

The Challenges of Implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka at SD Muhammadiyah PK Baturan

Problematika Pelaksanaan Kurikulum Merdeka di SD Muhammadiyah PK Baturan

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Abstract

Implementing the Merdeka curriculum in the school environment faces various challenges, particularly in inspiring the school members to engage actively in efforts towards change. Therefore, this research aims to (1) analyze the problems faced by the school principal and teachers in implementing the curriculum merdeka at SD Muhammadiyah PK Baturan and (2) describe the ways to overcome the issues faced by the school principal and teachers. The research methodology is qualitative and phenomenological, conducted at SD Muhammadiyah PK Baturan. The research subjects include the school principal and first and fourth-grade teachers. Data sources consist of primary and secondary data collected through direct interviews, documentation, and observation. Data analysis involves data collection, reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data credibility is tested by enhancing diligence and applying triangulation techniques and sources to ensure the validity of research findings. The research results indicate (1) issues faced by the school principal and teachers during the implementation of the curriculum Merdeka, including limited teacher understanding of the curriculum, lack of learning support facilities, and time allocation for project-based learning, (2) solutions provided by the school principal and teachers, including involving teachers in workshops, seminars, or training, improving school facilities and infrastructure, and enhancing teachers' skills in organizing the learning process to ensure adequate time allocation for project-based learning. In conclusion, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of the challenges in implementing the curriculum merdeka at SD Muhammadiyah PK Baturan. It offers concrete solutions to enhance its effectiveness at the elementary school level.

Keywords: issues, implementation, kurikulum merdeka

Abstrak

Penerapan kurikulum merdeka di lingkungan sekolah menghadapi berbagai tantangan, khususnya dalam menginspirasi semangat anggota sekolah untuk terlibat aktif dalam upaya menuju perubahan. Oleh sebab itu penelitian ini bertujuan (1) menganalisis permasalahan kepala sekolah dan guru dalam implementasi kurikulum merdeka di SD Muhammadiyah PK Baturan, (2) mendeskripsikan cara mengatasi permasalahan kepala sekolah dan guru. Metode penelitian kualitatif dengan desain fenomenologi. Penelitian ini berlangsung di SD Muhammadiyah PK Baturan. Subjek penelitiannya yaitu kepala sekolah, guru kelas I dan IV. Sumber data terdiri dari data primer dan data sekunder. Wawancara langsung, dokumentasi, dan observasi langsung semua digunakan dalam proses pengumpulan data. Analisis data melibatkan pengumpulan data, reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Untuk memastikan validitas temuan penelitian, uji kredibilitas data dilakukan dengan meningkatkan ketekunan dan menerapkan metode triangulasi teknik dan sumber. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan (1) permasalahan kepala sekolah dan guru saat implementasi kurikulum merdeka yaitu terbatasnya pemahaman guru tentang kurikulum merdeka, kurangnya fasilitas penunjang pembelajaran, dan alokasi waktu dalam pembelajaran berbasis proyek, (2) solusi yang diberikan kepala sekolah dan guru yaitumengikutsertakan guru dalam kegiatan *workshop*, seminar, atau diklat, meningkatkan fasilitas dan sarana prasarana sekolah, dan meningkatkan keterampilan guru dalam mengatur proses pembelajaran agar alokasi waktu dalam pembelajaran berbasis proyek dapat terlaksana dengan baik. Kesimpulannya, penelitian ini memberikan pemahaman yang komprehensif tentang permasalahan implementasi kurikulum merdeka di SD Muhammadiyah PK Baturan dan menawarkan solusi konkret untuk meningkatkan efektivitas kurikulum tersebut di tingkat sekolah dasar.

Kata Kunci: permasalahan, implementasi, kurikulum merdeka

1. Introduction

The Ministry of Education and Culture created the Merdeka Curriculum to refresh the education process and improve standards. This curriculum includes objectives, content, materials, and methods for learning activities to achieve national goals based on Law No. 20 of 2003. This statement aligns with the view of Munandar (2017), who interprets curriculum transformation as a step to revitalize the quality of education. The implementation of the curriculum is a reflection of an accurate and comprehensive educational policy. Thus, the curriculum represents policy in the education system carried out in the classroom (Akuba et al., 2021).

The independent curriculum is described as a learning system that does not pressure but makes students happy. This idea is in line with the view of Wisnujati (2021), who argued that liberating education should pay attention to children's happiness in achieving a future according to their hopes and desires. The independent learning approach emphasizes freedom and creativity. The concept of independent learning embodies a statement in line with Nadiem Makarim, who revealed that the current lessons needed are not limited administratively but involve cultural transformation (Rahayu et al., 2022).

Freedom of learning indicates that teachers and students have free space to implement learning activities. This freedom leads to efforts to achieve independence, flexibility, and exercise creativity in implementing learning activities. This concept is emphasized by Widiyono et al (2021), who revealed that independence in learning aims to make students not limited and have a wide space in the learning process. The role of teachers is crucial in organizing learning to develop students' potential. Unfortunately, not many teachers have the freedom to determine the course of learning. Before starting learning, teachers need to be given space to think and act freely and seek ideas about learning objectives with students (Mustaghfiroh, 2020). However, in reality, many teachers have not been able to contribute effectively in interacting with learners; teachers often only focus on theory. To make independent learning programs a reality, the curriculum system must provide support, and learners also need to have freedom during the learning process (Suntoro & Widoro, 2020).

The role of the principal is crucial in realizing the independent learning program by providing facilities and support to teachers. Mustaghfiroh (2020) states that improving principals' understanding of teacher quality and competence is the first step in building the foundation for freedom of learning. Therefore, principals play an essential role in fostering freedom of learning in the educational environment. As a leader, the principal is a critical pillar for creating a learning environment that can produce superior generations and respond to the demands of the times in the 21st century (Angga & Iskandar, 2022).

The hectic schedule of learning administration is one of the challenges that arose and prompted the adoption of the independent learning policy. The education system in Indonesia recognizes that managing and supervising education administration based on applicable laws is one of the responsibilities of educators. This statement aligns with Houtman's (2020) view that schools and teachers are still in an administrative routine and aim to fulfil bureaucratic requirements, accreditation, grades and exams. Therefore, schools and teachers often place educational administration as the main focus and priority in educational activities.

Curriculum development is essential for implementation based on improving the quality of learning. The urgency of the emergence of an independent curriculum is the recovery of education in 2022-2024 due to the COVID-19 pandemic that broke out in Indonesia and

impacted the process of organizing educational activities. So, many obstacles still occur while implementing the independent curriculum (Marlina, 2022).

Implementing the independent curriculum in the school environment faces various challenges, especially in inspiring the enthusiasm of school members to be actively involved in efforts towards change (Rahayu et al., 2022). As a school leader, the principal is expected to motivate, guide and influence teachers to be willing to adopt changes that improve the quality of education. In addition, for implementing learning with an independent curriculum to run as expected, strong collaboration between the principal, teachers, parents and other related parties is essential.

2. Literatur Review

Several previous studies on implementing the independent curriculum have produced interesting findings. According to research by Rahayu et al (2022) The independent curriculum was successfully implemented in various pilot schools. Teachers faced several obstacles in implementing the independent curriculum in these pilot schools, including the daily obligation to create engaging, original and creative lessons. The issue of human resources is one of the obstacles.

Findings from research by Sumarsih et al. (2022) proved that the independent curriculum had been effectively adopted in the pilot schools, producing students with good character, independence, critical thinking, creativity, cooperation and respect for diversity. The pilot school principals actively initiated participatory programs, unique ideas, and diverse innovations while working closely with the teachers to achieve success for the pilot schools.

Barlian et al (2022) found that implementing the independent curriculum at SDN 244 Guruminda Bandung City involved three main aspects. First, the school has prepared learning media following the guidelines. Second, it has implemented an independent curriculum, including running and processing summative and formative assessments, diagnostic assessments, and reporting learning outcomes. In addition, the research results by Sasmita & Darmansyah (2022) at SDN 21 Koto Tuo showed three challenges teachers face in implementing the independent learning curriculum: limited literacy, technology and soft skills or competencies.

The idea of the independent curriculum is very different from the previous curriculum. It pays attention to the cognitive talents and individuality of each student. Freedom of learning includes the ability of educators and learners to experiment, learn on their own and imagine. (Hattarina et al., 2022). Kovacs (2017) emphasizes the importance of innovative knowledge in 21st-century education. Creative learning strategies support the evolution of 21st-century education by focusing on critical aspects such as thinking skills, understanding, emotions, and the role of an educator. The learning independence approach is expected to be a solution, as it considers students' aspirations and critical needs.

Principals have a central role in improving the quality of education (Djafri, 2021). According to Isa et al (2022), Principals have additional responsibilities as leaders in educational institutions. To achieve organizational goals, the role involves providing guidance and support to instructors, staff, students and others. In addition to the principal, educators play a crucial role in curriculum creation and implementation. Teachers can work together and complement each other to organize and design learning materials, textbooks, and other course content as part of the curriculum creation process (Daga, 2021).

Implementing an independent curriculum emphasizes students by focusing on various aspects of their personality, experiences, history, views, abilities, interests, talents, capacities, and

individual needs as part of the learning process. Within this framework, the new educational approach is expected to encourage more intense interaction between teachers and students (Sumarmi, 2023). However, despite this, implementing an independent curriculum does not always go without obstacles, and principals and teachers often face several problems in implementing it.

3. Research Methods

This study used a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design. The research was conducted from April 1-20, 2023, at SD Muhammadiyah PK Baturan, Colomadu, Central Java, involving the principal, Grade I teacher, and Grade IV teacher as research subjects. Data sources consisted of primary data and secondary data. Preliminary data was obtained through observation, direct interviews, and documentation from the principal and grade I and IV teachers. In contrast, secondary data came from journals, articles, and books related to the independent curriculum. Direct interviews, documentation, and direct observation were all used in the data collection process. The researcher observed students in grades I and IV during the learning process and conducted online and face-to-face interviews with the principals and teachers of these grades. The four steps of data analysis involved data collection, data reduction, data presentation and conclusion drawing. To ensure the validity of the research findings, data credibility testing was conducted by increasing persistence and applying triangulation methods in terms of procedures and data sources.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Research Results

4.1.1. Principal and Teacher Problems in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

Based on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SD Muhammadiyah PK Baturan, the process of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is carried out in stages, starting with grade I and grade IV in the 2022/2023 school year, while grades II, III, V, and VI are still using the 2013 Curriculum. The introduction of a new curriculum certainly faces several problems. To explore related perspectives, this study focuses on the views of school principals and grade I and IV teachers who have implemented the Merdeka Curriculum. The following are the findings.

4.1.1.1. Problems in Planning the Merdeka Curriculum

The planning step taken by SD Muhammadiyah PK Baturan is the making of learning tools such as teaching modules, learning media, and teaching materials. The process of making this learning tool is carried out by the class teacher based on direction from the principal. In addition, implementing the Merdeka Curriculum shows a shift from thematic learning to subject-based learning. For grade IV, IPAS (Natural and Social Sciences) learning, a combination of science and social studies, is applied. However, in practice, there are obstacles in the planning process of implementing the independent curriculum at SD Muhammadiyah PK Baturan.

The SD Muhammadiyah PK Baturan's principal stated that the obstacles faced involved teachers' lack of understanding of the independent curriculum and teachers' difficulties in applying creative and innovative learning methods. According to classroom teachers who have implemented the independent curriculum at SD Muhammadiyah PK Baturan, this difficulty is due to changes in learning design from the previous curriculum. Teachers find it difficult to make learning according to student needs by considering the surrounding conditions. Grade IV

teachers also revealed that they still use the ATM system (observe, imitate, modify) in making teaching modules.

4.1.1.2. Problems in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

The school environment, facilities and human resources are still limited. School infrastructure and facilities are still inadequate to facilitate the implementation of the independent curriculum, mainly because there are no learning aids such as globes and human skeleton props. In addition, SD Muhammadiyah PK Baturan also suffers from a lack of human resources who can use creative and innovative learning methods, as most of the classroom teachers at the school are non-PGSD graduates.

The interview results show that teachers face several problems during the learning process. Some of these problems include teachers' difficulties in teaching grade 1 students who have not yet mastered reading skills well, the breadth of teaching materials, and teachers also face several difficulties when implementing project-based learning. There were further challenges related to the lack of time allotted for implementing project-based learning.

Based on the results of observation and documentation, the researcher found several things, namely (1) the principal did not participate in the preparation of the independent curriculum implementation planning, (2) the principal provided ideas and input when preparing the independent curriculum implementation planning, in, (3) the principal checks the results of the preparation of the independent curriculum implementation planning before it is implemented, (4) the principal conducts an evaluation to determine the success rate of the independent curriculum implementation, this is carried out once a week every Friday, (5) the principal directly monitors the implementation of the independent curriculum in the classroom. Based on the results of observation and documentation, the principal at SD Muhammadiyah PK Baturan focuses more on his role in providing instructions and supervising teacher performance.

4.1.2. How to Overcome Problems with Principals and Teachers when Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

4.1.2.1. How to Overcome Problems with Independent Curriculum Planning

Principals try to facilitate teachers to improve the quality of their skills and understanding of the independent curriculum by involving teachers in workshops, seminars, or training activities related to the independent curriculum. In addition, principals and teachers also collaborate with other schools to exchange ideas and discuss education together, especially the independent curriculum, to improve teachers' understanding of the separate curriculum system.

4.1.2.2. How to Overcome Problems in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

Teachers at SD Muhammadiyah PK Baturan deal with human skeleton props' limitations by showing YouTube videos through laptops and LCD projectors. In addition, teachers also need to be willing to change and continue learning through training, actively interacting with students, and increasing creativity. Teachers provide intensive assistance to students who cannot read well. To overcome the limitations of tools and materials in project-based learning, teachers provide information to students to bring data home and backups as an anticipatory step. As for problems related to teaching materials that are too broad, teachers at SD Muhammadiyah PK Baturan teach only the primary material in class, while students are motivated to take notes and learn more at home.

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. Principal and Teacher Issues

Based on the research results, principals and teachers have problems planning and implementing the independent curriculum implementation, including the following.

4.2.1.1. Merdeka Curriculum Learning Planning

SD Muhammadiyah PK Baturan has implemented various aspects related to the Merdeka Curriculum, one of which is making learning tools such as teaching modules. Classroom teachers who have received direction from the principal are responsible for compiling these learning tools. This perspective aligns with Handoyo & Soekanto (2022), who noted that lesson planning is delivered through teaching modules. This statement was also reinforced by Jaya (2019), who states that lesson planning refers to a general description of the steps that will be taken by a teacher in the classroom in the future to achieve effectiveness and efficiency. Mulyasa (2021) emphasizes that the success of learning approaches and methods is highly dependent on the role of the teacher as a facilitator of independent learning. As a learning planner, a teacher's responsibility involves designing a learning program that includes the organization of teaching materials, the delivery of information, and the assessment process to achieve predetermined learning objectives. Selecting the best teaching strategy to achieve the intended learning objectives is a fundamental component of lesson planning.

Teachers and principals at SD Muhammadiyah PK Baturan produce teaching materials, learning resources, Student Worksheets (LKPD), and evaluation tools. Teachers' thinking skills must be honed to innovate in learning module design. This perspective is in line with the view of Salsabilla et al (2023), who revealed that when the delivery of material to learners is not structured through a good learning module, the learning process becomes disorganized. Thus, the balance between the roles of teachers and students in learning can be disrupted. Kirom (2021) also recognizes that teachers and students have a dominant role in education, as both contribute significantly to the learning process to change children's behaviour. Thus, teaching modules become an essential element in learning because, without good planning of teaching modules, the learning process will not be systematic and balanced.

4.2.1.2. Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum Learning

Facilities and infrastructure at SD Muhammadiyah PK Baturan are still inadequate to support the implementation of the independent curriculum. In addition, few human resources can apply creative and innovative learning methods because most class teachers are non-PGSD graduates. A creative teacher is a teacher who can excitingly present material (Winda & Dafit, 2021). According to Winda & Dafit (2021), Teacher creativity affects student learning motivation, not only refers to matters related to the learning process but also the manifestation of teacher behaviour that is communicative, flexible, guiding, fun, aligned with images and so on. It can be concluded that a teacher can apply learning methods through teacher creativity when presenting material interestingly.

Guru harus dapat menerapkan strategi pembelajaran dengan memperhatikan keselarasan antara konten pembelajaran dengan tujuan pembelajaran (Khasanah, 2019). Implementing an independent curriculum requires mapping students' learning needs, involving factors such as students' learning readiness, interests, and learning profiles. By fostering an engaging learning environment, connecting the curriculum to each student's interests, and providing opportunities for students to participate in class actively, teachers want to arouse students' interest in learning.

Students' learning profiles, which include aptitude, interest and learning style, become critical information for teachers in determining appropriate learning strategies. (Jannah et al., 2022). Lutfiana (2022) believes that a teacher must have a thorough awareness of each student's circumstances and abilities to facilitate independent learning. If teachers are intensely aware of their students' traits, they will be more successful in choosing the suitable learning model or tactics for each student.

4.2.2. Ways of Overcoming Principal and Teacher Problems

4.2.2.1. How to Overcome Independent Curriculum Learning Planning

The principal at SD Muhammadiyah PK Baturan actively tries to facilitate the improvement of teachers' skills and understanding of the independent curriculum. One of the efforts is to involve teachers in various activities, such as workshops, seminars, or training related to the independent curriculum. Sitorus (2022). In addition, principals and teachers cooperate with other schools to exchange ideas and discuss important aspects of the independent curriculum. This statement aligns with the view of Sitorus (2022), who noted that principals can facilitate teachers' skill development through two types of activities: internal and external. In conclusion, effective collaboration between education stakeholders, especially with an independent curriculum, can improve teachers' understanding of the current education system.

4.2.2.2. How to Overcome the Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum Learning

This study reveals that every SD Muhammadiyah PK Baturan teacher faces various difficulties and obstacles in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers try to overcome the barrier of a lack of teaching aids by utilizing videos from YouTube through an LCD projector. Teachers are also expected to be willing to change, continue to learn through training, and interact actively with students to create a creative learning atmosphere. This approach is in line with the view of Herwani (2022), which emphasizes the role of teachers as frontline workers and perpetrators of change. As facilitators, teachers must be able to identify students' potential following the times, helping them to grow and develop optimally in society.

In addition, teachers apply three main strategies to overcome students who have difficulty reading. According to Hidayah et al (2021), teachers first introduce them to the Calistung program for students struggling to read. This program is held three times a week in a planned manner. Secondly, the teacher gives them more homework. This additional homework is in the form of writing the names of objects with certain letters so that students can more easily remember letters when reading. Third, teachers encourage students to study outside the classroom to foster a positive learning environment. The aim is to create a more exciting learning atmosphere and avoid boredom. This approach aligns with the idea of Afifulloh (2019) that the surrounding environment can serve as a valuable learning resource.

Teachers try to complete the lesson on the same day to overcome time constraints by adding more class hours. This approach aligns with the recommendations Yusriani et al (2020), who revealed that increasing class hours can be an effective strategy to improve students' learning achievement, provided that it does not interfere with other subjects. In addition, problems related to the breadth of teaching material are overcome by encouraging students to take notes and convey basic material. Therefore, it can be concluded that the role of the teacher in applying the right learning methods and teaching materials to the needs of students is crucial to ensure the learning process runs optimally.

5. Conclusion

This study reveals that the independent curriculum at SD Muhammadiyah PK Baturan was implemented in the 2022/2023 school year. In fact, in implementing the independent curriculum, principals and teachers face various types of problems as follows: (1) limited teacher understanding of the curriculum, (2) lack of learning support facilities such as human skeleton props and globes, (3) lack of time allocation in project-based learning. The ways to overcome the problems of school principals and teachers when applying the independent curriculum are (1) including teachers in workshops, seminars, or training activities related to the independent curriculum so that the independent curriculum can run following educational objectives, (2) improving school facilities and infrastructure, (3) improving teacher skills in organizing the learning process so that the time allocation in project-based learning can be carried out correctly. This research provides a comprehensive understanding of the problems of implementing the independent curriculum at SD Muhammadiyah PK Baturan. It offers concrete solutions to improve the effectiveness of the curriculum at the elementary school level. The results of this study are expected to help school principals and teachers overcome the problems of the independent curriculum, or at least this research can be a source of reference for further researchers. For other researchers who are interested in research on the implementation of the independent curriculum, it is hoped that they will not only discuss the problems but develop and implement the independent curriculum so that learning can occur according to the educational objectives.

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