



Implementation Of Independent Curriculum Management On Soft Skills Aspects In Palangka Raya

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Abstract. *This study aims to explore the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at State Vocational School 2 Palangka Raya in developing students' soft skills. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes the development of character and social skills through a project-based learning approach. Based on the educational management theory developed by George R. Terry, this research identifies four main indicators in the management of curriculum implementation: planning, organizing, implementing, and supervising. In the planning stage, the school designs learning programs that integrate soft skill development with academic content, and prepares supporting resources. The organizing stage involves assigning teacher roles in delivering flexible learning and integrating cross-subject content. Implementation is carried out by actively involving students in projects that stimulate creativity and collaboration, while utilizing technology in the learning process. Supervision is conducted through evaluations of both the process and the learning outcomes, including monitoring students' soft skill achievements and gathering feedback from relevant stakeholders. The findings show that although there are efforts to integrate soft skills into learning, several challenges remain, such as a lack of technological skills among teachers and issues in time management. Therefore, collaboration among schools, parents, and the community is essential in creating a supportive learning environment. These findings are expected to provide input for improving the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum to better prepare students for the workforce and social life.*

Keywords: *independent curriculum, management, soft skills*

Abstrak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka di SMK Negeri 2 Palangka Raya dalam mengembangkan soft skill siswa. Kurikulum Merdeka memiliki fokus pada pengembangan karakter dan keterampilan sosial siswa melalui pendekatan pembelajaran berbasis proyek. Berdasarkan teori manajemen pendidikan yang dikembangkan oleh George R. Terry, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi empat indikator utama dalam manajemen implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka, yaitu perencanaan, pengorganisasian, pelaksanaan, dan pengawasan. Dalam tahap perencanaan, sekolah menyusun program pembelajaran yang memadukan pengembangan soft skill dengan materi pembelajaran, serta menyiapkan sumber daya pendukung. Pengorganisasian mencakup pembagian peran guru dalam pelaksanaan pembelajaran yang fleksibel dan integrasi lintas mata pelajaran. Pelaksanaan dilakukan dengan melibatkan siswa secara aktif dalam proyek-proyek yang menstimulasi kreativitas dan kolaborasi, serta memanfaatkan teknologi dalam proses pembelajaran. Pengawasan dilakukan melalui evaluasi proses dan hasil pembelajaran, dengan pemantauan terhadap pencapaian soft skill siswa dan umpan balik dari pihak terkait. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun ada upaya untuk mengintegrasikan soft skill dalam pembelajaran, tantangan yang dihadapi antara lain kurangnya keterampilan teknologi di kalangan guru dan masalah dalam manajemen waktu. Oleh karena itu, kerja sama antara sekolah, orang tua, dan masyarakat menjadi kunci untuk menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang mendukung. Temuan ini diharapkan dapat memberikan masukan bagi perbaikan implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka untuk lebih mempersiapkan siswa menghadapi dunia kerja dan kehidupan sosial.

Kata Kunci: *kurikulum merdeka, manajemen, soft skill*

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the sectors that can transform a nation's civilization. Improving the quality of education also has an impact on the quality and caliber of human resources as the cornerstone of civilization. Improving the quality of education is a continuous effort that needs to be carried out (Gofur, Sapuadi, Muzakki, & Azhar, 2024). Education in Indonesia is the main foundation for the country's progress, playing an important role in improving the quality of human resources so that they can develop based on each individual's cognitive potential and experience. For education to function properly, efficient management is needed in its implementation and evaluation. Without proper management, the results of education will not be as expected (Susilowati, 2022). Management is a combination of science and art in effectively and efficiently managing the utilization of human resources and other resources to achieve predetermined goals. The term "management" refers to a series of processes that include planning, organizing, directing, executing, and controlling activities to achieve organizational goals while maximizing existing potential and resources (Na'im et al., 2021).

According to George R. Terry, the main functions of management include planning, organizing, executing, and supervising. Based on this thinking, the quality of a school can be assessed. Schools play a crucial role in the educational process in Indonesia, as this is where interaction between teachers and students takes place. The government's efforts to improve the quality of education are carried out by continuously updating and improving the curriculum (Kurniawan, 2017).

A curriculum is a plan that changes the material, teaching materials, and methods used as guidelines in the learning process. Change is a natural part of life that is bound to happen, which means that everything, including the independent curriculum in education, will continue to evolve. The independent curriculum is a policy from the Ministry of Education and Culture that aims to optimize the existing curriculum (Febrianningsih & Ramadan, 2023).

The implementation of the independent curriculum can be seen through project-based learning, which aims to develop soft skills and shape the Pancasila student profile. The strengthening of the Pancasila student profile emphasizes the formation of soft skills and personal competencies that are applied in daily life, which are taught to students. The purpose of education is not only focused on intellectual achievement but also on the

development of students' character and personality (Mufidatunrofiah, Maysyaroh, & Suratman, 2024). A teacher has the responsibility not only to transfer knowledge but also to serve as a role model and character builder for students through the learning process at school (Dermawan, 2022). The challenges faced by educators in implementing the independent curriculum in schools include limitations in teachers' skills in using technology, limited literacy skills, problems in time management, and a lack of mastery of soft skills or educator competencies (Sulistiyowati et al., 2023). This curriculum prioritizes students as the main focus in the learning process, with special emphasis on developing soft skills and character building (Hartoyo & Rahmadayanti, 2022).

Character education is a systematic process that helps students learn values and behaviors that are in line with Allah, themselves, and others. Soft skills play an important role in daily life, especially in the professional world. In addition to hard skills, learning soft skills is also important because in the workplace, we do not only carry out tasks as individuals, but we also have to collaborate with other people (Zahra & Anriva, 2023).

Soft skills refer to abilities that are acquired through a continuous process of self-development. In general, soft skills encompass attitudes, personality, and skills needed to work effectively and improve oneself. By improving these skills, individuals are empowered to live their lives more fully. Therefore, it is important for educators to prepare students well, developing both hard skills and soft skills through a curriculum that is adapted to the development of students and the needs of the school (Mahmudah, 2023).

The Vocational High School 2 Palangka Raya, abbreviated as SMKN 2 Palangka Raya, is an educational institution aimed at preparing its graduates to work by equipping them with knowledge and skills. One of the important aspects in developing students' character is soft skills. Educational institutions, especially vocational schools, have a role not only in producing students who excel in the field of knowledge, but also students who are able to make active and positive contributions in the world of work (Choirunnisa, Wirasti, & Hidayat, 2020). In the workplace, employers not only consider the cumulative academic achievements of students but also evaluate their soft skills. Therefore, the current generation must strive to develop themselves and recognize the importance of improving soft skills in order to succeed in both the professional and academic worlds (Hamdani, Ana Fauzia, Liani, Togatorop, & Risky Wulan Ramadhani, 2022).

Soft skills are also closely related to the values needed in the industrial world, such as discipline, honesty, commitment, responsibility, self-confidence, ethics, politeness, teamwork, creativity, communication, and leadership. However, the development of soft skills often becomes a challenge due to the nature and characteristics of each individual learner (Nugroho, 2022). Soft skills are not innate abilities, but rather competencies that can be continuously developed over time. Soft skills are considered abstract abilities that encompass the ability to interact and communicate effectively with others. An individual's personality is determined by the combination of technical skills and solid soft skills, which give the individual an advantage in terms of quality. Conversely, if not accompanied by the right character, this strength may become a liability. An individual who may have potential but lacks character is likely to be unable to realize their full potential (Arif & Sriyana, 2023).

Based on the preliminary findings, the researchers obtained information regarding the integration of soft skills in the curriculum at SMKN 2 Palangka Raya. In grade X, soft skills accounted for 70%, while theory accounted for 30%; in grade XI, the proportion of soft skills and theory was balanced at 50: 50; and in grade XII, soft skills are applied at 30%, while theory is 70%, in accordance with the objectives that have been set. This is in accordance with the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Number 34 of 2018 concerning the National Education Standards (SNP) for Vocational High Schools, which covers nine areas of competence, including character (soft skills), technical competence, and entrepreneurship.

State Vocational School 2 Palangka Raya, as a center of excellence, aims to produce graduates who are ready to compete in the global workforce and start their own businesses. This school is positioned as a center for improving educational quality and as a model for other vocational schools. State Vocational High 2 Palangka Raya is committed to producing competent graduates equipped with hard skills, soft skills, and character education that will enable them to thrive in the workforce and industry. State Vocational High 2 Palangka Raya, as a center of excellence, aims to produce outstanding graduates who are ready to compete in the job market. With a curriculum that emphasizes the development of soft skills, graduates are not only equipped with technical skills (hard skills) but also with interpersonal skills. State Vocational High 2 Palangka Raya aspires to become a center for improving the quality of education and a model for other vocational schools, with the aim of raising educational standards more broadly. Graduates are

expected to have a balanced combination of technical skills, soft skills, and character education.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological approach. The phenomenological approach is used to understand the meaning of the experiences experienced by the research subjects in depth, especially regarding the application of the Merdeka Curriculum in developing soft skills at State Vocational High 2 Palangka Raya. In this approach, researchers try to explore the perceptions, understanding, and subjective meanings of teachers and students of the phenomena they experience daily in the learning environment. The research was conducted by observing, interviewing, and documenting the direct experiences of the research subjects, then interpreting the meaning of these experiences. The main focus is to deeply understand how the independent curriculum is implemented in the learning process that emphasizes strengthening soft skills, and how educational actors feel the benefits, obstacles, and dynamics of this application in the context of their daily lives (Sugiyono, 2023).

This research was conducted at State Vocational High 2 Palangka Raya. Purposive sampling was used to select informants in this study. The researcher looked for informants or key informants who knew and understood the research process and materials, the vice principal for curriculum and teachers at State Vocational High 2 Palangka Raya. In this research, the researcher collected descriptive data related to the implementation of the curriculum, especially the soft skills aspect at State Vocational High 2 Palangka Raya. This research requires a short study to analyze the results of the research, as well as the methods used during the implementation process. The researcher can analyze themes that include general informality and uniqueness found in the past (Fadli, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Independent Curriculum

Curriculum, as the most important element in education, is bound to undergo changes. Therefore, schools or madrasahs must be ready to adapt to curriculum changes (Rizal, Hikmah, & Anshari, 2022). The independent learning curriculum is a new policy established by the Minister of Education (Mahmudah, 2023). The Merdeka Curriculum is a curriculum that provides valuable intracurricular learning, giving students the opportunity to explore concepts in greater depth and improve their competencies. This curriculum

gives students the freedom to develop their potential, while also providing flexibility to educational institutions in managing a curriculum that focuses on autonomy, as well as giving teachers the freedom to plan the learning process (Nanda & Samosir, 2023). The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at State Vocational High 2 Palangka Raya follows the guidelines from the Ministry of Education and Culture, with a focus on developing students' hard skills and soft skills competencies. This curriculum emphasizes student-oriented learning, while also meeting the needs and desires of the school through the implementation of project-based learning to develop character in accordance with the profile of Palincasilal students. The main characteristic of the Merdeka Curriculum at State Vocational High 2 Palangka Raya is to produce the Palancasilal learner profile through project-based learning aimed at developing students' skills and character. This curriculum also prioritizes core subjects (essential), emphasizing basic competencies such as literacy and numeracy in a comprehensive manner. The learning process is flexible, with differentiated approaches tailored to the context, local conditions, and the abilities of each student (Suherman, 2023).

According to the Ministry of Education and Culture, the characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum are project-based learning aimed at restoring soft skills and character in accordance with the profile of Palancasilal learners. This approach emphasizes essential materials and provides time for learning that is focused on core competencies. In addition, teachers are given the freedom to adapt teaching methods to the abilities of each student (Batara, 2022).

According to the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes project-based learning to foster soft skills and character development in alignment with the Pancasila Student Profile. To support this goal, its implementation is evaluated through several curriculum management indicators: planning, organizing, implementing, and monitoring. The planning phase includes defining clear learning objectives, developing essential learning materials, and adjusting time allocations to meet basic competencies. The organizing phase involves assigning teacher responsibilities and designing a flexible learning system that meets individual student needs. Implementation focuses on employing methods that promote the development of soft skills, alongside the integration of technology and project-based methods. Supervision is conducted through comprehensive evaluations, including the analysis of learning outcomes (CP), learning objectives (TP), learning progression flow (ALTP), and assessments.

At State Vocational 2 Palangka Raya, the Merdeka Curriculum was first implemented in 2021, following a 10-day technical training session provided by the inter-ministerial education center. Subsequently, the school conducted a learning simulation through a 10-day In-House Training (IHT) program using a Training Management System managed by the Central Kalimantan Provincial Office. This program focused on the development of curriculum documents, including the analysis of CPs, TPs, ATPs, teaching modules, and assessments.

a. Planning Phase

1) Learning Objectives (CP)

Learning Objectives (CP) refer to the competencies that students must achieve in each learning phase. At State Vocational High 2 Palangka Raya, teachers must first understand the curriculum concept used, then learn the learning assessment structure, and finally plan appropriate learning activities.

2) Formulating learning objectives

Learning at State Vocational High 2 Palangka Raya begins with the formulation of learning objectives (CP), followed by the determination of the competencies that must be acquired by students. Next, teachers determine the scope of material that needs to be learned by students, then establish the Criteria for Successful Outcomes (KKO) that are in line with the CP. After that, teachers formulate operational and concrete learning activities, and finally conduct a re-evaluation of the learning objectives that have been set.

3) Organizing the learning objectives

The learning objectives are organized in a logical order, starting from the beginning to the end. This sequence is organized based on a clear principle, namely to identify the learning objectives set by teachers at State Vocational High 2 Palangka Raya, then to analyze those objectives based on the content and competencies of each learning material. Next, an analysis of the competency elements in a learning process is carried out.

4) Planning the learning process

In planning the learning process, teachers at State Vocational High 2 Palangka Raya first analyze the needs of students, then develop a learning strategy, and finally develop a learning plan and learning modules.

b. Implementation Phase

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at State Vocational High 2 Palangka Raya follows the principles of a curriculum that places students at the center of education. This process includes several stages, namely diagnostic assessment, planning, and implementation of learning activities.

1) Diagnostic assessment

Diagnostic assessment is an evaluation aimed at identifying the characteristics, conditions, strengths, and weaknesses of students' learning processes, which is carried out on a regular basis. At State Vocational High 2 Palangka Raya, the assessment criteria include determining the time and schedule for the assessment as well as providing the necessary resources. Information regarding the implementation of the assessment is communicated to the students. In general, there are four assessment methods, namely tests, observations, assignments, and self-assessments.

2) Learning tools

Learning resources include learning materials and the Semester Learning Plan (RPS) that are aligned with the curriculum. In addition, there are also learning modules, learning media, and other learning materials that support the learning process.

3) Learning process

Student-centered learning provides opportunities for students to develop their personalities, creativity, and fulfill their needs. This learning process consists of three stages, namely introduction activities, core activities, and closing activities. Additionally, project-based learning methods are applied to enhance the learning profile of students at State Vocational High 2 Palangka Raya (Ulfadilah, Darmiyanti, & Munafiah, 2023).

Merdeka Curriculum Teaching Module

Teaching modules are a type of learning media that are systematically and comprehensively organized, containing a series of learning activities that are planned and designed to help students achieve learning objectives. Teaching modules play an important role in supporting teachers in planning the learning process (Rahimah, 2022). Teaching modules in the Merdeka Curriculum play an important role as part of planning in curriculum management. As a learning tool that is systematically and comprehensively structured, teaching modules aim to facilitate teachers in designing and

implementing the learning process. These modules are structured with reference to Learning Outcomes (CP) and learning objective sequences (ATP), which will guide classroom learning in accordance with established standards.

The teaching module is an innovation from the Lesson Plan (RPP) which is designed to facilitate and guide teachers in the teaching and learning process. In its implementation, teachers are given the flexibility to modify the teaching module in accordance with the characteristics and needs of the students they teach. This is regulated in the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 22 of 2020, which regulates the strategic plan of the Ministry of Education and Culture for the period 2020-2024 (Wahira, Hamid, & HB, 2023).

Based on the curriculum at State Vocational High 2 Palangka Raya, the government provides learning materials that are then converted into learning objectives by each teacher according to their respective subjects. These learning materials are then transformed into learning activities and eventually learning modules, involving collaboration among subject teachers. With the CP, teachers at State Vocational High 2 Palangka Raya have more opportunities to explore and develop their potential, create teaching modules, collaborate with various parties, and reflect on the teaching process. Overall, teaching modules are part of a plan that enables the learning process to run with clear and structured objectives, while also giving teachers the freedom to develop students' potential to the fullest.

Project-Based Learning (P5) and Student Profile Development

Project-based learning has become one of the pillars of the Merdeka Curriculum. This method is effective in increasing student motivation and supporting the development of soft skills and character in line with the Pancasila learner profile. However, project-based learning also poses challenges in terms of time management, as it often requires more time compared to conventional learning methods. With the implementation of an appropriate time management strategy, students can maximize project-based learning and achieve more optimal results (Arzaq, Bahri, Huda, Khoeriyah, & Khabibul Ikhsan Choirun Nahdliyin, 2024).

The implementation of project-based learning at State Vocational 2 Palangka Raya aims to develop students' soft skills and character in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum. Although this method is effective in increasing student motivation, the main challenge faced is time management, as projects often require more time than conventional methods.

To address this, the school encourages teachers to design projects in a structured manner and collaborate across subjects, ensuring that the learning process remains efficient and learning objectives are achieved optimally.

The Pancasila Student Profile describes the formation of students' character in their daily lives through the learning process in schools. This profile is in line with the values of the Indonesian nation and aims to improve the quality of education in Indonesia, with a focus on character development in accordance with the values of Pancasila. The aspects of the Pancasila Student Profile are regulated in Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 22 of 2020, which outlines the Ministry of Education and Culture's strategic plan for the 2020-2024 period (Wahira et al., 2023).

Through project activities that reinforce the Pancasila Student Profile, students are given the opportunity to study important themes or issues so that they can take concrete action in resolving the problems associated with those issues. These activities must be tailored to the learning process and existing needs. The six characteristics of the Pancasila Student Profile include: piety toward God Almighty and good morals, tolerance toward global diversity, a spirit of mutual cooperation, independence, critical thinking skills, and creativity. This profile is in line with the current needs of students, which emphasize the importance of character building (Ulinnuha Nafi & Anang Solikhudin, 2023).

Soft Skills

According to the English dictionary, soft skills consist of two words: "soft," which refers to a gentle nature, and "skill," which means ability or expertise. Thus, soft skills can be defined as skills that a person possesses but are not immediately apparent. Meanwhile, according to Muhammad (2019), students' soft skills are skills that need to be developed in interacting with others (interpersonal skills), socializing with others, society/environment, and skills in managing oneself (interpersonal skills) that can optimize performance development to the maximum, such as having a good personality, good communication skills such as being honest, and the ability to socialize with others, such as being helpful and cooperative, as well as the ability to be a good leader.

The Conference Board of Canada states that soft skills are not only necessary for obtaining employment but also for supporting company development. The business and industrial sectors also prioritize soft skills when hiring new employees. Additionally, the majority of them (88.9%)

assert that soft skills are more important than hard skills when graduates seek employment (Hasanah, 2020).

Kaipa and Milus state that soft skills are a key factor in achieving success, involving various aspects such as leadership, decision-making, conflict resolution, communication, creativity, presentation skills, humility, self-confidence, emotional intelligence, integrity, commitment, and cooperation.

Soft skills are terms related to emotional intelligence, personality traits, social skills, communication abilities, language proficiency, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism, reflecting how an individual interacts with others. Soft skill attributes include values, motivation, behavior, habits, character, and individual attitudes. This also includes self-awareness and how an individual relates to others (Maryana, Agus Wijarnaka, Eko Suryaani, Iswanto, 2022).

The importance of developing soft skills in the learning process is very clear, especially their crucial role in the world of working. Therefore, teachers need to have different skills and abilities in teaching students so that they can learn effectively. The selection and planning of learning must be carefully considered so that learning objectives are achieved. This shows that soft skills, which include the ability to manage oneself and interact with others, must be directed appropriately, as this is one of the keys to education. In particular, creative and innovative teachers will produce students who are more creative, innovative, and proactive (Wantiana & Mellisa, 2023).

Based on interviews at State Vocational High 2 Palangka Raya, soft skills play a very important role, especially in vocational schools. Soft skills emphasize practical skills, such as communication skills. In the marketing department, many students are not proficient in Indonesian and often use regional languages. They also tend to lack confidence, especially in retail and business, where communication, appearance, and thinking skills are very important. Soft skills are not only important in marketing but also in other departments, as these skills are highly beneficial during internships. At State Vocational High 2 Palangka Raya, the business and retail departments focus more on marketing, including sales and customer service. However, only around 30% of students participate in extracurricular activities, as many work to support their family's economy.

The improvement of soft skills in the retail and business department is still low, at around 40%, due to a lack of adequate training. Soft skills include attitude, cooperation, and communication. Nevertheless, teachers strive to help students develop their soft skills. For example, in customer service

practices in retail and business programs, students are not only required to explain products effectively (communication) but also must be able to collaborate when developing group promotional strategies, demonstrate discipline in managing work hours in a simulated store, and take responsibility for their tasks during hands-on activities. However, there are still many challenges, such as limited training time and a lack of activities that directly encourage the exploration of soft skills. Despite this, teachers continue to strive to create learning spaces and methods that encourage the development of soft skills, such as through presentations, transaction simulations, and simple entrepreneurship projects.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum at State Vocational High 2 Palangka Raya, especially in developing soft skills through project-based learning has shown a positive impact on the quality of education. Project-based learning has proven effective in shaping students' interpersonal, communication, and cooperation skills, which are highly relevant to the needs of today's workforce. However, challenges persist regarding teachers' proficiency in technology and their ability to manage time effectively. Therefore, further training for teachers and increased utilization of technology in the learning process are needed. Schools also need to support the creation of an environment that supports the maximum development of soft skills. Overall, despite some obstacles, the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum at State Vocational High 2 Palangka Raya shows that developing soft skills through this approach can help prepare graduates who are ready to face the challenges of the world of work and contribute positively in society.

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