

PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING THE INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN INDONESIA

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Abstract: This study aims to identify, describe, and analyze the problems and challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at the primary school level in Indonesia. Employing a literature review method, it draws from various sources including academic journals, books, policy documents, and relevant research reports. Data were gathered through a comprehensive literature review and analyzed using content analysis to uncover key themes surrounding implementation issues and obstacles. The findings indicate that major challenges include inadequate teacher training, limited infrastructure and technological support, and inconsistent policy implementation across regions. Moreover, the success of the curriculum heavily relies on strong collaboration between the government, schools, and the educational community. The study concludes that strengthening teacher competencies through ongoing professional development and improving educational infrastructure are essential strategies to support the transformative goals of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Keywords: Curriculum Implementation; Educational Challenges; Independent Curriculum; Primary School.

INTRODUCTION

Education in Indonesia continues to evolve in response to contemporary demands, notably through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, launched by the Ministry of

Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in 2022. This curriculum aims to offer greater flexibility to educational institutions and teachers, enabling them to cultivate students' potential in line with individual characteristics (Nur, 2011; Hidayat, Pardosi, & Zulkarnaen, 2023). At the primary school level, it emphasizes project-based learning, strengthening the Pancasila student profile, and differentiated instruction to address diverse learning needs (Aulia, 2023).

Despite its promising vision, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has faced criticism. Rapid and significant changes in curriculum design have led to confusion among teachers and students (Aytaç, 2023; Prabaningrum & Sayekti, 2023; Rahina & Syamsi, 2023). Many educators lack adequate preparation and training to adopt project-based and differentiated learning methods, leading to disparities in education quality.

Additionally, while the curriculum aims to accommodate individual learning characteristics, concerns have emerged regarding the absence of clear instructional standards. Excessive flexibility can hinder the consistency of student assessment and the evaluation of learning outcomes (Jonker, März, & Voogt, 2020; Hamdi, Triatna, & Nurdin, 2022). There is also a risk that focusing heavily on character education particularly the Pancasila profile

may detract from the mastery of core academic subjects, potentially affecting students' preparedness for future challenges (Magdalena, Elyipuspita, & Irmawati, 2023).

Furthermore, the curriculum may exacerbate inequality among schools. Institutions with more resources are better positioned to implement it effectively, while those with limited funding and infrastructure may struggle to keep pace, leading to educational disparities.

Research reveals that the Merdeka Curriculum introduces a spirit of renewal in primary education. For instance, a study by Sanguiliano Intra et al. (2023) found that teachers felt empowered by the flexibility to tailor instructional tools to students' needs. Conversely, Falah Ana (2023) highlighted challenges such as limited understanding of the curriculum's concepts, lack of training, and stark disparities between urban and rural schools.

These findings underscore the need to identify and address these obstacles to ensure equitable and effective curriculum implementation nationwide. Achieving this goal requires active involvement from all stakeholders government agencies, schools, and local communities to create an enabling environment for educational success.

Sustainable improvements in Indonesia's education system depend not only on curricular reform but also on systemic stability and continuity (Firdaus, 2023). Although the Merdeka Curriculum grants schools and teachers increased autonomy, many argue that the swift pace of change disrupts established teaching and learning practices (Ndari & Mahmudah, 2023). Teachers accustomed

to traditional methods may feel overwhelmed, and students may struggle without the structured guidance they need.

Moreover, although the curriculum is designed to align with students' unique characteristics, critics fear that the absence of standardized academic goals may lead to inconsistent and subjective evaluations (Hidayat et al., 2023). Without a strong academic foundation, students may face long-term disadvantages.

While promoting the Pancasila profile is valuable, overemphasis on character education can shift focus away from essential academic competencies (Sriyono, Rusijono, & Karwanto, 2023). Schools with robust resources can more easily adapt, whereas under-resourced institutions may fall further behind, widening educational gaps across regions (Haider & Shah, 2021).

Some educators remain optimistic about the curriculum's flexibility. However, many experience stress and confusion due to inadequate training and support. For successful implementation, it is crucial to provide targeted resources and support, ensuring all schools regardless of location or capacity can benefit equally.

The gap between theory and practice highlights the structural and cultural barriers that persist, particularly in under-resourced settings (Ndari & Mahmudah, 2023). While previous research has often focused on teacher readiness or instructional materials, few studies have examined the broader challenges during the curriculum's early stages across diverse local contexts (Yusniarti & Herosian, 2023).

This study focuses on the practical challenges encountered by teachers, principals, and students during the daily

implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian primary schools. It does not include coverage of the broader primary education system.

Addressing this issue is vital, as primary education forms the foundation for achieving national educational goals. Failure to resolve the implementation challenges of the Merdeka Curriculum could undermine holistic learning outcomes and compromise the development of future generations. Therefore, a critical, evidence-based analysis is required to inform effective strategies for curriculum reform and implementation.

This study seeks to identify, describe, and analyze the challenges of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at the primary school level in Indonesia and to propose applicable, research-based recommendations for improvement.

METHODS

This study adopts a library research approach to gather relevant data and information from a range of written sources, including books, academic journals, and scientific articles related to the research topic (Leeder & Shah, 2016; Jaya, Warsah, & Istan, 2023).

These sources provide a robust theoretical foundation and diverse perspectives, enabling a deeper and more comprehensive analysis of the problems and challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at the primary school level in Indonesia. A literature study was chosen because the research focuses on reviewing and analyzing existing literature without collecting data directly from the field.

The data for this study were obtained through an extensive literature review, which includes the following types of sources (Li, 2020):

- a. National and international scientific journals,
- b. Academic books,
- c. Official government policy documents related to Merdeka Curriculum,
- d. Relevant previous research reports.

The selection of sources was based on topic relevance, recency of the information, and the credibility and validity of the content. These criteria ensured that the study captured comprehensive insights into the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, along with the associated challenges and opportunities encountered by both educators and students.

Subsequently, the collected data were analyzed using content analysis techniques (Holdford, 2008). This analytical method was employed to identify recurring patterns, key themes, and emerging trends across the reviewed literature, thereby constructing a holistic understanding of how the Merdeka Curriculum affects the education system. The analysis followed these sequential steps:

1. Data reduction (Batani & Eslamian, 2023) : Filtering and extracting the most relevant information related to the challenges and problems associated with the curriculum's implementation.
2. Categorisation (Sloutsky & Fisher, 2011) : Organizing the data into major themes, such as school readiness, teacher competence, available resources, administrative issues, and sociocultural influences.

3. Interpretation (Hugueno, 2022): Interpreting the significance of each theme to uncover dominant patterns in the problems and challenges reported.

RESULT

Based on the results of a comprehensive literature review of scientific journals, books, policy documents, and research reports, several key findings have emerged regarding the problems and challenges of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian primary schools. Content analysis of these sources revealed several major issues, which are described in detail below:

1. Teachers' Uneven Understanding of Merdeka Curriculum

Teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum varies widely, primarily due to limited training and insufficient support. Many educators lack a deep grasp of the curriculum's core philosophy particularly in areas such as differentiated instruction and project-based learning which are essential to its success (Widiansyah et al., 2025; Witraguna et al., 2024). This problem is exacerbated by the Ministry of Education's acknowledgement that training programs have not been evenly distributed, especially in underserved regions (Soleha & Mujahid, 2024).

Key Challenges in Teacher Understanding

- a. **Lack of Training:** A large number of teachers report inadequate training in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, leading to significant gaps in understanding its foundational

principles (Widiansyah et al., 2025; Witraguna et al., 2024).

- b. **Resource Gaps:** Teachers in remote areas face severe limitations in accessing educational resources and support systems, hindering their ability to adopt the curriculum effectively (Soleha & Mujahid, 2024; Fatimatuzzahrah et al., 2024).
- c. **Resistance to Change:** Some educators are hesitant to adopt new pedagogical methods, which presents another obstacle to effective implementation (Widiansyah et al., 2025; Miftahudin et al., 2024).

Implications for Education Quality

- a. **Impact on Student Learning:** Teachers' limited understanding negatively affects students' learning experiences, often curbing creativity and reducing student engagement (Soleha & Mujahid, 2024; Miftahudin et al., 2024).
- b. **The Need for Holistic Support:** Improving teacher readiness and curriculum implementation requires a collaborative approach involving all stakeholders teachers, schools, and policymakers alike (Widiansyah et al., 2025; Fatimatuzzahrah et al., 2024).

Despite these challenges, there is a growing sense of enthusiasm among teachers. Many are eager to engage with the Merdeka Curriculum, indicating that effective implementation is possible with adequate support and ongoing professional development.

2. Limitations of Supporting Facilities and Infrastructure

One of the most pressing obstacles in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is the lack of adequate facilities and infrastructure, especially in rural and remote areas. Although the curriculum emphasizes project-based learning, character development, and digital literacy, many schools lack the resources needed to support these innovations.

Disparities in ICT Access

One of the main challenges is the huge difference in access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT):

- a. **Unequal Internet Access:** Over 45% of primary schools in rural areas lack stable internet connectivity, which severely hampers digital learning initiatives a core component of the Merdeka Curriculum (Saputri & Fatmawati, 2024).
- b. **Digital Divide:** Technological disparities widen educational inequality. Students in well-equipped areas benefit from greater access to learning resources, while those in under-resourced regions remain disadvantaged (Kumari & Srivastava, 2023).

Infrastructure Challenges

In addition to ICT access, physical challenges in school infrastructure are also a barrier:

- a. **Budget and Maintenance Limitations:** Many schools face limited financial resources to repair existing facilities or construct new ones, preventing them from creating conducive learning environments (Saputri & Fatmawati, 2024).

- b. **Outdated Infrastructure:** Numerous schools continue to operate with outdated infrastructure that cannot support technology-integrated instruction. The cost of modernization is often prohibitive (Kumari & Srivastava, 2023).

Need for Comprehensive Solutions

Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach:

- a. **Effective Planning and Management:** Governments and schools must work collaboratively to plan infrastructure improvements, allocate budgets efficiently, and involve communities in enhancing educational facilities (Salsabila et al., 2025).
- b. **Teacher Training and Infrastructure Investment:** Teachers need targeted training on how to integrate technology in the classroom. Concurrently, investments in upgrading facilities are critical to support educational innovation (Nurfadila et al., 2023; Asher, 2009).

Despite these issues, there is optimism that community-driven innovation and local resource optimization can significantly enhance educational quality in under-resourced areas, demonstrating that these obstacles are surmountable.

3. Teacher Administrative Burden

Another significant challenge in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is the heavy administrative workload placed on teachers. Besides teaching, teachers are required to manage a wide range of administrative duties, which can detract from their instructional responsibilities.

Administrative Responsibilities

Teachers in Indonesia have to handle various administrative matters such as:

- a. Developing lesson plans, conducting student assessments, and sometimes even being involved in school financial reports (Oktafiami & Rizqa, 2024) .
- b. These tasks are often more time-consuming than the core activities of teaching and mentoring students (Gyoyug jonghab yeon'gu, 2024) .
- c. The lack of adequate administrative staff leaves teachers to fend for themselves, which is one of the main causes of stress, even accounting for 34% of teacher stress levels (Olayiwola, 2024).

Impact on Teacher Welfare

The heavy administrative burden greatly affects teachers' welfare:

- a. Many teachers, especially those early in their careers, experience emotional and physical exhaustion (Hye Sook Shin, 2024).
- b. Additional stressors, such as overcrowded classrooms or internal school conflicts, worsen the situation (Gyoyug jonghab yeon'gu, 2024).

Solutions and Innovations

To reduce this burden, several solutions have been proposed:

- a. **Robotic Process Automation (RPA)** is being implemented to handle simple administrative tasks automatically, allowing teachers to focus more on learning and interacting with students (Zahurin, Mamat, wan Ali, & Abas, 2024) .
- b. **Online reporting systems** are also considered effective, especially for

schools in remote areas, as they help streamline administrative processes that were previously done manually (Olayiwola, 2024) .

Unless addressed, the administrative burden can undermine teacher morale and effectiveness. Therefore, strong system support and technological innovation are essential to restore teachers' focus on their core responsibility: educating students.

4. Learner Readiness

Learner readiness is a crucial factor in the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in primary schools. This readiness encompasses not only foundational knowledge but also cognitive abilities, motivation to learn, and self-efficacy. Without sufficient student preparedness, the core principles of the Merdeka Curriculum such as independent learning, project-based learning, and differentiation are unlikely to be effectively realized.

The Importance of Learning Readiness

- a. **Academic Achievement:** Research demonstrates a strong correlation between learning readiness and academic performance. In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, which encourages student autonomy, readiness is a prerequisite for achieving optimal outcomes (Dangol & Shrestha, 2019).
- b. **Independent Effectiveness:** The curriculum demands that students become more self-directed. In this regard, self-efficacy students' belief in their own capabilities plays a critical role. Learners with high self-efficacy are more likely to be motivated, active,

and less dependent on teachers (Afandi et al., 2023).

Participant Readiness Dimension

- a. **Sub-Dimension:** Learner readiness includes various factors, such as:
 - 1) *Self-efficacy in using technology*, which is especially important in digital learning.
 - 2) *Self-learning ability*, where students are required to organise their own learning rhythm and strategy.
 - 3) *Internal motivation*, which is the drive from within to keep learning and developing (Kirmizi, 2015) .
- b. **Experiential Learning:** In addition to cognitive aspects, emotional readiness is also required. The experiential learning promoted by Merdeka Curriculum requires students to be active, creative, and emotionally involved in the learning process (Maddox et al., .2000).

While learner readiness is critical, there are major challenges that arise. An excessive focus on learner readiness alone risks overlooking other equally important factors, such as; curriculum quality: Whether the material provided is relevant and applicable. Teaching methods: Are teachers able to apply methods that are varied and in accordance with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. Therefore, the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum depends not only on the readiness of students, but also on the synergy between student readiness, teacher readiness, provision of infrastructure, and support for the education system as a whole.

5. Lack of Parental Support in Implementing the Independent Curriculum in Elementary Schools

Parental support plays a critical role in the success of the Merdeka Curriculum. Since the curriculum emphasizes student independence, creativity, and active learning, parental involvement becomes essential both at school and at home. A lack of such support can have serious implications.

Emotional Impact on Adolescents

Studies show that insufficient parental support can negatively affect children’s emotional well-being, particularly during adolescence. Children often experience increased stress, anxiety, and sadness when they feel neglected especially if their parents also face emotional challenges or depression (Janssen et al., 2021).

Decreased Academic Performance

Parental involvement strongly influences children's motivation and academic success. In a curriculum that requires students to explore and understand material independently, a lack of parental assistance can hinder effective learning. Without adequate support, students are more likely to lose motivation, struggle with new concepts, and underperform academically (Vedhaswari, 2022; Adnan et al., 2022).

Long-term Consequences

Ongoing lack of parental support can lead to more severe outcomes in adulthood, such as increased risk of suicidal ideation (Macalli et al., 2018). However, it is important to note that as children reach emotional or financial independence, some may rely less on their

parents (Majamaa, 2014). This indicates that the need for parental support should be adjusted according to the child's developmental stage.

To ensure the success of the Merdeka Curriculum, increasing parents' awareness of their role in supporting their children's education is essential. Efforts to improve parental literacy about educational expectations are crucial, particularly in the context of a curriculum that promotes student autonomy.

6. Regional Disparities

Indonesia's vast geographical diversity poses a significant challenge to the equitable implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. As an archipelago comprising thousands of islands, disparities in educational access between regions are substantial, affecting the uniform application of national policies.

Geographical Disparities in Education

a. Access between Urban and Rural Areas

Schools in urban areas usually have better access to educational facilities such as laboratories, technology, libraries and highly qualified teachers. In contrast, schools in rural and remote areas often lack basic facilities. This leads to inequality in education quality between cities and villages (Sukari & Sugiyarti, 2024).

b. Infrastructure Challenges

Remote areas face severe challenges, such as poor road infrastructure, unstable electricity, and unreliable internet connections. These factors hinder the teaching and learning process and obstruct the application of

student-centered methods promoted by the Merdeka Curriculum (Rahman et al., 2024).

Quality of Education

a. Variations in Teacher Quality

Teacher quality is unevenly distributed. While urban schools benefit from well-trained educators, rural schools often employ teachers who lack the competencies necessary for effective instruction under the Merdeka Curriculum (Muttaqin, 2017).

b. Curriculum Relevance

Although the curriculum is designed to be flexible and responsive to local contexts, its implementation in resource-constrained regions is often ineffective, limiting its potential to meet local educational needs (Zreik, 2024).

Policy Implementation Challenges

a. Resource Allocation

Although the government has initiated programs targeting underdeveloped regions (3T areas: Disadvantaged, Frontier, and Outermost), implementation remains suboptimal. Inequitable resource distribution continues to obstruct equal access to quality education (Nurfadilah et al., 2024).

b. The Need for Inclusive Policies

To ensure that the Merdeka Curriculum reaches all areas, inclusive policies must be developed. These include increasing education budgets, providing continuous teacher training, and investing in basic infrastructure, particularly in underserved regions (Rahman et al., 2024).

Despite these challenges, several innovative initiatives are underway. These include the use of digital learning platforms, community-based education programs, and national efforts to improve education equity. Such initiatives offer hope that, with sustained innovation and policy commitment, regional disparities can be progressively reduced.

7. Lack of Mentoring and Evaluation

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in primary schools also faces significant difficulties in the areas of mentoring and evaluation. These issues stem from insufficient government support and teachers' limited preparedness, both of which obstruct effective implementation.

Lack of government guidance

- a. Inadequate government support has been identified as a major obstacle, leading to confusion among educators regarding curriculum implementation (Putri et al., .2024)
- b. Policymakers need to establish effective communication channels to ensure teachers understand the curriculum objectives and methodology (Yunitasari et al., .2023).

Teacher Readiness and Training

- a. A considerable number of teachers struggle to adapt to new learning paradigms and technology integration, which are essential components of the Merdeka Curriculum (Vinna et al., 2024).

Comprehensive and ongoing training programs are needed to equip educators with the necessary skills and confidence to

implement the curriculum effectively (Miftahudin et al., 2024).

Evaluation Challenges

- a. Assessing the curriculum's effectiveness remains problematic due to the absence of structured, standardized evaluation tools (Setioyuliani & Andaryani, 2023)
- b. A holistic evaluation approach incorporating continuous assessment, feedback mechanisms, and performance tracking is essential to improve and sustain curriculum implementation (Miftahudin et al., 2024).

While challenges persist, some teachers have reported increased student creativity and engagement, suggesting that with adequate support, the Merdeka Curriculum can significantly enhance learning outcomes in Indonesia.

DISCUSSION

The findings regarding the challenges and obstacles in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian primary schools reflect the complex realities observed in the field. Although the Merdeka Curriculum was designed to foster creativity, flexibility, and adaptability among students, there remains a significant gap between the ideal vision of the policy and its actual implementation in schools (Lestari et al., 2023; Azzarah et al., 2024).

Key challenges include insufficient teacher preparedness, limited educational resources, difficulties in assessment, and weak institutional support (Salim, 2023; Atiaturrahmaniah et al., 2023; Isnaningrum et al., 2024). Many teachers still lack a strong understanding of the new curriculum's principles, which negatively

affects their teaching practices and, consequently, student learning outcomes (Soleha & Mujahid, 2024).

These issues are closely tied to the theoretical foundation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which is rooted in constructivist learning theory. This approach emphasizes student-centered learning and competency-based development (Lisnawati et al., 2024; Aminah et al., 2023). The Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Education and Culture, promotes the curriculum to support the development of the Pancasila Student Profile. However, major barriers such as inadequate training, poor infrastructure, and socioeconomic disparities remain unresolved (Fitri et al., 2022; Umari et al., 2024; Diah & Andriyani, 2024).

Several contributing factors have been identified: teachers' limited understanding, inadequate school facilities, students' lack of readiness, and curriculum materials that are not well-aligned with real-world contexts (Startyaningsih et al., 2024; Usman et al., 2023). Socioeconomic conditions also play a critical role. Students from low-income families often have restricted access to the learning resources necessary for success (Startyaningsih et al., 2024).

Furthermore, implementing differentiated learning and character-building projects within the Pancasila Student Profile presents its own set of challenges. These include difficulties in assessing character values and a limited understanding of Pancasila principles among educators (Muthaharoh et al., 2024; Wulandari et al., 2023).

In this context, In this context, Abdurrahmansyah et al. (2023) emphasize

that the success of Merdeka Curriculum implementation depends heavily on teachers' pedagogical competence and the quality of school leadership. He also highlights the importance of integrating local wisdom and religious-spiritual values into the curriculum, particularly in culturally and religiously rich regions. This perspective suggests that implementation challenges are not only technical, but also ideological and cultural thus requiring a comprehensive and locally rooted approach (These findings have important practical implications. Chief among them is the urgent need for continuous and collaborative professional development to enhance teacher readiness for curriculum transformation (Retnowati et al., 2024). Additionally, schools should prioritize the availability of relevant learning materials and the integration of digital tools to support innovative teaching (Larasati, 2024). Simplifying administrative tasks and reinforcing school leadership are also essential strategies for helping teachers maintain focus on student learning (Ahyani et al., 2024).

To address these challenges, collaboration between schools and the government is vital. Strengthening educational infrastructure, expanding teacher training programs, and increasing community engagement are necessary steps. Investments in digital technology, physical facilities, mentoring systems, and responsive feedback mechanisms can significantly accelerate improvements in curriculum implementation (Syafuruddin et al., 2024; Hasan et al., 2024; Mangesti & Kismartini, 2024).

Nonetheless, resistance to change must also be anticipated. Open dialogue and inclusive transition strategies can help

build a shared understanding among all stakeholders. With this holistic, adaptive approach, the Merdeka Curriculum has the potential to become a powerful driver of educational transformation that is more relevant, equitable, and meaningful for Indonesia's future.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that although the Merdeka Curriculum holds great potential to promote student-centered learning and strengthen character development through the Pancasila Student Profile, its implementation in Indonesian primary schools still faces significant challenges. These challenges include teachers' lack of preparedness, insufficient infrastructure and resources, difficulties in assessment, students' limited readiness, and complex socioeconomic factors. Moreover, the gap between policy expectations and actual practice in schools remains a major barrier to effective curriculum implementation. Efforts to apply differentiated learning and character-building initiatives are still hampered by limited conceptual understanding and technical constraints at the school level. Therefore, comprehensive interventions are required. These include continuous teacher training, improvements in educational infrastructure, and the active involvement of all stakeholders including the government, schools, parents, and local communities. Support systems must be strengthened to ensure that all schools, regardless of location or resources, are equipped to implement the curriculum effectively. With adaptive and collaborative strategies, the Merdeka Curriculum can be optimized as a meaningful and inclusive tool for

transforming education in Indonesia. Its success depends not only on technical preparation but also on a collective commitment to ensuring equitable learning opportunities for all students.

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