UNVEILING THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM IN INDONESIA: INSIGHTS FROM EDUCATORS AND POLICYMAKERS ON ITS EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

This study examines the Merdeka Curriculum, a recent educational reform in Indonesia designed to empower teachers and students with greater flexibility in learning. Rooted in the philosophy of "Merdeka" (freedom), the curriculum allows teachers to tailor instructional methods to students' individual needs, optimizing content delivery and enhancing competencies. Central to the curriculum is character development, inspired by Indonesia's national ideology, Pancasila, through the Pancasila Student Profile. This approach fosters integrity, empathy, and social responsibility—values crucial for local and global success, which align with Global Citizenship Education (GCE) that equips students to navigate an interconnected world meaningfully. Employing a qualitative research approach, this study endeavors to capture the perspectives of policymakers and educators responsible for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Utilizing semi-structured interviews, participants are encouraged to openly share their insights, challenges, and recommendations. The study concludes that the Merdeka Curriculum has been integrated into approximately 70% of Indonesian schools in three years. Successful strategies include resource allocation, teacher training, and enhanced visual support, which proved especially impactful during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings highlight the transformative effects of character-based and project-based learning approaches, which increased student enthusiasm and necessitated cultural and mindset shifts. Key recommendations emphasize maintaining curriculum consistency, prioritizing character education, and maximizing the Merdeka Mengajar Platform to support educators. Additionally, fostering collaboration among stakeholders and expanding teacher involvement remain critical to successful implementation. This dissertation contributes to educational reform discussions, offering insights for enhancing curriculum design and improving Indonesia's education system to prepare students for 21st-century challenges.

Keywords: educators, policymakers, Merdeka Curriculum

INTRODUCTION

Education is an essential and inseparable aspect of an individual's life within the family, community, and nation. Indonesia, as a developing country in the process of national development, requires high-quality Human Resources (HR) that can be relied upon. According to the Ministry of Education, one of the efforts to create reliable HR is through education (Sriandila et al., 2023). Schools, as a form of formal education, play a significant role in achieving national educational goals through the teaching and learning process. However, the evolving educational landscape calls for an open, flexible, and dynamic shift in the paradigm of teaching and learning (Lestariningrum, 2022).

Good education aimed at producing quality human resources requires a comprehensive reform of the education curriculum, such as the Merdeka Curriculum (Stanovich & Stanovich, 2006). The launch of the Merdeka Curriculum is one of the efforts made by the Ministry of Education and Culture to address the ongoing learning crisis in Indonesia, which has persisted and shown little improvement from year to year (Jayawardana et al., 2022). The PISA study has revealed that many students are unable to comprehend simple texts or apply basic mathematical concepts. Over the past 10 to 15 years, around 70% of 15-year-old students have fallen below the minimum competency level in literacy and numeracy. Similarly, there is an

evident disparity in learning quality among different regions and socio-economic groups (Directorate of Early Childhood Education, 2023).

The Merdeka Curriculum offers a diverse range of intracurricular learning, with optimized content to give students ample time to grasp concepts and strengthen competencies. Teachers have the flexibility to select various teaching tools, allowing instruction to be tailored to the learning needs and interests of students (Khoirurrijal et al., 2022). The essence of independent learning lies in the freedom to think both individually and collaboratively, fostering critical, creative, collaborative, innovative, and participatory students (Hidayat, 2016). With independent learning, student engagement in the learning process is enhanced. A joyful atmosphere can positively impact student productivity, as happiness often leads to increased focus and effective learning.

The legal basis and regulations for the Merdeka Curriculum include Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Regulation No. 5 of 2022 concerning Graduate Competency Standards, Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Regulation No. 7 of 2022 concerning Content Standards, and Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Regulation No. 16 of 2022 concerning Process Standards. According to the National Education Standards Agency (BSNP), the Merdeka Curriculum is a learning curriculum that focuses on talent and interest approaches. Developing a curriculum is a complex process involving many stakeholders (Puad & Ashton, 2022).

In the ideal implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, students can choose the subjects they wish to study based on their talents and interests. Teachers present lessons aligned with students' individual abilities and interests within the classroom. Students are empowered to express and explore ideas, concepts, and imaginations through discussions and projects (Wati, 2021). This is underpinned by the essence of independent learning, which involves the freedom to think and act in exploring ideas, concepts, and imaginations to create works. However, in its implementation, challenges remain. Schools adopting the Merdeka Curriculum are guided by the Merdeka Mengajar Platform. Only teachers with belajar.id accounts can access this platform (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022). Private schools face issues, as not all teachers possess belajar.id accounts. Some local governments mandate all schools to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. For "Sekolah Penggerak" or driving schools of Merdeka Curriculum, learning committees provide support, starting a month before the new academic year and led by facilitators (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022). Pilot schools focus on holistic student development and uphold the Pancasila Student Profile, encompassing competencies and character, all beginning with excellent human resources (school principals and teachers). However, for non-pilot schools, learning about the Merdeka Curriculum depends on the Merdeka Mengajar platform (PMM), supervisors, and online resources. As the curriculum evolves, teaching materials change. Purchasing student textbooks becomes unavoidable, leading teachers to base their instruction on these materials (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022). Many teachers disregard CP, ATP, TP, and teaching modules (Dian et al., 2023). Creative teachers might manage, but many educators aged over 50 are not enthusiastic about learning the new curriculum (Romansah, 2023).

Hence, the ideal implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum requires teachers to be tech-savvy and have a good understanding of technology. Integrating technology and effective teaching techniques in this curriculum will maximize the learning process. Successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum necessitates educational institutions to provide facilities that support learning success. In principle, educational institutions must fully facilitate the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation. Moreover, the government has established the Merdeka Mengajar platform to support its implementation. Thus, teachers are expected to innovate and develop creative teaching strategies, while also sharing ideas with colleagues.

Virtual learning communities allow teachers to learn from each other and develop competencies. Technological advancement in education has made learning easier for students (Haleem et al., 2022).

There are three implementation options for the Merdeka Curriculum in the 2022/2023 academic year: 1) Integrating certain aspects and principles of the Merdeka Curriculum into existing education curricula (independent learning); 2) Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum using provided teaching tools (independent transformation); and 3) Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum while creating custom teaching tools (independent sharing). The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is also supported by the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM), which helps teachers find inspiration, tailor instruction to student abilities, enhance competency through training, and inspire fellow educators in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum (Directorate of Early Childhood Education, 2023). Therefore, introducing and training educational institutions to implement the Merdeka Curriculum is essential preparation (Anwar, 2022).

However, the success or effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation relies on educators' and policymakers' perspectives. Their insights impact the curriculum's effectiveness and implications. Independent learning is not just a slogan; it strengthens education policies by enhancing educators' (teachers') quality and insights as drivers of independent learning towards nurturing a strong national character. Teachers play a pivotal role in educational success; lacking an understanding of students' potential impedes their teaching. Thus, teacher competence must actively engage in teaching processes, achieved through a long-term independent learning movement that continuously enhances their insight. Expanding insights through reading and adopting digital literacy as a teacher habit enhances knowledge for competency development (Darling-Hammond, 2020). Teachers' research and written works improve their insights and critical thinking skills, contributing to enhancing their competencies. Hence, educators (teachers) are allowed to associate, assemble, and organize, conveying messages and critiques while executing their duties and striving to improve their competencies (Hasbiyallah & Ihsan, 2022). However, a systematic guideline explaining researcher (teacher) and policymaker collaboration to enhance teacher competency is lacking (Alazmi & Alazmi, 2023).

This research aims to explore the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly the perspectives of educators and policymakers regarding its effectiveness, implications, implementation, and success. Effectiveness implies success; thus, effectiveness assesses a goal or outcome's achievement (Amelia et al., 2023). Higher effectiveness is necessary to approach or achieve a designated outcome or goal. The higher the effectiveness of an action, the greater the likelihood of attaining a goal. Increased effectiveness enhances an activity's quality; this principle applies to education, where effectiveness significantly influences the learning process. Herein lies the critical role of educators and policymakers in supporting this endeavor. Educators (teachers) and policymakers are key to successful teaching and learning and play roles in implementing ongoing school curricula. Educators (teachers) and policymakers are responsible for enlightening students holistically in physical, spiritual, emotional, and moral dimensions. They must uphold the government-issued competencies in their teaching roles. Educators (teachers) and policymakers' roles significantly contribute to achieving education's goals and benefits (Serdyukov, 2017).

The challenges in this study stem from the lack of educators' and policymakers' insights into the Merdeka Curriculum, leading to many teachers feeling unprepared for its implementation. Teachers' inadequate understanding is attributed to suboptimal training by district, provincial, and even national education offices. Some training sessions are haphazardly organized, with sessions extended into the late hours. During the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum's preparation phase, most teachers do not craft lesson plans. The majority

rely on materials found in student textbooks. To address this, a shift in teachers' mentality is needed, not changes to the curriculum itself. Research suggests that solutions include attending training, self-learning, and gathering information from the internet or reliable sources with comprehensive knowledge of the Merdeka Curriculum. After training, teachers desire continued support. Mentoring could be provided by school principals, supervisors, or district instructors. They emphasize that the key to success does not lie solely in training but also in ongoing mentorship. Therefore, school administrators and supervisors should also undergo Merdeka Curriculum training to provide effective mentorship. Conversely, although schools generally welcome the Merdeka Curriculum, community support is limited. This lack of support arises from a lack of understanding about how each stakeholder can contribute to the curriculum's successful implementation. In their opinion, revising training for school administrators, school supervisors, school committees, and administrative staff regarding the Merdeka Curriculum is essential (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022).

This study delves into the intricate landscape of educational reform by focusing on the recently introduced Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. The research contribution of this study lies in providing a comprehensive analysis of Indonesia's recently introduced Merdeka Curriculum, offering insights into its implications for educational reform. This study enhances the understanding of curriculum transformation in developing countries by identifying opportunities and challenges associated with implementing a learner-centered framework. By focusing on the Merdeka Curriculum's impact, it contributes to the global discourse on curriculum innovation, shedding light on how local cultural and policy contexts influence the effectiveness of such reforms. Additionally, the research offers practical recommendations for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to optimize the curriculum's implementation, making it a valuable resource for future studies on educational innovation in similar socio-cultural settings.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research employs a qualitative descriptive approach using interviews with educators and policymakers to analyze the implementation and implications of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. Participants, selected through purposive sampling, include educators from primary to higher education across diverse regions and policymakers from various government bodies. Semi-structured interviews explore curriculum effectiveness, challenges, resource allocation, and improvement recommendations. Data analysis follows Miles and Huberman's framework, including data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing, complemented by thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes. Provisional coding aids in organizing qualitative data, ensuring flexibility and relevance.

The research leverages policy implementation and effectiveness theories to assess the Merdeka Curriculum's clarity, resource distribution, support systems, and infrastructure. These frameworks evaluate curriculum goals, strategies, and the alignment of policy with practical implementation, emphasizing educational outcomes and efficiency. Findings aim to provide actionable insights into the curriculum's impact on teaching practices, classroom dynamics, and systemic education policies.

Through this analysis, the study contributes to understanding the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum and its alignment with national educational objectives. It offers recommendations for curriculum refinement, infrastructure improvement, and policy enhancements to address implementation challenges and improve learning outcomes across educational contexts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data reduction process also involves coding to identify patterns or themes within the gathered interview data. These themes align with the five research questions that this paper aims to analyze. Codes represent keywords that the author has identified as recurring across multiple informant interviews. Meanwhile, the evidence consists of quotations that support these codes. Since all interviews were conducted in Indonesian, the author provides detailed evidence in later sections, organized according to the focus of each research question.

Table 1. Brief Summary of Thematic Analysis

Codes	Themes	Evidence
• "Sekolah Penggerak" (driving/pilot schools) • "Guru Penggerak" (educators/agents of change in driving schools) • National curriculum • Digital platform • Government support & regulations	Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum	As explained in Section A.
• Financial resource • Platform Merdeka Mengajar (PMM – Teacher Platform) • Infrastructure/school facilities • Teacher training/development	Resource Allocation	As explained in Section B.
• Teacher mindset • Limited resources • Access to education	Challenges in Implementation	As explained in Section C.
• Student impact and experiences • Teacher impact and experiences • Parental involvement	Effectiveness of Merdeka Curriculum	As explained in Section D.
• Continuous improvement • Stakeholder collaboration	Recommendations for the Merdeka Curriculum	As explained in Section E.

Source: Author

Section A: Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

This analysis aims to comprehend and assess how the Merdeka Curriculum is put into practice in Indonesian schools. The following is an excerpt from an interview with an informant concerning the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian schools: *"The Merdeka Curriculum is implemented by providing educational institutions the choice to select and adopt this curriculum. Mr. DZ explained that approximately 70% of schools in Indonesia have opted to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. The implementation begins with specific grade levels, and official regulations designating the Merdeka Curriculum as a national curriculum are expected to be established in early 2024"* (Interview with DZ, Head of Curriculum – Ministry of Education) on 23 August 2023).

Based on the above interview findings, it can be elucidated that the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented by allowing educational institutions to choose and adopt the curriculum. Roughly 70% of schools in Indonesia have chosen to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. Implementation commences from specific grade levels, and official regulations declaring the Merdeka Curriculum as a national curriculum are anticipated to be enacted by early 2024.

According to TS (policymaker), the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is executed through the Merdeka Mengajar platform (PMM). PMM serves as a tool for educators to access content, resources, and guidelines related to the Merdeka Curriculum. Educators are empowered to take independent steps in learning, teaching, and content development. PMM also offers training and a collaborative learning community for educators to share experiences and inspiration.

EU (educator) adds that the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented in schools by integrating character aspects, entrepreneurship, and real-world project development into the learning process. Learning materials are presented through an engaging approach and digital resources. The curriculum's implementation also involves evaluating character and attitudes, with a focus on nurturing students' skills and character. The curriculum's content is concise and centered around thematic approaches. Projects such as eco-brick waste management and entrepreneurial initiatives have been executed. Influential educators play a pivotal role in implementing the curriculum. Support and access to digital content, facilitated by digital platforms, have contributed to successful curriculum implementation.

A similar viewpoint is conveyed by SH (policymaker), stating that the curriculum is piloted through collaboration with leading schools or "Sekolah Penggerak". Educators from these leading schools, called "Guru Penggerak" (in English is similar to Agents of Change), receive training through PMM to enhance their teaching competence within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum. The Merdeka Mengajar platform guides educators on necessary actions and knowledge enhancement, enabling them to effectively implement the curriculum.

AY (educator) elucidates that curriculum implementation involves collaboration between core and affiliated schools to introduce and apply the Merdeka Curriculum. The necessary facilities, such as Chromebook, LCDs, and laptops, are provided by schools with financial support from the government. These facilities enable technology-based learning and skill development for students.

HY (educator) notes that the gradual implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in various Indonesian schools necessitates resource allocation for teacher training, learning material development, and visual aids. While the government is responsible for providing these resources, educators are expected to contribute to independent learning to optimize curriculum usage.

FL (educator) adds that funding resources in their school come from various sources, including support from the central government in the first year. Additionally, they rely on contributions from the school committee, alumni support, and external partnerships. The school seeks funding opportunities that align with its capabilities. Schools are encouraged to engage alumni and parents to obtain sponsorship for further development activities.

Section B: Resource Allocation Strategies for the Merdeka Curriculum

This analysis aims to comprehend and assess strategies for allocating resources to ensure the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The following is an excerpt from an interview with an informant regarding strategies for effective resource allocation for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum: *"Resource allocation for the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum involves the utilization of digital platforms and teacher training. The government has provided instructional materials and guidelines for teachers, including support for the development of projects aligned with the curriculum" (Interview with EU (Educator) on 29 July 2023).*

Based on the above interview findings, it can be clarified that successful resource allocation for the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum involves the use of digital platforms (such as Google Forms and Google Classroom) and teacher training. The government has supplied instructional materials and guidelines for teachers, including support for project

development aligned with the curriculum. Schools also allocate funds from their budgets to support project implementation. In terms of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, project funds are sourced from the school budget. For entrepreneurship projects, the required funds are relatively modest as they mainly cover raw materials. In EU' school, funds are obtained through student contributions of around Rp 50,000 per class. Additionally, digital platforms like Google Form and Google Classroom have been used previously, facilitating the digital aspects of curriculum implementation.

DZ (policymaker) further emphasizes the primary strategy of fostering collaborative learning groups among teachers in various regions. The Ministry of Education provides teaching tools accessible through their instructional platform, along with webinars and technical assistance from regional technical implementation units. The aim is to encourage teachers to not solely rely on centralized training but to establish a culture of collaborative learning and knowledge sharing. The Ministry's goal is to cultivate collaborative learning groups among teachers in different regions. Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum involves a shift in teachers' mindsets rather than a strict directive.

However, according to SH (policymaker), resource allocation strategies involve government support for leading schools through funding. In the piloting scheme, schools implementing the Merdeka Curriculum require budgetary support from the government. There must be a willingness on the part of the Ministry to embrace honest school institutions, and the government's efforts must be substantial to implement the Merdeka Curriculum.

According to PJ (educator), the government provides substantial grant funding to universities for campus teaching programs and the development of the Merdeka Curriculum. However, questions arise about recognizing credit hours for specific activities and the challenge of striking a balance between competencies achieved through traditional instruction and those from programs supported by the Merdeka Curriculum. The government should incentivize universities to engage in campus teaching programs through financial incentives.

On the other hand, AY (educator) explains that the required funds and facilities have been allocated by the government but may vary between core and affiliated schools. Periodic monitoring and Collaborative Subject Teacher Groups (KKG) meetings assist in ensuring effective and efficient resource allocation. This perspective is supported by HY (Educator), who asserts that implementing the Merdeka Curriculum requires allocating resources such as teacher training, learning material development, and visual aids. The government plays a role in providing these resources, but educators are also expected to contribute to independent learning to optimize curriculum utilization. FL (educator) adds that funding resources in their school come from various sources, including support from the central government in the first year. Additionally, they rely on contributions from the school committee, alumni support, and external partnerships. The school seeks funding opportunities that align with its capabilities. Schools are encouraged to engage alumni and parents to obtain sponsorship for further development activities.

Section C: The Merdeka Curriculum: Challenges and Recommendations for Improvement

This analysis seeks to understand and analyze the challenges encountered during the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and offer recommendations for its enhancement. The following excerpts are from interviews conducted with informants regarding the challenges faced and the potential recommendations for improvement: *"The challenges within the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum encompass pressures from various stakeholders, including supervisors and the surrounding environment. At times, educators feel the strain which can impact their teaching approach. Thus, there's a need for support and*

acknowledgment for educators who are implementing the Merdeka Curriculum." (Interview with TS (Policymaker) on 8 August 2023).

Based on the aforementioned interview findings, the challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum include external pressures from various stakeholders such as supervisors and the immediate environment. These pressures can influence educators' teaching methodologies. Consequently, it's imperative to provide educators with the necessary support, training, and recognition while also involving them in decision-making processes related to the curriculum.

DZ (policymaker) adds that a significant challenge in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is transforming educators' paradigm from content delivery to facilitating learning focused on students' competencies and character. Moreover, another challenge is adapting to shifts in the learning culture, particularly among educators accustomed to the traditional paradigm. Schools should prioritize equipping educators with not just technical skills but also fostering an environment that encourages innovation and establishes sustainable learning communities. The most substantial challenge, however, lies in changing mindsets. This presents a considerable challenge since it involves altering long-standing mindsets, initial thoughts, or habits. It's essential to provide the necessary support and motivation to demonstrate that all educators can adapt and transform.

EU (educator) identifies that challenges in the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation include aligning with real-world projects within the curriculum and the availability of time for project implementation. However, EU feels that adaptation and collaboration among educators have been instrumental in surmounting these challenges. EU also recommends that the government continues to extend support through training and material development while also considering the curriculum's sustainability and revisions to enhance its effectiveness.

An additional challenge in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum involves accommodating necessary changes and projects. Despite prior familiarity with digital approaches, certain educators may still require more training to effectively manage these changes. Moreover, the following are excerpts from interviews with informants about their insights on the implications of the Merdeka Curriculum: *"There are differing views about the Merdeka Curriculum. There is concern that the freedom granted in the Merdeka Curriculum could lead to a lack of focus and limitations in the development of knowledge. Some programs struggle to address long-term challenges or develop their knowledge, potentially affecting the quality of education" (Interview with PJ (Educator) on 13 August 2023).*

Based on the results of the above interview, it can be explained that there are differing views about the Merdeka Curriculum. There is concern that the freedom granted in the Merdeka Curriculum could lead to a lack of focus and limitations in the development of knowledge. The informant also mentioned that some programs struggle to address long-term challenges or develop their knowledge, potentially affecting the quality of education. The informant sees colleges as places for knowledge development, and the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum might not be entirely suitable, especially if not applied flexibly.

On the other hand, DZ (policymaker) explained that the Merdeka Curriculum has significant implications for changing the paradigm of learning. Teachers are expected to focus more on differentiated learning, considering the needs and abilities of each student, and providing space for their creative expression. Additionally, the Merdeka Curriculum influences students' views on learning, where they feel freer to express their ideas and thoughts.

Another perspective was added by TS (policymaker), stating that the perspectives of educators and policymakers regarding the implications of the Merdeka Curriculum tend to be positive. Teachers are expected to better cope with challenges due to the flexibility provided by this curriculum. Teachers can be more creative in teaching and adapting lessons to students'

needs and interests. The broader definition of learning outcomes allows teachers to guide students more effectively based on each individual's potential.

A similar view was expressed by EU (educator), stating that the Merdeka Curriculum has brought about changes in teaching and assessment methods. In the Merdeka Curriculum, character and attitude aspects are also assessed, differing from the previous curriculum. The informant observed that teachers have adapted well to this change, and the government team's support in terms of training and material provision has facilitated implementation. The Merdeka Curriculum is more focused on character and project-based learning. Character assessment for students has been integrated into the Merdeka Curriculum, such as the Assessment of Pancasila and Citizenship Education (P3). Changes in the assessment and evaluation system have occurred, including changes in attitude assessment. The use of visually appealing materials, such as comics, has helped overcome teacher limitations and made learning more engaging for students.

However, according to SH (policymaker), there is an understanding that the 2013 Curriculum (K-13) did not provide a strong space for reflection for teachers, thus not supporting innovation. The COVID-19 pandemic worsened this situation with distance learning, which required digital literacy that teachers and students did not possess. Teachers were already burdened with a lot of content, so the space for reflection and evaluation was relatively lacking. Curriculum K-13 did not eliminate this, but it did reduce the space for innovation.

According to HY (educator), educators' and policymakers' insights into the implications of the Merdeka Curriculum are that this curriculum requires a change in mindset and culture in the approach to learning. This curriculum allows teachers and students to be more proactive in learning and teaching, as well as promoting a differentiated approach that respects each student's uniqueness.

A more detailed perspective was shared by SL (educator), stating that educators' and policymakers' insights into the implications of the Merdeka Curriculum are as follows:

1) In the Merdeka Curriculum (IKM), the focus is no longer on mastering detailed content as in the previous curriculum but on a broader understanding of concepts. Teachers are expected to find essential materials and deliver them simply, focusing on students' understanding.

2) P5 is implemented during co-curricular hours with the aim of shaping student profiles that emphasize Pancasila values in six dimensions.

According to FL (educator), communication and consensus within the school regarding the adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum are important. The informant also emphasized that changing the teacher's mindset and full support from the school and parents are key factors in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Joint commitment, discussions, and agreements are important for the progress of the school, and the informant sees the essence of a good Merdeka Curriculum in this.

Based on the above description, it can be concluded that educators' and policymakers' insights into the implications of the Merdeka Curriculum include concerns that the freedom granted in the Merdeka Curriculum could lead to a lack of focus and limitations in the development of knowledge. However, the Merdeka Curriculum has significant implications for changing the paradigm of learning, where teachers are expected to focus more on differentiated learning, considering the needs and abilities of each student, and providing space for their creative expression. Teachers can be more creative in teaching and adapting lessons to students' needs and interests, enabling teachers to guide students more effectively based on each individual's potential. Another implication of the Merdeka Curriculum is that it has brought about changes in teaching and assessment methods, with a focus on character and project-based learning. This curriculum requires a change in mindset and culture in the approach to learning.

Recommendations for improvement encompass the government's consistency in maintaining the curriculum without frequent alterations. A consistent curriculum approach aids educators and students in better adaptation. Furthermore, character education and skill development must remain focal points, necessitating continued governmental support to ensure the curriculum's success.

Additional recommendations for the future implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum include:

1) Maximizing the use of the Merdeka Teaching (Merdeka Mengajar) Platform (PMM) to support self-directed learning and boost educators' enthusiasm in implementing the curriculum.
2) Expanding opportunities for educator leadership roles, allowing more educators to play a part in curriculum implementation.
3) Fostering collaborative efforts in implementation, involving stakeholders such as educators, parents, students, and relevant parties to effectively execute the curriculum.
4) Continually reinforcing character development aspects within the learning process, enabling students to cultivate positive attitudes and values.
5) Maximizing parental involvement by engaging them in supporting the learning process, such as participating in field trips or school activities.
6) Emphasizing outcome-based and process-based learning to encourage holistic learning approaches that consider personal student achievements and character development.

Moving to challenges faced at the higher education level, HY (educator) outlines several obstacles in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum within his institution. These challenges include:

1) Self-directed learning,
2) Constraints related to time and energy,
3) Managing self-directed learning time,
4) Shifting mindsets,
5) Evaluation and selection processes, and
6) Human resources.

Recommendations for improvement involve:

1) Structured training sessions, acknowledging the need for guidance despite the emphasis on self-directed learning.
2) Prioritizing differentiated learning, particularly in inclusive education contexts. Empowering educators to cater to diverse student needs, including those with special requirements, is vital.
3) Adopting holistic evaluation approaches, steering clear of standardized exams that solely emphasize end results. Enhancing character assessment and comprehensive learning practices is crucial.
4) Ensuring clear understanding by all stakeholders—educators, students, parents, and schools—of the principles underlying the Merdeka Curriculum. Effective communication and easily comprehensible guidelines aid in smooth implementation.
5) Optimizing governmental support by providing necessary resources, training, and consistent guidance. A balance between self-directed learning and structured guidance must be maintained.
6) Considering the elimination of selection exams, where feasible, to minimize potential impacts on learning approaches.

In summary, challenges encountered in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum encompass external pressures from various stakeholders, including supervisors and the

immediate environment. Educators require support, training, and acknowledgment, and their involvement in curriculum-related decisions is vital. The central challenge lies in transforming educators' paradigms to focus on competency-based and character-focused learning.

Additional challenges involve adapting to evolving learning cultures, especially among educators accustomed to traditional approaches. Overcoming the challenge of mindset shifts is pivotal, necessitating support and motivation to encourage educators to embrace change. Adaptation to necessary changes, including digital approaches, presents another challenge, indicating the need for further training.

At the regional level, challenges are rooted in varying levels of student and educator understanding, as well as policies that may not align with local contexts. In higher education, balancing practical experience with theoretical knowledge, maintaining educational quality, and evading capitalist influences present unique challenges. Recommendations include maintaining curriculum consistency, prioritizing character and skills education, and optimizing government support.

Further recommendations encompass maximizing the use of digital platforms, expanding educator leadership roles, fostering collaboration, reinforcing character development, involving parents, and promoting outcome-based and process-based learning approaches. Addressing challenges linked to self-directed learning, time constraints, mindset shifts, and human resources is paramount for successful curriculum implementation.

Section D: Insights into the Effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum

This analysis aims to understand and analyze the perspectives of educators and policymakers regarding the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum. The following excerpts are from interviews with informants about how educators and policymakers perceive the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum: *"The perspectives of educators and policymakers on the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum are quite varied. There is consideration that the content-rich Curriculum 13 has encouraged a spirit for students to master many things, but it also poses the risk of burdening students with excessive material."* (Interview with SH (Policymaker) on 11 July 2023).

Based on the above interview findings, it can be explained that the perspectives of educators and policymakers regarding the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum are quite varied. There is consideration that the content-rich Curriculum 13 has encouraged a spirit for students to master many things, but it also poses the risk of burdening students with excessive material. The spirit of the Merdeka Curriculum aims to equip students with knowledge across various subjects, but the risk lies in the workload due to its content-heavy nature.

Meanwhile, DZ (policymaker) explains that the Merdeka Curriculum was initially developed as one of the options that Educational Units could choose in order to address the challenges posed by the impact of COVID-19 on learning loss. The goal is to provide more focus on serving the children and enhancing their competencies and character. The effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum is reflected in the shift of the teacher's paradigm from content delivery to differentiated learning support. Changing the curriculum is a significant challenge as it involves altering long-standing mindsets, initial thoughts, or habits. The Merdeka Curriculum is more about transforming the learning culture, transitioning from a teacher-centered approach focused on completing subject matter to an emphasis on students' competencies.

TS (policymaker) mentions that the perspectives of educators and policymakers on the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum are quite positive, particularly in addressing the learning challenges that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Merdeka Curriculum is seen as a solution to overcome learning loss and to rekindle students' interest in learning, which was affected by the challenges of the pandemic. Government efforts, including

initiatives like the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM), are seen as appropriate steps to support teachers in facing these changes.

EU (educator) states that the Merdeka Curriculum has been well planned by the government, but some teachers might still need to adapt to it. Teachers also face projects within the Merdeka Curriculum that require them to innovate and integrate material with engaging activities for students. According to EU, the government's support in terms of providing material and digital platforms has been quite effective. The curriculum has been determined by the government, so it should be suitable for implementation. Even though teachers might not fully understand or be capable yet, they will strive to implement it. Despite changes in the Merdeka Curriculum, such as the removal of the Minimum Competence Criteria (KKM) and an emphasis on character, implementation and understanding are gradually developing. Changes like the use of different e-reporting methods have also been introduced. However, there are changes in terms of more concise content and thematic approaches used in the Merdeka Curriculum.

PJ (educator) reveals that the Merdeka Curriculum approach has both positive and negative aspects. The advantage is that it provides students with the freedom to explore interests beyond the set curriculum of their study program. However, the lack of regulations can lead to issues. He cites examples like an increase in the number of students transferring between universities with the same courses, resulting in an excessive workload for instructors who have to teach and provide feedback, as well as conflicting schedules across universities. Moreover, many students are unaware that courses taken outside their study program might not be relevant to the Learning Outcomes of their program.

According to AY (educator), Curriculum 2013 (K-13) was designed with learning objectives and student achievement targets, while the Merdeka Curriculum provides freedom and flexibility to teachers and students in developing learning materials according to students' needs. The Merdeka Curriculum does not have core or foundational competencies but focuses on learning outcomes in phases A, B, and C. Teaching material is adjusted for depth and breadth and is placed within the available time.

HY (educator) suggests that educators' and policymakers' insights into the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum are that it has the potential to develop students' character, provide freedom to teachers and students in learning, and encourage individual-focused learning. The Merdeka Curriculum has the potential to effectively develop Indonesian students' character through the principles of Pancasila.

However, SL (educator) notes that the Merdeka Curriculum incurs significant costs. In the Independent Curriculum Model, the focus is no longer on in-depth mastery of content as in previous curricula but on a broader understanding of concepts. Teachers are expected to find essential material and deliver it simply, focusing on student comprehension.

Meanwhile, FL (educator) explains that the Merdeka Curriculum is a response to the educational changes brought about by COVID-19. Their experience in online learning made their school more adaptable to different approaches, such as the Merdeka Curriculum. They see it as an opportunity to innovate and provide freedom in teaching, as well as to prioritize learning that serves the students' interests.

In conclusion, based on the description above, it can be summarized that educators' and policymakers' perspectives on the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum are quite effective, especially in addressing the learning challenges that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. The effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum is reflected in the shift of the teacher's paradigm from content delivery to differentiated learning support. The Merdeka Curriculum aims to transform the learning culture, shifting from a teacher-centered approach to one that emphasizes students' competencies. The curriculum has the potential to develop students' character, provide freedom to teachers and students in learning, encourage individual-focused

learning, and effectively promote Indonesian students' character development through the principles of Pancasila. The Merdeka Curriculum is seen as an opportunity to innovate and provide freedom in teaching, while also focusing on learning that serves students' interests.

Section E: Implementation and Success of the Merdeka Curriculum

This analysis aims to understand and analyze the implementation and success of the Merdeka Curriculum. The following are excerpts from interviews with informants about how the implementation and success of the Merdeka Curriculum are perceived: *"Developments observed since the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum include aspects such as the Pancasila Student Profile, contextual learning, changes in student mindset, parental involvement, focus on character strengthening, and active learning"* (Interview with AY (Educator) on 25 July 2023).

Based on the results of the above interview, it can be explained that developments observed since the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum include aspects such as:

1. **Pancasila Student Profile:** Students are internalizing Pancasila values such as mutual cooperation, faith in the One and Only God, and independence.
2. **Contextual Learning:** Students are more engaged in contextual learning, such as visits to historical places, making them more active in the learning process.
3. **Change in Student Mindset:** Students are more focused on mastering knowledge and developing character rather than just pursuing numerical grades.
4. **Parental Involvement:** Parents are more involved in their children's education, supporting field trips and school activities.
5. **Focus on Character Strengthening:** Teachers are more focused on developing students' character, resulting in positive attitudes and values.
6. **Active Learning:** A more active learning approach makes students more enthusiastic about the learning process.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is progressing well, although there are some difficulties in preparation and training. Support from facilitators and instructors has helped schools implement the curriculum without obstacles. The school's focus is on an inclusive approach, inclusive child development, and teacher competence development.

DZ (policymaker) mentioned that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is being carried out gradually. Schools that have not fully implemented it start with specific grades such as grades 1, 4, 7, and 10. For schools that have implemented it from the beginning, the implementation is in line with the plan and has yielded positive results in changing the learning paradigm and increasing students' active participation in expression and creativity.

According to TS (policymaker), the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is mainly done through the Merdeka Teaching Platform (PMM). PMM focuses on teachers as the main users. Teachers can access various content and resources to support the learning process. The success of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is measured by the positive response of teachers to the flexibility in teaching and their ability to adapt the curriculum to students' needs. However, challenges still exist, especially in reaching areas with poor digital access.

EU (educator) observed that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at her school has been quite successful. There are projects within the Merdeka Curriculum that involve students in real activities, such as recycling waste into ecobricks and developing traditional food entrepreneurship. The informant believes that learning using the Merdeka Curriculum has provided a more interesting and interactive atmosphere for students. The Merdeka Curriculum has been implemented at the school for two years, starting with grades seven and eight as the initial implementation. Projects within this curriculum, such as waste management into ecobricks and traditional food entrepreneurship, have been carried out. The use of g-form for assessment was adopted before the pandemic, so teachers were already familiar with digital

approaches. Government support and the efforts of the implementing team have facilitated the implementation of this curriculum, although there are challenges in adapting to changes.

On the other hand, SH (policymaker) mentioned that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum began with a pilot scheme through leading schools ("Sekolah Penggerak"). The number of leading schools is limited due to budget constraints. The initial implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum was optional and not mandatory.

PJ (educator) stated that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum faces challenges in integrating courses taken outside the study program with the program's courses. The informant gave an example that some specific courses that used to have a weight of six credits were combined into two credits, resulting in shallower knowledge acquisition than before. According to the informant, the implementation of Subject-Based Learning (MBKM) allows flexibility to pursue interests not covered in the study program's curriculum, but conversely, there is a decrease in quality in outcome-based education.

Another perspective was added by HY (educator), who explained that the Merdeka Curriculum has several phases, including self-learning and self-transformation. Currently, learning activities and activities for leading teachers are available, so those programs are in place. However, individuals must access them on their own, utilize them on their own, and explore on their own.

According to SL (educator), concerning the Merdeka Curriculum, its implementation depends on the readiness of supervisors and human resources in schools. The government has provided opportunities and strategies to implement this curriculum, with a focus on leading schools selected through assessment by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Schools also have the freedom to develop teaching modules according to students' characteristics but must still follow the established guidelines.

FL (educator) explained that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at their school is going well. Despite some difficulties in preparation and training, support from facilitators and instructors has helped the school implement the curriculum. The school focuses on an inclusive approach, inclusive child development, and teacher competence development. To date, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at their school has proceeded smoothly without obstacles.

Based on the above description, it can be concluded that the implementation and success of the Merdeka Curriculum include aspects such as the internalization of Pancasila values among students, contextual learning, changes in student mindset, increased parental involvement, focus on character strengthening, and active learning. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is progressing well, although there are some difficulties in preparation and training. Support from facilitators and instructors has helped schools implement the curriculum without obstacles. The school's focus is on an inclusive approach, inclusive child development, and teacher competence development, resulting in the smooth implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at their school.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia, facilitated through initiatives like the "Sekolah Penggerak" and "Guru Penggerak" programs, has reached approximately 70% of schools. These programs drive educational improvements, equip teachers with innovative teaching resources via the Merdeka Mengajar Platform, and integrate character development, entrepreneurship, and project-based learning. Educators enjoy greater flexibility under the curriculum, fostering a more inclusive and personalized teaching approach. Resource allocation strategies include government support, such as internet access and funding for Pancasila Student Profile-related projects, while schools collaborate with parents and stakeholders to enhance implementation. Both educators and policymakers view the Merdeka

Curriculum as a forward-looking initiative addressing the need for differentiated, student-centered learning, although challenges persist in adapting to this shift.

The research also highlights the transformative impact of the curriculum on teaching paradigms, shifting the focus from content delivery to creative, inclusive, and project-based learning. Policymakers and educators emphasize the need for mindset changes among teachers accustomed to traditional methods and call for collaborative efforts to ensure the curriculum's effectiveness. Despite the challenges, early results indicate increased student engagement and enthusiasm. Recommendations include providing equitable financial support for underprivileged regions, tailored professional development for teachers, robust monitoring systems, localized implementation strategies, and community engagement. Sustained investment in capacity building and consistent implementation amidst political changes are crucial to realizing the curriculum's full potential and delivering high-quality education across diverse educational contexts in Indonesia.

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