unit has diverse abilities and preparations and always innovates (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). In reality, however, many teachers and education units are still struggling to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. This is the experience of primary school teachers in Manggarai, East Nusa Tenggara.

Based on preliminary observations, primary school teachers in Manggarai are finding it difficult to prepare teaching modules. This is because teachers do not have the opportunity to participate in training related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. In addition, teachers also face barriers in implementing learning, especially differentiated learning. In this case, teachers find it difficult to identify different activities that are suitable for the characteristics of the students, both from the cognitive aspect and from the character aspect. Another problem is also seen when teachers conduct assessments because they do not understand the assessment standards according to the Merdeka Curriculum. These problems need to be explored further, so this research was conducted to describe the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in primary schools in Manggarai.

Previous research revealed that careful readiness is needed from various parties to implement the Merdeka Curriculum in learning (Salsabillah, Fitri, Afifatul Maula Zahro,Rini Ramadhani, 2023). Other research results also show that Merdeka Curriculum has been implemented in primary schools, but it still needs to be improved and developed to be more optimal (Fadhli, 2022). Furthermore, it is stated that the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum can make students as individuals with morals, independence, cooperation, tolerance, creativity, and critical thinking (Sumarsih et al., 2022). While other studies have examined the difficulties faced by teachers in implementing the redesigned curriculum, this study examines a complete portrait of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in primary schools in Manggarai. This includes preparation, implementation, evaluation, obstacles or difficulties encountered and efforts made to overcome these obstacles and difficulties.

METHODS

Type and Design

This research adopts a qualitative approach using a phenomenological method. The phenomenon in question is related to the description of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in primary schools in Greater Manggarai, NTT. As a method, phenomenology can describe and describe a phenomenon as it is without manipulating the data in it (Yen, 2018). In this study, the phenomenon studied was related to the description of the implementation of the independent curriculum at primary schools in Manggarai.

Data and Data Sources

The data in this study are in the form of interview results and the data sources consist of 7 headmasters and 30 primary school teachers. The data sources are spread over 3 districts, namely Manggarai, West Manggarai and East Manggarai, NTT. The reason for selecting these data sources is that they are the implementers of the independent curriculum.

Collection and Analysis Techniques

The data collection technique uses in-depth interviews and Google forms. The interview indicators relate to the preparation, implementation, evaluation, barriers and efforts made in relation to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in primary schools. The data obtained from the in-depth interviews were then analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). According to Smith (Helaluddin, 2018) there are several stages in IPA, namely: (1) reading and re-reading. In this study, the reading and re-reading activities were replaced by listening to the recorded interviews repeatedly and summarising the answers on the google form; (2) initial noting. The researcher recorded all the recordings. (3) developing emergent themes. At this stage, the researcher analysed the results and themes that emerged. (4) searching for connections across emergent themes. At this stage, the researcher finds the relationship of each emerging theme and makes an interpretation. (5) moving the next cases. and (6) looking for patterns acros cases. At this stage, researchers find patterns of phenomena that occur, classify, describe, and make conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the research findings, teachers have started to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. However, in terms of the implementation that has taken place, it is not free from obstacles. However, teachers are still trying their best to achieve the goals expected by the government. The summary of the research results is as follows.

- 1. Preparation Stage; related to preparation, there are several things that are done, namely:
 - a. attending socialisation, training and workshops
 - b. attending In House Trainings at the school's initiative
 - c. studying the curriculum guide on the independent teaching platform
 - d. compiling various independent curriculum tools
 - e. conducting socialisation to students and stakeholders
 - f. compiling the vision, mission, and school programme according to the mandate of the independent curriculum
 - g. organising good practice sharing activities with peers.
- 2. Implementation Stage;
 - a. the school implements the Independent Curriculum in an independent pathway
 - b. implementing a differentiated learning model system
 - c. follow the independent path of change,
 - d. implementing in stages, starting in 2022 with target classes 1 and 4, in the 2023 school year classes 1, 2, 4 and 5, while in the upcoming 2024 school year the target is grades 1-6
 - e. compile the flow of learning objectives, study the criteria for achieving learning objectives, learn how to compile teaching modules, prepare the

application of the Pancasila profile project, and the application of assessment / assessment.

- 3. Assessment Phase; in conducting assessments, schools still apply flexible and flexible assessments and use formative assessments.
- 4. Obstacles;
 - a. inadequate availability of supporting facilities such as the number of classrooms and IT
 - b. the lack of availability of reference books for teachers and students
 - c. here are still teachers who are not equipped with adequate training
 - d. the carrying capacity of online activities is still minimal
 - e. lack of cooperation between stakeholders
 - f. the school culture is still traditional and focuses on memorisation.
- 5. Efforts Made;
 - a. building a joint commitment by maximising existing resources in stages
 - b. facilitating IHT activities at school
 - c. collaborating with colleagues
 - d. utilising educational technology
 - e. collaborating with parents and the community
 - f. improving teachers' pedagogical skills

Based on the research findings above, the seven schools are ready to implement Merdeka Curriculum but not yet optimal. Teachers were facilitated to participate in socialisation, training and workshops related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. In these activities, teachers completed worksheets to assess their understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum and the results were quite good. Teachers participate in In House Training (IHT) which is organised by the school and involves all the teachers in the school. In addition, one of the special things that teachers learn during the training is how to create teaching modules whose content is in line with the characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum. The teachers then carry out the replication in their respective schools. Thus, the presence of the Merdeka Curriculum has a positive impact on the learning process. Teachers have mastered the concepts and practices of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, although there are still obstacles. Other research shows the same thing, that teachers master 70% of the theory and 50% of the practice. (Mustofa & Mariati, 2022). In addition, the increase in students' numeracy literacy is a positive sign of the implementation of the redesigned curriculum (Hindriyanti, et al., 2023). This shows that teachers are ready to use the Merdeka Curriculum. Some of the things that show this are that teachers develop competence by attending webinars and trainings, and doing reflection and evaluation. Other research shows that teachers learn concepts on how to implement the Merdeka Curriculum through textbooks for teachers (Iskandar, et al., 2023). Furthermore, the ability of primary school teachers to implement the Merdeka Curriculum shows a medium average score with the highest score of 59 and the lowest score of 56. It can be concluded that primary school teachers have excellent potential (Syaripudin, et al., 2023). Although the overall level of readiness is not satisfactory. However, this is an improvement because in reality, in 2022, there are still many teachers who are not ready to implement the Merdeka Curriculum (Ndari, et al., 2023).

All of these activities were followed by an outreach to the schools. In Manggarai this was done in different ways. There are schools that follow an independent path of change. There are also schools that rely on the concepts discussed in the PMM, as it is seen as providing many conveniences for teachers to explore the Merdeka Curriculum more deeply. In addition, there are schools that are implementing it in stages, starting with Grades 1 and 4 in 2022, Grades 1, 2, 4 and 5 in 2023 and Grades 1 to 6 in the upcoming school year 2024.

Other schools are implementing a system of differentiated learning. In addition, teachers map learners' needs, abilities and learning profiles and then adapt the learning process by differentiating content, process and product/task. Teachers also differentiate learning content and media according to learners' level of understanding and readiness. Teachers also pay attention to learning approaches, strategies and methods that are appropriate to learners' characteristics. (Sudarto, et al., 2023). There are schools that focus on preparing the flow of learning objectives, studying the criteria for achieving learning objectives, learning how to compile teaching modules, preparing to implement Pancasila profile projects, and conducting assessments. In addition, other schools are still implementing it gradually, such as focusing on Grade 1 and Grade 4. Another study showed the same thing, namely that the Merdeka Curriculum was implemented in the 2021/2022 school year for grades 1 and 4, and the school qualified as a driving school. (Nugraheni & Siswanti, 2022). Contrary to the findings of other studies, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in all classes has been optimised. As a follow-up, teachers' skills and understanding will continue to be improved (Sufendi, et al., 2023). Similarly, at SDN Pajang 1 Surakarta, teachers have implemented the Merdeka Curriculum in three phases, namely Phase A for Grades 1-2, Phase B for Grades 3-4 and Phase C for Grades 5-6, using the learning outcomes published by the government. These learning outcomes are also a reference for teachers to formulate learning objectives that are appropriate for them (Prabaningrum & Sayekti, 2023). In principle, the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in each school can be done according to the readiness of the educators in the school.

In addition to the above activities, the school's actual form of follow-up is to carry out joint activities in the school to compile various learning tools and school documents and to share good practices. In addition, the school principal involves all teachers in

attending workshops to build their capacity in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. In this regard, other research findings show that the implementation of an independent curriculum in primary schools has been carried out even though teachers are given the opportunity to participate in socialisation or workshops by dividing the group into several batches (Efendi & Suastra, 2022). There are some schools that focus on learning how to develop learning modules, planning specific and measurable learning objectives, compiling teaching materials and planning the development of P5 modules. The Pancasila Learner Profile in this curriculum is strengthened by the existence of projects based on themes set by the government. The Pancasila Learner Profile is an output or graduate who has character and competence to strengthen the noble values of Pancasila. (Inayati, 2022). The teachers in Manggarai NTT have shown that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum can be said to be good because the efforts and achievements of the teachers should be appreciated. This is supported by the statement that with the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers are more free to provide opportunities for students to learn according to their abilities and are not required to have a one-size-fits-all learning experience (Akbar, et al., 2023). The Merdeka Curriculum has had a positive impact on primary school teachers. Teachers love to learn. The learning resources used by teachers are reference books, articles, guides, joining professional networks such as online discussion groups, social media forums or groups, PMM, YouTube, KKG containers. In relation to the activities of the Teachers' Working Group (TWG), another study also revealed that one of the places where teachers share with each other is the TWG forum and mentoring with regular learning committee meetings attended by principals, teachers and school supervisors/PMOs (Wijayanti, et al., 2023).

The implementation of assessments using the Merdeka Curriculum has begun. Based on the research findings, teachers have implemented flexible assessments that encourage teachers to use different approaches to learning. In addition, the Merdeka Curriculum encourages teachers to use continuous formative assessment to monitor the development of students' skills in all aspects. Contrary to the findings of other studies on the implementation of learning assessment, teachers have implemented diagnostic to summative assessments (Syah, et al., 2023). The Merdeka Curriculum requires both teachers and students to master 21st century skills. Teachers and students are required to be creative, critical thinkers and communicators. Other studies have shown that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has become better and more intensive, and has succeeded in making students more creative, enthusiastic and of good character (Yunus, et al., 2024).

In-school mentoring in relation to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has been carried out according to the capacity of the school. It's just that there are still obstacles that teachers face. The obstacle in question is the inadequate availability of support facilities. The facilities in question are the lack of availability of the number of classrooms, the availability of other facilities and infrastructure such as inadequate IT, schools do not have enough leptops/computers, LCDs, internet as learning resources and media. Regarding the limitations of the Internet network, other studies have found similar things. Here, the difficulty of the Internet network is the reason why teachers do not have access to adequate learning resources. (Mayanti, 2023). The results of similar studies also show that there are barriers related to the availability of facilities and infrastructure to support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This can be seen in the limited number of classrooms, the lack of laboratory or library facilities and the lack of textbooks. Apart from these various things, one of the fundamental obstacles is the lack of qualified and skilled human resources (Hariani, et al., 2023).

In addition to the facilities mentioned, there are other obstacles, such as the fact that some teachers are not adequately trained. The carrying capacity of online activities is still minimal. These two things certainly have an impact on teachers' low understanding of the concept of the Merdeka Curriculum. Low teachers' understanding of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers, who are the main actors, do not understand the basic concepts of the curriculum. This is not only the case in Manggarai, but also in Batu Sangkar City Primary School. The teachers' lack of understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum is a major factor in the difficulty of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in the school (Fifani, et al., 2023). Not only in primary schools, but also other research findings show that teachers in junior and senior high schools/vocational schools mostly have a good understanding of how to use the Merdeka Curriculum. However, teachers still face several difficulties such as setting learning objectives, understanding lesson plan formats, developing performance indicators, designing assessments and enriching tools. Therefore, there is a need for more socialisation, supervision and training to improve the quality of teachers in understanding the curriculum and its implementation (Tanjung & Amalia, 2023). In addition, the Merdeka Curriculum is considered too demanding. This is the reason for the increasing workload of teachers. Other challenges include the lack of cooperation between stakeholders such as teachers, students, parents and school administrators, and the different levels of student readiness. Related to this, another study found that student readiness is highly dependent on each student's learning style. With this diversity, teachers feel somewhat hampered in their ability to deliver learning (Baehaki, 2023). Another obstacle is the traditional school culture, which focuses on rote learning. However, other studies show a different picture. Here, the skills possessed by principals and teachers are a real supporting aspect for the realisation of adequate learning implementation with the Merdeka Curriculum (Bakari, et al., 2023). This shows that the intention and readiness of the actors in the field are the main factors for the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Furthermore, related to the implementation of evaluation/assessment, the results showed that the implementation of assessment using Merdeka Curriculum

still requires additional resources such as training for teachers, updated teaching materials, or equipment to support different assessments.

With regard to the obstacles mentioned above, the school has made efforts to overcome them. These efforts include: 1) gradually maximising resources. Similar efforts have been made by the teachers of SDN 3 Apuan. Teachers attended training in stages with good coordination between the government (Dewi & Astuti, 2022); 2) facilitating IHT activities in the school. In this regard, other research results also show that the implementation of IHT is very important (Azis & Lubis, 2023); 3) collaboration with peers; 4) use of technology; 5) collaboration with parents and community; 6) improvement of teachers' pedagogical skills in implementing differentiated learning. Other studies have identified similar efforts, such as encouraging teachers to participate in the teacher mobilisation programme (Wuwur, 2023).

CONCLUSIONS

The research data shows that teachers in Manggarai, NTT, are ready to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. This is evident from the various activities they have participated in such as attending training, socialisation and workshops. The purpose of all these is to increase the teachers' understanding of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Furthermore, the results of the activities are followed up through mentoring activities in their respective schools. This is part of the implementation phase. Schools begin to implement the Merdeka Curriculum gradually and according to their respective capabilities. The same applies to the learning evaluation/assessment stage. The assessment is flexible, using formative assessment. In terms of implementation in the field, teachers are not free from obstacles such as the inadequate availability of support facilities, the lack of availability of reference books for teachers and students, there are still teachers who are not equipped with adequate training, the carrying capacity of online activities is still minimal, the low understanding of teachers regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, the lack of cooperation among stakeholders and the traditional school culture. Efforts to overcome these barriers include building a shared commitment to improving teacher resources, conducting IHT, collaborating with peers and developing learning through the use of technology.

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