



The Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in Piloting Madrasa; A Case Study at State Madrasah Ibtidaiyah of Semarang City

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Received: August 03rd, 2023. Accepted: October 24th, 2023. Published: October 31st, 2023.

Abstract

This research examines the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at State Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MIN) of Semarang City, Central Java, Indonesia. This type of research is qualitative research with a descriptive-analytical approach. The Data of this study are collected through interviews and documentation, while the analysis technique used is the Miles and Huberman model, including data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions. The results showed that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MIN of Semarang City has been effective despite facing obstacles. Some obstacles are a lack of experience in implementing the Merdeka Belajar approach, the references and access to learning resources, the facilities and the amenities, and the understanding of scoring and assessment. However, these obstacles can be overcome with several supporting actors, including the active participation of teachers and madrasahs, the use of Merdeka Belajar platforms, the continuity of evaluation and improvement, and assistance from supervisors. The impact of implementation, including the changes in learning methods, innovation, the development of student independence, increased creativity and initiative, the relevance of learning, and increased student collaboration, bring positive impacts in improving the quality of learning and the outcomes of the student.

Keywords: *implementation of merdeka curriculum, madrasa piloting, continuous improvement.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji tentang implementasi kurikulum merdeka di MIN of Semarang City, Jawa Tengah, Indonesia. Jenis penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif sehingga pendekatan yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini ialah pendekatan deskriptif-analitis.. teknik pengumpulan data pada penelitian ini melalui wawancara dan dokumentasi, sedangkan teknik analisisnya menggunakan model Miles dan Huberman yang mencakup tahap reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di MIN of Semarang City telah berjalan efektif, meskipun menghadapi kendala seperti kurangnya pengalaman dalam menerapkan pendekatan merdeka belajar, keterbatasan referensi dan akses ke sumber belajar, keterbatasan sarana dan fasilitas, dan keterbatasan pemahaman dalam penilaian dan asesmen. Akan tetapi hambatan tersebut dapat diatasi dengan beberapa faktor pendukung yang meliputi partisipasi

aktif guru dan madrasah, pemanfaatan platform merdeka belajar, evaluasi dan perbaikan terus-menerus, dan pendampingan dari pengawas. Dampak implementasi termasuk perubahan metode pembelajaran, inovasi, pengembangan kemandirian siswa, peningkatan kreativitas dan inisiatif, relevansi pembelajaran, dan peningkatan kolaborasi siswa, membawa dampak positif dalam meningkatkan kualitas pembelajaran dan hasil belajar siswa secara keseluruhan.

Kata kunci: *Implementasi kurikulum merdeka; Madrasah percontohan; perbaikan berkelanjutan.*

INTRODUCTION

The Curriculum in Indonesia was first developed in 1974. The applicable Curriculum has changed or developed several times till 2023 in 1947, 1952, 1964, 1968, 1975, 1984, 1994, 2004, 2006, 2013, and 2023. The change in Curriculum is caused by the difference in political, social, cultural, economic, scientific conditions and technological development. The epistemology of the Curriculum is based on the ideology of Pancasila, while the legal basis is the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. The differences between the curricula used are centred on the main objectives of education and the approach used to realize those educational goals (Yulianti & Yuniasih, 2016). The development of the Curriculum by adjusting the times according to the Word of Rasulullah states: "*teach your children according to their time, for they live not yours. verily they were created for their time, whereas you were created for your time*". This can be interpreted that teachers always educate all students according to their era, not their teachers, because they live in different times (Komala, 2020).

Change and determination of Curriculum are an authority managed through public policy in education regulated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of Indonesia. Indonesia's Curriculum was applied or changed sequentially in 2022 to solve the learning crisis. The Ministry of Education and Culture and Technology, Nadiem Anwar Makarim, launched the Merdeka Belajar Episode Fifteen: Merdeka Curriculum and Merdeka Belajar Platform online on Friday (11/2). The Minister, Nadiem, disclosed from some national and international research that the learning issue in Indonesia has been ongoing for a long time and has not improved from year to year. The learning crisis is worsening due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which has resulted in learning loss and increased learning gaps (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022).

In 2024, the Merdeka Curriculum will be adopted as the national Curriculum. This Curriculum has been tested in 3,000 schools in Indonesia since 2020, especially in underprivileged, frontier, and outlying districts. In 2022, the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Technology will also open registration for the Merdeka Curriculum implementation for each educational unit. Around 140 thousand education units voluntarily registered for the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Rosa, 2023). The Curriculum is the core of an educational delivery. Murray Print defines Curriculum as all the planned learning spaces provided to students by educational institutions and experiences enjoyed by students when the Curriculum is implemented (Hermawan et al., 2020). If the national Curriculum has been established, it is necessary to conduct a study of the various implementations of the Merdeka Curriculum that have been carried out throughout 2020. Because the madrasah, which is under the auspices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, only starts in the 2022/2023 school year (Zakiyah & Achadi, 2022). The Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (IKM) in

Madrasah Ibtidaiyah requires studies to monitor and evaluate successes and obstacles that occur in the field before becoming a national curriculum.

Studies on IKM have indeed been carried out. In the researchers' reading, studies on IKM can be mapped into two categories of studies. *First*, a study that is a conceptual review. These studies analyze the concept of the Merdeka Curriculum in MI from various aspects. For example, a study of KMA RI policy No. 347 of 2022 (Anas et al., 2023), a comparative study of the 1947 RPP curriculum after the independence era with a Merdeka Curriculum (Ridlo, 2022), theoretical studies on the application of the Merdeka Curriculum (Putri et al., 2023) and studies on the application of IKM and their relevance to 21st-century learning (Inayati, 2022). *Second*, studies that are descriptive-analytical. These studies photographed and analyzed IKM madrasah piloting in various regions. Included in this category are IKM studies at MIN 2 Bantul Yogyakarta (Zakiyah & Achadi, 2022), MIN 2 Pati (Yusrina et al., 2023), MIN 1 Banyumas (Nafi'ah, 2023) and Madrasah in Cirebon (Masnun, 2023). This study continues the study of the second category while enriching findings of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in piloting madrasahs, especially in the Semarang area, Central Java.

This study aims to describe IKM in MIN of Semarang City and investigate supportive and inhibiting elements in IKM. There are currently 88 MIs, and three MIs have been chosen as pilot projects for introducing the Merdeka Curriculum (IKM) in 2022. The three MIs chosen for this project are MIN of Semarang City, MI Tarbiyatul Khoirot of Semarang City, and MI Taufiqiyah Tembalang of Semarang City. According to the supervisor of Madrasah in Gunungpati District, Semarang City, Sriyati, some schools categorized as MIN of Semarang city have successfully implemented the Merdeka Curriculum well and in accordance with expectations while continuing the 2013 Curriculum (K13). This motivates the researchers to conduct additional research on IKM at MIN of Semarang City. This study is based on the notion that IKM in MIN of Semarang City can be a model for Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in IKM. This success is intriguing to define and examine scientifically. The discussion of building a Merdeka Curriculum as a national curriculum necessitates best practices from many IKM projects that have been completed. As a result, IKM in MIN of Semarang City must characterize and analyze their supporting and inhibiting elements as soon as possible.

METHODS

This research examines the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MIN of Semarang City. This type of research is qualitative research. The approach used in this study is descriptive-analytical. The steps of this research are 1) observation and pre-research interview of the supervisor of Madrasah in Gunungpati District, Semarang City; 2) identify participants involved in IKM at MIN of Semarang City; 3) conduct a data collection process; 4) analyze data obtained by interviews and documentation; 5) describe the findings and results of research on IKM at MIN of Semarang City.

The data in this study was obtained from school principals, class teachers and students at MIN of Semarang City. The tools and materials used are: 1) journals or field notes to record observations and conclusions from researchers during data collection; 2) an audio recorder is used to record interviews so that the data can be studied more thoroughly afterwards; 3) transcription is used to transcribe audio or video recordings of interviews.

In addition, data was also obtained from the document of the Curriculum of MIN of Semarang City. Data were collected through direct observation in the process of

implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and open interviews with school principals, class teachers and students at MIN of Semarang City. This research used the Miles and Huberman model (Sugiyono, 2017), which includes the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions. The factors that determine data validity in this study are credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability), and confirmability (objectivity), as the approach described by Cresswell (Cresswell, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in State Madrasah Ibtidaiyah of Semarang City

In general, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MIN of Semarang City has been running effectively and optimally even though there are still many shortcomings in learning. This is in line with Gunawi's statement, the vice principal of Curriculum at MIN of Semarang City as follows: "*equipped with several socialization and training/seminars on the implementation of merdeka curriculum for previous teachers, in this 2022/2023 academic year, MIN of Semarang City has begun to implement merdeka curriculum even though the implementation of merdeka curriculum is only for grade 1 and 4 students, while for grade 2 students, 3, 5 and 6 are still implementing the 2013 curriculum.*"

This is different from IKM at MIN 1 Banyumas, where the implementation has not run well because teachers do not have much time to understand the Merdeka Curriculum, which is too brief (Nafi'ah, 2023). In addition to time issues, in MIN 4 Ponorogo, teachers are not even ready to implement the Merdeka Curriculum due to the lack of training or socialization organized by the relevant education authority (Fathiha, 2023). From teacher readiness, MIN of Semarang City is better prepared to implement the Merdeka Curriculum.

Furthermore, Gunawi explained that teachers always try to learn and implement the Merdeka Curriculum optimally at MIN of Semarang City. This is due to the stark differences between the Merdeka Curriculum and the 2013 curriculum, especially in the subjects' approach. The 2013 curriculum adopts a thematic approach, while the Merdeka Curriculum adopts a subject approach. What fundamentally distinguishes the structure of the Merdeka Curriculum are two main student activities, intra-curricular learning and learning through projects for strengthening the achievement of the Pancasila student profile (Anggraena et al., 2022). There are six principles of the Merdeka Curriculum design process as well as evaluation materials for the 2013 curriculum, namely 1) simple, easy to understand, and implement, 2) focus on the competence and character of all students, 3) flexible, 4) aligned, 5) work together, 6) pay attention to the results of studies and feedback (Anggraena et al., 2022).

In the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, grade 1 and 4 teachers must independently prepare Merdeka Curriculum questions accompanied by the supervisor, namely Mrs. Sriyati, who routinely supervises teaching and learning activities at MIN of Semarang City, especially in the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum and Year-End Summative Test (SAT) in 2022/2023 academic year. The supervisor's job is to accompany Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in IKM. The supervisor is also in charge of coaching, monitoring, assessment, guidance and training of coached Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Yusrina et al., 2023). In addition, the component of assistance should be broader, as in the IKM guidelines for madrasahs, which include 1) preparation of Madrasah Operational Curriculum (KOM), 2) review of Learning Outcomes (CP) into Learning Objectives (TP) and preparation of Learning Objectives Flow (ATP), 3) Implementation of learning and assessment, 4) Preparation of modules and teaching

tools, 5) Design and preparation of P5 PPRA Modules, 6) Implementation of P5 PPRA, 7) Evaluation and reflection of the implementation Merdeka Curriculum, 8) Other relevant aspects of implementation (Zamroni et al., 2022).

In addition to being accompanied by the supervisor, the teachers also received socialization about making questions based on the Merdeka Curriculum before making SAT questions. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MIN of Semarang City in the 2022/2023 academic year is carried out as piloting, involving two Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), namely MIN of Semarang City and MI Taufiqiyah. Widiastuti, one of the teachers at MIN of Semarang City, stated that implementing the Merdeka Curriculum gives freedom to students to develop independence, creativity, and initiative in the learning process. Thus, the practice of IKM at MIN of Semarang City is in accordance with the purpose of developing the Merdeka Curriculum through projects that are integrated into the curriculum structure as a student character development strategy (Anggraena et al., 2022).

In learning activities, the Covid-19 pandemic has posed various challenges for students (Engzell et al., 2021). Many students only get instruction, feedback, and interaction from their teachers (Indrawati et al., 2020). Even researchers in Canada say the pandemic can make the skills gap increase by as much as 30% (Haeck & Lefebvre, 2020). Therefore, many countries are making curriculum adjustments geared towards learning recovery after the pandemic. With the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, learning can provide appropriate guidance and support to students. One approach is differentiated, where education is adjusted to the student's ability level. This approach accommodates the diversity of talents, interests and abilities (Zamroni et al., 2022).

For example, in grade 4, 3 students cannot read well, namely Abi, Putra, and Tirta. As a result, the instructor will deliver material and tasks appropriate for the student's level of understanding and competencies. Furthermore, some supplementary assignments are assigned to provide extra support for those students, allowing them to receive further coaching at the right level of competence. Sri Marginingsih, a teacher at MIN of Semarang City, emphasized that specific reading books should be given to individuals who cannot read effectively. Furthermore, the teacher allots time each day for students to read and create a connection book with parents to join them for 30 minutes while reading books at home. The differentiation approach encourages the creation of creative and innovative students according to the profile of Pancasila students (Purwowododo & Zaini, 2023)

A learning style-based strategy is used in addition to the differentiated method. The learning style approach is based on the thesis that everyone has a different learning style (Cabual, 2021). Teachers consider students' individual learning styles, such as visual, auditory, or kinesthetic. Marginingsih explained that variations of teaching strategies at MIN of Semarang City are applied by teachers so that students can learn through styles that suit their preferences. For example, teachers use pictures or diagrams for students who use visual styles, hold oral discussions for auditory students, and provide physical activity for kinesthetic students. With this approach, the learning process can be adjusted to each student's needs and learning styles.

Supporting Factors and Obstacles to the Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in State Madrasah Ibtidaiyah of Semarang City

1. Inhibiting Factors

Even though the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in MIN of Semarang City has run optimally, MIN of Semarang City still faces several inhibiting factors. According to the vice principal of Curriculum at MIN of Semarang City, there are several obstacles in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MIN of Semarang City, including:

a. Lack of experience in applying the Merdeka Belajar approach

This obstacle cannot be separated from a centralized syllabus in the 2013 curriculum, which limits instructors' ability to create and innovate in selecting relevant, innovative, and contextual learning approaches (Djaelani et al., 2019). At MIN of Semarang City, some teachers still have no experience implementing a Merdeka Belajar approach, so there are few obstacles when IKM. Previously, they were accustomed to conventional approaches in the learning process, so adopting a new approach became a challenge.

b. Limited references and access to learning resources

Some teachers experience challenges due to low resources and uneven access to learning tools. Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum necessitates proper resources, including searching for learning media content online, to which not all teachers have access. The constraints of the internet, digital gadgets, and their utilization impede educational transformation (Afriansyah, 2020).

c. Limited facilities and amenities

The Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum requires suitable facilities and amenities to facilitate more creative learning. However, MIN of Semarang City lacks the necessary infrastructure to implement this more road curriculum. As a result, this limitation should be overcome by the community's active participation in supporting institutions and infrastructure that promote learning, such as universities, non-profit organizations, industry, and other stakeholders. This role is referred to as ecosystems in an educational policy approach (Lopez et al., 2005).

d. Limited understanding of scoring and assessment

Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes student-centred and project-based learning, which can objectively and consistently assess student success. This problem is primarily concerned with how curriculum-relevant examinations allow students to explore and develop their potential. Teachers must grasp constructivist learning theory, which is the foundation of the Merdeka Curriculum. In this theory, three key terms are known, learning (learning new things), relearning (strengthening things that have been learned) and unlearning (overhauling the construction of old understanding by new things) (Glaesser, 2019).

2. Supporting Factors

Although it is not easy, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MIN of Semarang City has run effectively because of a lot of support from various parties, both from the Madrasah itself, such as the Principal (Head of the Madrasah), teachers, and all *stakeholders*, as well as support from outside, especially from the school supervisor. Some

supporting factors that make an important contribution to the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum include:

a. Active participation of teachers and schools

Active participation in curriculum creation by teachers and schools is one of the critical pillars in successfully implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers and schools are closely involved in developing a curriculum that meets the features and needs of MIN of Semarang City students. With this involvement, the Curriculum can become more relevant and accommodate a wider range of potential students. Teachers' lack of experience does not prevent them from learning new things. The allotted change adaptation time is crucial in revising the Merdeka Curriculum. Time management that policymakers have set is very influential on the level of teacher confidence in implementing Merdeka Curriculum changes (Tikanen et al., 2017).

b. Utilizing Merdeka Belajar Platform

Teachers at MIN of Semarang City use the Merdeka Belajar platform to develop their knowledge and skills in planning and executing courses that adhere to Merdeka Curriculum principles. Teachers may create more engaging and interactive learning with the platform's access to various new learning resources and content. The strategy of utilizing digital platforms in finding learning resources is in accordance with UNESCO's recommendations on Open Educational Resources (UNESCO, 2019).

c. Continuous evaluation and improvement

A critical cycle in curriculum implementation is continuous evaluation and improvement. Evaluations are carried out regularly at MIN of Semarang City to ensure that the Curriculum used can satisfy the local needs and potential of students. Furthermore, modifications are being made to ensure that the Curriculum remains current and in line with the development of students. Formative assessment, for example, can identify students' competency or achievement so that feedback is required to continue to alter learning to match the goals to be reached (Lambert & Lines, 2000).

d. Assistance from supervisors

The supervisor's help is an essential aspect of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at MIN of Semarang City. Mrs. Sriyati, the supervisor, routinely observes and guides teachers to ensure that the learning process works smoothly and in accordance with the established Curriculum. Clarity on the targets that must be met, procedures, and modifications that must be implemented must be understood by all elements in the Merdeka Curriculum implementation (Fullan, 2007). In this position, the supervisor plays a very important role.

This assisting aspect contributes to the easy and successful implementation of Merdeka Curriculum at MIN of Semarang City. Commitment and collaboration from diverse stakeholders went well as a result of these various supportive aspects. For students, the impact of learning becomes relevant and exciting. Overall, the introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum at MIN of Semarang City has improved the quality of learning and student learning results. Learning becomes more interesting, relevant, and student-centred, fostering student independence, creativity, and collaboration. Furthermore, teachers' roles as

autonomous learning drivers are becoming more active in producing innovations and successful learning practices.

The most significant changes from the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MIN of Semarang City are:

1. Changes in learning methods

In the Merdeka Curriculum, the learning method changed to be more project-based. Students are given project tasks that allow them to actively explore knowledge and skills independently. This makes students more actively involved in the learning process so that learning becomes more interesting and meaningful to them.

2. Innovation in learning

Merdeka Curriculum encourages teachers to become independent movers of learning. Teachers need to innovate in developing learning plans that are interesting and relevant to the needs and interests of students. The Merdeka Belajar workshop provides an opportunity for teachers to increase their activeness in adopting more creative learning methods and strategies.

3. Development of student independence

Merdeka Curriculum gives students the opportunity to search for their own learning materials through the internet. This develops students' independence in finding relevant and quality learning resources so that they become more active in the learning process.

4. Increased creativity and student initiative

Students are encouraged to be more creative and imaginative when they are allowed to explore and express their passion for learning. They can discover the most effective learning method for themselves, making the learning process more pleasurable and efficient.

5. The relevance of learning to experience and everyday life

The Merdeka curriculum allows students to connect learning with their experiences and daily lives. This makes learning more relevant and meaningful for students, as they can see how the concepts learned can be applied in real life.

6. Improved Student Collaboration:

In the Merdeka Curriculum, students are often involved in group work and collaborative projects. This improves students' social and cooperation skills, so they learn to work effectively in teams and appreciate the role and contribution of each group member.

CONCLUSION

The Merdeka Curriculum is the right step to achieve education in accordance with current conditions with the aim of preparing a generation that is strong, intelligent, creative, and has a character that is in accordance with the values of Indonesians. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MIN of Semarang City has been effective with support from teachers, madrasahs, and supervisors. Although facing several obstacles, such as lack of experience in implementing a Merdeka Belajar approach, limited references and access to learning resources, limited facilities and amenities, and limited understanding of scoring and assessment, this implementation has a positive impact in the form of changes in learning methods and innovations, development of independence, creativity, and student initiative, as well as increased student collaboration in the learning process.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks are conveyed to Mr Nadzib, S.Ag as the Head of Madrasah, who gave permission and information about the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum (IKM), Gunawi as Vice Principal of Curriculum and teachers and students at MIN of Semarang City, who provided opportunities for researchers to conduct research openly and academically. To my fellows at PGMI Unwas lecturers who are also actively discussing IKM in general, especially in MIN of Semarang City. Thank you also to Ahmad Arifuddin, M.Pd as the organizing committee of the *Syekh Nurjati International Conference on Elementary Education (SICEE) IAIN Syekh Nurjati Cirebon, July 28-30, 2023*, along with the team who have extraordinarily well organized the event.

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