



Implementation of *Merdeka* Curriculum in the Learning Process through Outdoor Learning Methods

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in Indonesia aims to transform education, fostering a new generation of quality human beings. This study explores the challenges and opportunities of implementing this curriculum through outdoor learning, a pedagogical approach that emphasizes experiential learning in natural settings. This qualitative study used observation, documentation, and interviews to gather data from public and private high schools in Semarang City. Data were analyzed using an interactive model involving data collection, reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The study found that while most schools have adopted the *Merdeka* Curriculum, key challenges hinder effective implementation, including a lack of comprehensive teacher understanding of the curriculum's content and limited experience with independent learning programs. Specifically, many teachers reported feeling unprepared to implement the curriculum's flexible learning framework. To address these challenges, the study suggests prioritizing professional development focused on the nuances of the *Merdeka* Curriculum and practical strategies for its implementation in outdoor learning environments. Furthermore, schools can optimize resource utilization through strategies such as rotating schedules and explore external funding opportunities through sponsorships and alumni networks to enhance facilities and infrastructure. These findings underscore the need for targeted support and resources to ensure the successful integration of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, particularly within innovative pedagogical approaches like outdoor learning. Further research could explore the long-term impact of these challenges and the effectiveness of proposed solutions.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Education is crucial for national progress. A nation's educational quality and system serve as benchmarks for its development. Without education, a country will lag behind others [1]. Education encompasses a curriculum and government-designed frameworks. The curriculum is central to the educational process, exerting the most direct influence on its progress and outcomes [2].

This highlights the importance of a curriculum in education. It is vital, and teachers and other educators must understand its content. The curriculum clearly outlines the objectives and processes of education, aiming for a conducive, innovative, interactive, effective, and comfortable learning environment that aligns with current developments [3].

As times change, so do various aspects of life, including curricula. These changes can arise from societal dissatisfaction with educational outcomes and a continuous desire for improvement, which, in reality, has not always kept pace with evolving needs. Simply put, it is impossible

to create a curriculum that remains relevant across all time periods. A curriculum's effectiveness is tied to a specific society and time. As science and technology advance and society changes, the curriculum must adapt to these demands [4]. Indonesia's curriculum has undergone numerous revisions, including the 1947, 1964, 1968, 1973, 1975, 1984, 1994, 1997, 2004, 2006, and 2013 curricula, culminating in the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Prior to the pandemic, the 2013 Curriculum was the sole curriculum used in educational institutions. During the 2020/2021 academic year, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology introduced a policy allowing educational units to choose between the 2013 Curriculum and the Emergency Curriculum (a simplified version of the 2013 Curriculum). The *Merdeka* Curriculum was also piloted in Mover Schools and Vocational High School Centers of Excellence [5].

The *Merdeka* Curriculum development policy offered to these educational units provided an additional option to

facilitate learning recovery during 2022-2024. The national curriculum policy will be reviewed in 2024 based on evaluations conducted during this recovery period. The Merdeka Curriculum, offered as an option to all educational units, is adopted by those institutions ready to implement it as a new policy [6]. According to data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, as of 2024, 143,265 schools have implemented the Merdeka Curriculum. Specifically, 6,448 high school education units adopted the Merdeka Curriculum in the 2022/2023 academic year [7]. The Merdeka Curriculum prioritizes essential materials, character development, and student competencies. Its main characteristic is supporting learning recovery through project-based learning to develop soft skills and character aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile, while focusing on essential materials. This allows sufficient time for in-depth learning of basic competencies such as literacy and numeracy [8]. Unfortunately, in the learning process, some teachers still rely on lectures, question-and-answer, and discussion methods, despite these methods being considered less effective in engaging students and fostering enthusiasm for learning. This is because these methods often emphasize a conventional, teacher-centered approach [9].

These conditions contribute to passive student behavior, diminished enthusiasm, and ultimately, a decline in comprehension of learning material. Learning that relies heavily on verbal instruction and is confined to the classroom fails to develop critical thinking, analytical, and collaborative skills—essential competencies that should be fostered throughout the learning process. Furthermore, conventional teaching methods are often perceived as boring, focusing on rote memorization of place names, personal names, dates, and similar information without connecting to real-world facts and current technologies relevant to students' lives. Therefore, outdoor learning methods should be implemented to improve the achievement of learning objectives [10].

Outdoor learning involves activities that take place outside the traditional classroom setting, often in natural environments [11]. Nature can serve as a valuable learning resource, effectively expanding knowledge and developing students' mindsets [12]. Research has established at least four characteristics of outdoor learning: 1) exploration through discovery and inquiry, focusing on the surrounding environment. Outdoor learning encourages active student engagement with their surroundings to develop cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills, leading to mastery of knowledge and skills; 2) activities involving forecasting (prediction), observation, and explanation; 3) reporting findings through various media, including verbal presentations, written reports, images, photos, or audio-visual materials; and 4) a fun learning design to stimulate students' interest in further learning [13].

In the context of general subjects, the outdoor learning method can be applied by assigning tasks that require

students to directly observe and analyze their surroundings. Previous research has explored the influence of outdoor learning on student learning outcomes. For example, a study titled "The Influence of Outdoor Learning Methods on Learning Outcomes in Social Studies for Students of Public and Private High Schools in Purwodadi City" [14] aimed to describe and analyze the effectiveness of outdoor learning on student learning outcomes in social studies. Numerous other studies related to the application of outdoor learning exist.

Based on these considerations, it is clear that success in the learning process depends on the teacher's role in planning, implementing methods, and enacting the curriculum [9]. In practice, teachers still face challenges in implementing learning using the Merdeka Curriculum. Some teachers lack a thorough understanding of the curriculum [8], struggle to create and develop learning tools, and experience difficulties due to a lack of accessible resources for obtaining learning materials.

II. METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative approach, which focuses on exploring and understanding the complexities of human behavior and experiences, in this case, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum through outdoor learning. Qualitative research emphasizes rich, descriptive data, often in the form of interviews, observations, and document analysis, to gain in-depth insights into the research topic [15]. This study is field-based, meaning data were collected in the natural settings of the participating public and private high schools in Semarang City [16].

This descriptive study aims to understand the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum through outdoor learning in Semarang City high schools, exploring the experiences of teachers and school administrators and documenting the conditions of the learning process. The research involved 13 informants strategically selected to provide diverse perspectives on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The Head of the Semarang City Education Office was included as a key informant to provide policy context. Principals and Vice Principals for curriculum were chosen to offer insights into school-level leadership and curriculum management. Subject teachers were included to represent the classroom-level experiences of implementing the curriculum through outdoor learning. This purposeful sampling ensured a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

Data were collected through three primary methods: document analysis (e.g., curriculum documents, lesson plans), classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using an interactive model [15], a cyclical process involving data collection, data reduction (summarizing and coding data), data presentation (organizing and displaying data), and conclusion drawing (interpreting the findings and identifying patterns).

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed triangulation of methods, sources, and time [17]. Method triangulation involved collecting data through multiple methods (observation and interviews) to cross-validate information and gain a more holistic understanding. Source triangulation involved gathering data from different informants (e.g., principals, teachers) to compare perspectives. Time triangulation involved conducting interviews at different times to account for potential variations in responses and to capture a more comprehensive picture of the implementation process.

III. DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the findings related to the four research questions guiding this study: teacher readiness in implementing the *Merdeka Curriculum*; implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum* in social and community subjects; obstacles in implementation; and solutions to overcome these obstacles.

A. Teacher Readiness in Implementing the *Merdeka Curriculum*

Curriculum changes necessitate adjustments to its various elements. The initial step taken by schools is typically registration with the Semarang City Education Office to adopt the *Merdeka Curriculum*. Prior to this, schools generally hold internal discussions involving the Principal, Deputy Curriculum, subject teachers, and the School Committee. Positive outcomes from these discussions typically lead to the school's decision to implement the curriculum. The school then registers with the Semarang City Education Office to obtain a recommendation from the Supervisor. In implementing the *Merdeka Curriculum*, schools often choose to make changes independently, utilizing the resources provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Teachers participate in training or In-House Training (IHT) sessions facilitated by the Supervisor to support implementation. However, the effectiveness of IHT is often hampered by factors such as the limited duration (approximately 8 hours), the introductory nature of the material, requiring teachers to engage in substantial independent learning, and the restricted participant quota (five teachers per school). Schools are also responsible for preparing the Operational Curriculum of the Education Unit (KOSP), while subject teachers develop the Learning Objective Flow (ATP) and Teaching Module (MA). Teacher readiness is assessed based on their preparedness in preparing learning tools (ATP and MA), materials, and teaching methods. Most schools opt for the discovery learning model, as it is believed to facilitate student comprehension. Teachers commonly utilize PowerPoint, Canva, and learning videos as learning media. Regarding evaluation and assessment, subject teachers typically plan two assessments for students: formative and summative.

B. Implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum* in Social and Community Subjects

High schools generally implement the *Merdeka Curriculum* in accordance with its structure. Learning employs an integrated system across subjects, with subject teachers collaborating to establish the learning flow. Teaching hours, particularly in class X, are significantly reduced due to the elimination of majors in this grade. Previously, certain subjects had a time allocation of four JP (Jam Pelajaran/Lesson Hours) per week. The *Merdeka Curriculum* divides learning into two components: intracurricular learning and co-curricular learning, also known as Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project Learning (P5). For example, some high schools have adopted two themes for P5 project learning: batik and entrepreneurship. Batik activities are conducted after students complete the Mid-Semester Summative Assessment (PSTS), typically taking place on a designated day (e.g., Tuesday) for one day. Students engage in the batik creation process from start to finish. This project aims to develop two dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile: global diversity and creativity. The second theme, entrepreneurship, is closely related to social subjects. The P5 project activity with this theme is often titled "The Market Day." It is conducted after students complete the Final Summative Assessment (PSAJ), usually taking place on a designated day (e.g., Friday or Saturday). Students prepare food or drinks for sale at provided stands, targeting teachers, staff, and younger students as customers. This project aims to develop three dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile: cooperation, independence, and creativity.

C. Obstacles in the Implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum* in Social and Community Subjects

Teachers of social and community subjects have strived to align classroom learning with the standards of the *Merdeka Curriculum*. Despite progress in implementation, teachers continue to encounter several obstacles. These include: 1) limited references, encompassing both lesson texts and teacher books published by book centers or private publishers, as well as a lack of teacher guidebooks, hindering a thorough understanding of the *Merdeka Curriculum*; 2) teachers' lack of experience with independent learning programs, posing a challenge as they are accustomed to teacher-centered instruction; 3) the absence of education and training on the *Merdeka Curriculum*, whether through the Subject Teacher Deliberation (MGMP) forum or other avenues. While the government has provided the *Merdeka Mengajar Platform* (PMM), teachers have not fully grasped its potential, resulting in classroom learning resembling that of the previous curriculum; 4) teachers' difficulty in transitioning from familiar systems, although they are beginning to adopt new practices such as increased interaction with students and discussions of current events related to social subjects; and 5) inadequate school facilities and infrastructure, a

common issue, particularly in private schools. Damaged classrooms and a lack of facilities, such as LCD projectors, are significant limitations. Limited access to computer laboratories and the absence of language laboratories in some schools further impede the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

D. Solutions to Overcome Obstacles in the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Social and Community Subjects

The following solutions are proposed to address the obstacles in implementing the *Merdeka Curriculum* in social and community subjects: 1) optimizing the use of existing facilities and infrastructure, including rotating usage schedules for equipment like LCD projectors and laboratories to ensure equitable access for all subjects. Maximizing the use of available multimedia spaces and employing alternative devices, such as interactive TVs, tablets, or teacher laptops connected to speakers, can support presentations. Prioritizing outdoor learning methods can also enhance student comprehension; 2) fundraising and cooperation with external parties, such as submitting budget requests for facility procurement or repair through BOS funds, school committees, or private high school management foundations. Seeking sponsorships and CSR partnerships with companies or alumni can generate donations for learning facilities. School crowdfunding through platforms like "Kitabisa" or internal donation programs can also be explored; 3) utilizing alternative learning methods, including blended learning, which combines online learning with digital education platforms like Google Classroom, YouTube Edu, and Canva for material presentation. Manual visual media, such as digital whiteboards, wall maps, printed infographics, and case study-based discussions, can be employed when projectors are unavailable. Empowering student technology by integrating student cell phones or tablets into online discussions and exploration-based learning activities can also be implemented; and 4) repair and maintenance of existing facilities, including routine checks to ensure the functionality of projectors and LCDs through regular maintenance. Training teachers and school technicians in the use and basic repair of learning facilities can reduce repair costs. Procuring mini projectors, which are more affordable and portable, can be considered when budgets are limited. These solutions can optimize the implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum* in social subjects, even amidst limitations in school facilities and infrastructure.

IV. CONCLUSION

Most public and private high schools in Semarang City have implemented the *Merdeka Curriculum* since the 2022/2023 school year. Teacher readiness in implementing the *Merdeka Curriculum* in social and community subjects has been generally positive and aligned with curriculum guidelines. This readiness encompasses the development of

learning tools, preparation of learning materials and methods, selection of learning media, and planning for learning evaluation and assessment. This is evidenced by the creation of several key documents, namely the Educational Unit Operational Curriculum (KOSP), Learning Objective Flow (ATP), and Teaching Module (MA).

The implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum* in social and community subjects utilizes both intracurricular and co-curricular learning, including the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), which are interconnected. P5 learning typically focuses on two themes tailored to the school's context. However, implementation has not yet reached its full potential due to several obstacles. These challenges include limited available references, teachers' lack of experience with independent learning programs, insufficient education and training opportunities for teachers on the *Merdeka Curriculum*, teachers' difficulty in adapting their established teaching practices, and inadequate school facilities and infrastructure. Several solutions have been proposed to address these obstacles, particularly those related to learning facilities and infrastructure. These include optimizing the use of existing resources through strategies such as rotating schedules to ensure equitable access for all subjects. Fundraising and collaboration with external partners, such as sponsorships and CSR initiatives with companies or alumni, are also being pursued to secure donations for learning facilities. The adoption of outdoor learning methods and blended learning, combining online platforms like Google Classroom, YouTube Edu, and Canva with traditional instruction, are also being explored. Finally, the consistent repair and maintenance of existing learning facilities are recognized as crucial.

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