

## Research Paper

# Study of "Merdeka Belajar" Curriculum for Cultivating Student Character: Evidence from Indonesia

Sri Handayani<sup>1\*</sup>, Endah Nur Amalina<sup>1</sup>, Afifah Nur Asiah<sup>1</sup>, Andy Prasetyo Wati<sup>2</sup>, Primasa Minerva Nagari<sup>3</sup>, Aryati Abd Rahman<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Economic Development, Faculty of Economic and Business, Universitas Negeri Malang

<sup>2</sup>Department of Management, Faculty of Economic and Business, Universitas Negeri Malang

<sup>3</sup>Department of Accounting, Faculty of Education, Universitas Negeri Malang

<sup>4</sup>Sektor Pembangunan Kompetensi Nazir, Jemaah Nazir, Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia

**ORCID**

Sri Handayani: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4471-6153>

**Abstract.**

The curriculum is a tool that will never be separated from the educational process. In Indonesia, there have been several curriculum changes to support the implementation of education to run smoothly, and curriculum improvements in supporting the learning process have been carried out until now. The last curriculum improvement was carried out in 2020 under the name "Merdeka Belajar", and its implementation was carried out in stages. In order to find out the effectiveness of the implementation of this curriculum in formal educational institutions, this study focuses on highlighting *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum to bring out the characters in students for independent learning. To solve this problem, the researcher used qualitative research methods with case study techniques, while the data collection method used were observation in the form of non participatory observations and interviews. The results of the study stated that the implementation of the independent learning curriculum has not been fully implemented, and still limited to *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5) so it was categorized as a school "Mandiri Belajar".

**Keywords:** *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum, implementation, cultivating student character

Corresponding Author: Sri Handayani; email: [sri.handayani.fe@um.ac.id](mailto:sri.handayani.fe@um.ac.id)

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## 1. Introduction

The curriculum is a tool that will never be separated from the educational process (Marek & Natalie Wu, 2020; Chen et al., 2021; Law, 2022), because the curriculum is a set of plans and arrangements that contain the objectives, content and learning materials as well as ways that can be used as guidelines for the implementation of learning activities to achieve the expected educational goals (Mahfud, 2019; Campbel, 2020; Simanjuntak, 2020). In Indonesia, there have been several curriculum changes to support the implementation of education to run smoothly. The first time the education curriculum in Indonesia was formed in 1947 and named *Rentjana Belajar* 1947 which

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emphasizes the formation of a sovereign human character and on an equal footing with other nations (Mukminin et al., 2019). Then in 1952 there was a refinement of the curriculum that prioritized the content of the lessons and was connected to daily life, in 1952 the change focused more on the *pancawardhana program* (moral, intelligence, emotional, religious and physical development), in 1964 there was a change in the structure of education from *pancawardhana* to Pancasila soul building, basic knowledge and special skills (Alhamuddin et al., 2020; Dewi, 2021; Hidayah et al., 2022), The year 1975 placed more emphasis on the goal of making education more efficient and effective by using the methods and materials detailed in *Prosedur Pengembangan Sistem Instruksi* (PPSI), In 1984 the curriculum began to carry the skill approach process or called the model CBSA (Salahuddin & Asroriyah, 2019; Jaya, 2020), In 1994 curriculum changes in addition to improving plans in the learning process also improved the arrangement of the learning time sharing system, namely by changing from a semester system to a chess system (Darmawanti, 2021; Ridwan et al., 2023).

Improvements to the curriculum continued until 2004, where there has been a shift to structural changes in government from centralistic to decentralistic, resulting in curriculum changes called competency-based curricula (KBK) (Datumula, 2021; Burhaein et al., 2020). This curriculum focuses on developing the ability to perform (competency) tasks with certain performance standards, so that the results can be felt by students, in the form of mastery of certain competencies (Mahfud, 2019; Akib et al., 2020). Therefore, KBK is a curriculum that is directed to develop the knowledge, understanding, abilities, values, attitudes, and interests of students, in order to be able to do things in the form of proficiency, accuracy and success with full responsibility. In 2006, KBK refinement into “Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan” curriculum or KTSP (Istanti, 2019; Hikmawati & Hosnan, 2022) compiled and developed based on UU No. 20 of 2003. The focus of KTSP is the implementation of the operational curriculum carried out by each education unit while still paying attention to the competency standards and basic competencies that have been developed by *Badan Standar Nasional Pendidikan* (Hidayati, 2019; Suwarma & Kumano, 2019). Then in 2013, a National curriculum was developed that has covered all the objectives of the previous curricula and is summarized into two dimensions, namely the planning dimension and the regulatory dimension (Rozi et al., 2021; Soysal, 2022), In addition, the 2013 curriculum has characteristics that are a combination of all the characteristics of the previous curriculum, namely balanced competency development, school contextualization, time flexibility, detailed competencies, core competencies as organizing elements, and accumulative, mutual strengthening and enriching each other (Wulandari, 2020).

Changes in the return curriculum occurred due to a pandemic that attacked the whole world, including Indonesia. Therefore, it requires policymakers in education to be able to compile a curriculum that can be implemented in accordance with the current educational conditions. Merdeka Belajar Curriculum Launched as a Solution to Overcome 'Learning Loss' During the Covid-19 Pandemic (Jojo & Sitohang, 2022). Implementation Merdeka Belajar Curriculum implemented based on the Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology No. 5 and No. & 2022, and supported by the Ministry of Education and Culture No. 56 of 2022 concerning guidelines for curriculum implementation in the context of learning recovery. Therefore, schools can implement the *Merdeka Curriculum* in stages according to the readiness of each school (Yuhastina et al., 2020; Ingtias et al., 2022). The gradual implementation of this *Merdeka Belajar Curriculum* began in 2021/2022 (Kasman & Lubis, 2022), and there are 2,500 schools that have begun to implement the *Merdeka Belajar Curriculum*, especially schools that participate in the '*Sekolah Penggerak*' program (Pratikno et al., 2022). In 2022/2023, schools can choose to implement the *Merdeka Belajar Curriculum* according to the questionnaire provided by the government, because the questionnaire is intended to help schools assess the extent of their readiness to implement the *Merdeka Belajar Curriculum* (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, 2022a). The results of the questionnaire are used by schools to assess which choices of the *Merdeka Belajar Curriculum* are in accordance with their readiness. These choices are (1) *Mandiri Belajar*, (2) *Mandiri Berubah*, and (3) *Mandiri Berbagi*. '*Mandiri Belajar*' i.e. the school applies part of the principles and part of the *Merdeka Belajar Curriculum*. '*Mandiri Berubah*' i.e. the school applies all the principles and parts of the *Merdeka Belajar Curriculum*, and using learning tools provided by the government. While, '*Mandiri Berbagi*' is a school that is able to apply all the principles of the *Merdeka Belajar Curriculum* and develop its own learning tools (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2020a).

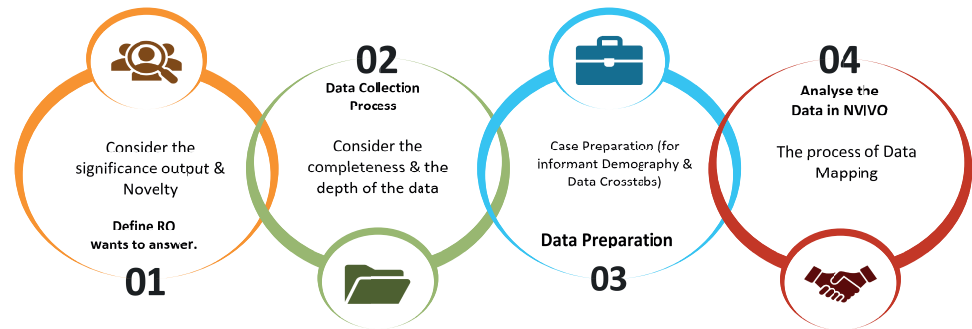
Education units or schools are encouraged to study the *Merdeka Belajar Curriculum* independently and in depth through the platform provided, introduction videos of the *Merdeka Belajar Curriculum*, and download guides on <https://guru.kemdikbud.go.id/> provided by the government (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, 2022b). One of the schools that has implemented the *Merdeka Belajar Curriculum* is a private high school X in Malang City. The school is a branch of the X foundation founded by Ki Hadjar Dewantara (Harnani, 2020). X High School is a special school at the upper secondary level. The characteristic of X High School is the cultivation of character and freedom in learning, both for students and teachers in learning (Jumiarti, 2023). This characteristic was later adapted by the Indonesian Minister of Education, Nadiem

Makarim as a *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, 2022b). Before being implemented, the government introduced and socialized the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum online through the platforms provided, resulting in various perceptions and disagreements in implementing it. In fact, many schools still have difficulty in understanding how to implement the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. Therefore, further observation is needed to find out how the realization of the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in educational units, especially at X High School in Malang City which is a branch of X founded by Ki Hadjar Dewantara. Therefore, this study aims to: (1) Know the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum; (2) Know the implementation 'Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila' (P5); (3) Knowing the impact of the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum; (4) Knowing the obstacles to the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum; (5) Knowing the school's expectations for the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum.

## 2. Methods

This research is qualitative research with a case study approach, which is carried out at one school location. The data collection method used is observation in the form of non-participatory observations and interviews. Non-participatory observation is carried out by observing learning activities and student activities at one of the private high schools in Malang City (X High School). Before conducting the interview, the observer has prepared a list of questions regarding the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum so that the information obtained is directed. In addition, during the interview process, it is assisted by a smartphone to record the voice so that no information is missed, and documentation is carried out. The interview was conducted together with several speakers, namely: The head of one of the private high schools in Malang City, the Coordinator of the Vice Principal. Vice principal for curriculum, and economics teacher. Data capture in this study was carried out for six months, this needs to be done until the data reaches a saturated level. While the analysis tool used uses the NVIVO 12 Plus application. The steps to perform data analysis using NVIVO 12 Plus consist of four steps, namely define RO wants to answer, data collection process, data preparation and analyses the data in NVIVO (Picture 1).

## 3. Result and Discussion



**Figure 1:** Phase of Data Analysis with NVIVO 12 Plus.

### 3.1. Profil Informan

One of the private high schools in Malang City that became an informant was one of the education units with a high school level in Bunulrejo, Blimbing District, Malang City, East Java. In carrying out its activities, X High School is under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Culture. X High School is based on character education, with an among system, upholding physical and mental independence for the sake of subtlety ethics and happiness of students. Prioritizing customs, culture, and life discipline, as well as being aware of the progress of science and technology. The high school teaching staff and educators have Master's and Bachelor of Education degrees. Learning at the high school was carried out on a full day. Within a week, learning is carried out for 5 days. The school has adequate learning facilities such as two-story classrooms, sports fields, garden gazebos, mosque, school cafeterias, cooperatives, hall rooms, and parking areas. This school prioritizes the nature of honing, loving, nurturing, for the growth and development of students in achieving their goals.

The vision of X high school is to become a school with science and technology insight, faith, and piety and noble character. To realize this vision, there are several missions as follows: (1) Creating a learning environment that is able to increase the sharpness of thoughts, feelings and feelings; (2) Fostering the learning interest of all school residents, (3) Fostering the development of passion and experience of cultural arts teachings; (4) Develop the passion and practice of religious teachings; (5) Carry out student education in an effort to instill ethical values; (6) Getting used to the attitude '*ing ngarsa sung tuladha, ing madya mangun karsa, tut wuri handayani*'. The demographics of informants who provide data can be seen in the following table.

Based on table 1 about the demographics of informants, it shows that the head of X High School is a male with an age of more than 45 years. Then the informants with the female gender are four people, namely the Coordinator of the Vice Principal, the Vice

TABLE 1: Demographics of Informants.

Position	Gender		Age			
	Men	Woman	30 -- 40 years	41 -- 45 years	>45 years	
High School Principal	√				√	
Vice Principal Coordinator		√			√	
Vice Principal for Curriculum		√	√			
Economics Teacher 1		√	√			
Economics Teacher 2		√		√		

Principal for Curriculum, the teacher of economics 1, and the teacher of economics 2. All female informants also have different ages, namely, the 45-year-old Vice Principal Coordinator, the Curriculum Vice Principal, and economics teacher 1 who is 0-40 years old, and the economics teacher 2 who is 41-45 years old.

TABLE 2: Hirearki Classification of Research Data.

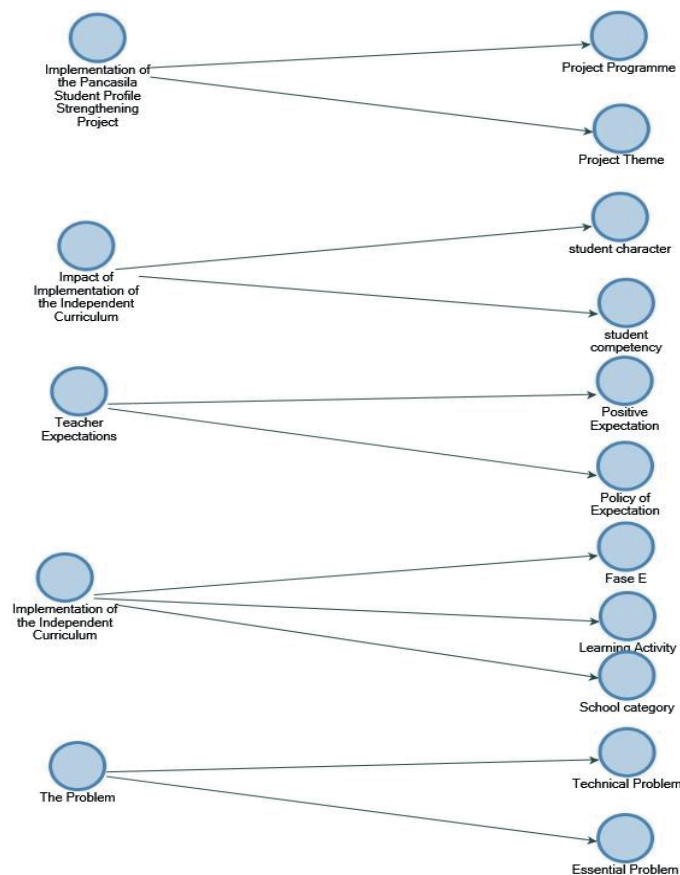
Codes	Number of coding references	Aggregate number of coding references	Number of items coded	Aggregate number of items coded
Nodes\\The Problem	7	7	1	1
Nodes\\Teacher Expectations	6	6	2	2
Nodes\\Implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project	6	6	2	2
Nodes\\Implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum	7	7	2	2
Nodes\\Impact of Implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum	6	6	2	2

Source: Interview results from informants

Meanwhile, based on table 2 about the classification of research data, the problem of implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in X High School is the most often discussed. The problems of the implementation include technical problems and essential problems. The technical problem experienced by X High School is about the availability of facilities and infrastructure that are not adequate, as well as good administrative synchrony. Then, for the essential problems experienced, there are related to the competence of teachers at X High School which still do not have the capabilities related to the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum, due to the age of teachers who are almost entering retirement. The negative stigma about the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum is learning from

teachers who think that this curriculum change, is very difficult and complex to learn and implement.

The implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in X High School is still categorized as a Phase E school, which is a school that implements the Merdeka curriculum only specifically for class X in the school. In addition, implementation in learning activities consists of the preparation of student projects in the first semester (1 project) and even semester (2 projects). The projects that have been carried out in the next semester are themed on sustainable lifestyles, as well as engineering and technology in the even semester. Furthermore, the last project is themed 'Build the soul and body'. The hope of the Independent Learning Curriculum that teachers want is that teachers can have the opportunity to become trainees on the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum, so that its implementation can run according to the guidelines and philosophy concepts of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum,



**Figure 2:** Classification of Information Case.

Based on picture 2 of the classification of case information, there were five cases obtained. The five cases, including the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum can be economic subjects, the implementation of the Pancasila youth profile

strengthening project, teachers' expectations about the implementation of economic learning with the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum, the impact of the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum, and the constraints of curriculum implementation.

TABLE 3: Research Case Code.

Code A	Code B
Nodes\\Teacher Expectations	Nodes\\Implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum
Nodes\\The Problem	Nodes\\Implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project
Nodes\\The Problem	Nodes\\Implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum
Nodes\\Teacher Expectations	Nodes\\Impact of Implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum
Nodes\\Implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project	Nodes\\Implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum
Nodes\\The Problem	Nodes\\Teacher Expectations
Nodes\\Implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project	Nodes\\Impact of Implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum
Nodes\\The Problem	Nodes\\Impact of Implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum
Nodes\\Teacher Expectations	Nodes\\Implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project
Nodes\\Implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum	Nodes\\Impact of Implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum

Based on table 3, about the research code, there are two classifications of codes, namely code A and code B, the coding is based on the time of information retrieval.

*Implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum*

Private high schools, which are informants of this research, have implemented the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum since the last semester of the 2022/2023 school year, meaning that the school has implemented it for one semester. The *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum is implemented specifically for class X, or in the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum called Phase E. In this school year, the number of students in Phase E High School is 7 people, consisting of 3 students and 4 students. Based on the results of interviews with Mrs. A and Mrs. B, it is known that X High School is still implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum is still limited to the implementation of 'Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila' (P5). Meanwhile, during the learning process, it still uses the 2013 curriculum.

Mrs.A: "About the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum here it has started to run well, yes, but in X High School itself the *Merdeka* curriculum is only still based on the P5 project where P5 is a project to strengthen the *Pancasila* profile,



now here we have organized a project where it was carried out in the first semester yesterday semester 1 where we took the theme of a sustainable lifestyle.”

Mrs. B: “It is carried out on a 3-hour basis in social studies subjects, so the lessons remain solely sociology of geography and others. That means it’s economy 3, because this is 3 hours per week, yes it’s here like making promissory notes according to technical guidelines.”

The selection of the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum for the Independent Learning category is caused by several things, namely:

1. School readiness, where *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum is not ready to implement the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. Mr. AP as the principal emphasized that the school does not have sufficient costs to implement the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum as a whole. This cost is needed to organize training on the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum independently, prepare facilities and infrastructure, and procure books as learning resources.
2. The lack of socialization from the local Education Office has resulted in many teachers and even schools understanding how the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum should be implemented. Mrs. A and Mrs. B said that until now there has been no socialization or *workshop* on the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum from the local Education Office. Socialization related to the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum (IKM) can only be obtained through the independent learning platform, meaning that socialization is carried out online and asynchronously. Teachers can only watch video shows and study pocketbooks and existing regulations, so teachers do not have access to ask questions or differences in perceptions in understanding the socialization material. Coupled with other teacher administrative tasks that cause teachers to witness socialization through the platform accompanied by doing other jobs. As a result, teachers do not understand the intent and content of the IKM guidelines as intended by the Minister of Education and Culture, Mr. Nadhiem Makarim.
3. Limited teaching staff. The implementation of an independent curriculum requires educators who are literate in technology, while many educators at X High School Malang are elderly, or approaching retirement.

Furthermore, regarding the opinions of teachers on the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum, teachers of X High School in Malang have different views. Mrs. A and Mrs. B are happy and greatly facilitated by the existence of this *Merdeka*

*Belajar* Curriculum, because all the learning tools needed, such as Teaching Modules, Books, Learning Objectives Flow, etc., are available on the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum platform. The teacher only needs to download the device and make modifications or adjust to the school conditions and the characteristics of the students. However, in contrast to Mrs. C who argues that the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum is fun but adds to the burden of making the P5 report card. This is supported by the opinion of class X students who stated that they felt happy and enthusiastic to follow the learning and make products for P5. However, on the other hand they also feel tired from having to work on new loads outside of academic activities.

Mrs.C: "Yes, because here also sometimes a teacher who is the coordinator of P5 is still unable to provide what is called a really appropriate direction for teachers. Being a teacher here is also sometimes still confusing, said Mr. this is not this so it seems that it is still allocated time also continues to be the directions that are also still confused as well as the obstacles. Well, for the suggestion, yes, maybe you can consider it again continue."

From the results of the interview above, it can be concluded that schools are still implementing the parts and principles of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum, meaning that schools that only apply some parts and principles of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum without replacing the previous curriculum are categorized as schools that '*Mandiri Belajar*' (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2020b), Because the government has given freedom to the education unit in the implementation of the curriculum which is adjusted to the needs and ownership of supporting resources for the implementation of existing education (Purwanti, 2021; (Adrianus Sihombing et al., 2021).

#### *Implementation of 'Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila'(Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project)*

Because X High School still implements the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in the '*Merdeka Belajar*' category, and only in the form of implementing P5, observations and interviews focus on P5 activities. Under the regulations, within a period of one year, students must implement or manufacture three products on P5. The implementation of P5 is divided into two semesters, namely 1 product in the first semester and 2 products in the even semester. In X High School, P5 activities are carried out for one week, namely in the last week of each month. The implementation of P5 for the first period, namely in the even semester, takes the theme "Sustainable Lifestyle". The result is a work to promote sustainable lifestyles to school residents. The promotion by the students is packaged in an interesting art offering.

Mrs. C: "Naah, if me, in the project provide criteria in the group project collection mechanism, such as elements of innovation, originality, and creativity."

In even semesters, students must carry out two P5 activities. The theme taken was "Engineering and Technology". The students took the initiative to make a school profile video. The video will then be used to promote high school X to the wider community to be better known. The next project, students take the theme "Build the Soul and the Body". The implementation of the project here emphasizes more on the benefits that students will get in their understanding of the five precepts in Pancasila, with the hope that after implementing the project, students can implement it consciously in everyday life. As is known, cultivating an attitude to be able to respect everyone and tolerance for the environment has been further eroded by cultural changes and rapid technological developments (Inglehart, 2020). Therefore, the emergence of projects in strengthening student profiles based on the principle of *Pancasila* in the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum is a strategic step in bringing up a tolerant and civilized attitude (Wasimin, 2022).

#### *Impact of Merdeka Belajar Curriculum Implementation*

The ideal of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum is to produce graduates who are competent and have a Pancasila student profile. This is realized through project-based learning, namely the *Pancasila* Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), there are six Pancasila Student profiles that students must have, namely 1) Faith, piety to God, and noble character; 2) Independent; 3) Global diversity; 4) Working together; 5) Creative; and 6) Critical reasoning (Satria et al., 2021). The impact of the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum can already be felt by teachers, one of which is in X High School. Although it is only in the form of implementing P5, teachers have felt the difference in competence and belonging to 10 grade (Phase E) students, with 11 grade and 12 grade students who are still using the 2013 curriculum. Based on the results of interviews with Ibu A and Ibu B, these students who are class X have a high level of creativity. This is evidenced by student initiatives in compiling and planning P5. The students also have independence and a high attitude of mutual aid. The independence and cooperation of students can be seen from their determination and hard work in preparing for the performance of the art offerings in the framework of the first P5 theme in the last semester. Even though there are only 7 people, they can present a beautiful and interesting masterpiece.

The impact is also felt by teachers in economic learning. Although the learning activities are still using the 2013 curriculum, Mrs. C and Mrs. D as economics teachers have felt the positive impact.

Mrs.D: “Hmmm... So, with the innovation of learning activities, student competence has increased. Usually, I tell them to make a mini vlog about the cashless payment procedure, their ability to present in front of the class, with them doing e-assessments, making students’ competencies better and not getting bored.”

The impact felt in economic learning is learning independence and high student sensitivity, where students can quickly grasp the teacher’s explanations, as well as being able to learn independently (Tedjokoesoemo et al., 2021). In addition, the impact that can be felt by teachers in implementing the curriculum to learn during the learning process is that the teacher will act as a facilitator, where the teacher helps and guides students when they experience learning difficulties (Juli Iswanto, 2022), This means that in the learning process, the teacher is no longer the main actor in the learning process.

#### *Obstacles of Merdeka Belajar Curriculum Implementation*

The implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum is expected to be implemented by all schools in Indonesia by 2024 (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2020c). However, until 2023, there are still many schools that have difficulty implementing it. One of them is as experienced by X High School. High School which is based on the ‘Pamong’ system is still experiencing problems in its implementation. Based on the results of the interview, it can be concluded that the obstacles experienced, including:

1. Cost, which includes the cost of providing facilities and infrastructure as well as books or modules as student learning resources.
2. Negative stigma, where teachers are of the view that the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum is very complex and difficult to implement, so teachers are less interested in learning it further.
3. The low socialization of the relevant agencies results in teachers having difficulties and not understanding the essence of the Independent Curriculum.
4. The age of teachers who are approaching retirement is also an obstacle, where these teachers do not want to learn more because they are approaching retirement.
5. The misalignment of the administrative system, where when the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum began to be socialized and implemented, but the education office had not provided an e-report card in accordance with the assessment of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. As a result, teachers at SMA X chose to postpone the full

implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum, from Independent Learning to Independent Change.

Mrs.D: “There is also LKPD or own or worksheet based as you mentioned earlier. If I’m LKS-based okay. The problem is, mom, yes, this is still new, including KM. Now for mom as an economics teacher, what are the obstacles in implementing it that, if possible, from me because sometimes, especially in semester 2, we will cut.”

Mrs B: “During the fasting and holiday moments the time was getting tighter, and many materials actually had to be taught in grade 10. Especially since the 10th grade for this semester, there are three chapters, this has just finished one and a half chapters, so we must chase time, because with the P5 project, this is also time-consuming. If 1 month is just one full week, then later in the next month, there is also still full. Which is like the obstacle I think we ourselves are a bit overwhelmed.”

The obstacles experienced by schools are also in accordance with the results of research which reveals that in the implementation of this curriculum is still constrained by program adjustments from the previous curriculum (Alawi et al., 2022) and inadequate facilities and infrastructure used to facilitate student activities (Mujab et al., 2023).

#### *Teachers’ Expectations of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum Implementation*

Based on the interview results, policymakers in schools have a positive view of the Independent Curriculum. Hopefully, the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum can be implemented as the guidelines and the true essence. The implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum itself is in line with the philosophical foundation of X High School which is a branch of the X Foundation founded by Ki Hajar Dewantara. In order to realize these expectations, the initial step is to thoroughly understand the essence and procedures for implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum, so that the closest hope of teachers at SMA X Malang City is to obtain socialization and training / workshops from the Education Office or competent parties. Thus, in the new school year 2023/2024, SMA X can fully implement the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum.

Mr.A:” Because there really isn’t really a proper direction from the relevant agencies, or what the term is like a seminar or training from the government. Later it was implemented by their respective schools. Therefore, we hope that there will need to be seminars and mini workshops from related agencies or experts on the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum.”

Teachers’ expectations for the implementation of the learning curriculum are a positive response from users of the curriculum, so that cooperation between all parties is needed so that the obstacles to the implementation of this independent learning

curriculum can be minimized (Ingthias et al., 2022). Thus, curriculum changes that have been carried out due to the need for an educational process that considers the situation and demands for the rapid development of the quality of human resources, are no longer an obstacle that can slow down changes in the quality of better human resources (Fensham, 2022).

## 4. Conclusions

Based on the presentation of the observations above, conclusions can be drawn, namely the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum at X High School in Malang has started since the last semester of the 2022/2023 school year. Such implementations are limited to *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5)* so it is categorized as an '*Mandiri Belajar*' school. Although it is still limited to the implementation of P5, the impact can already be felt by teachers, especially in economics subjects, where students have an independent, creative, and cooperative attitude. The obstacles experienced by X High School in implementing the Independent Curriculum include costs, negative stigma of teachers, lack of socialization, the age of teachers approaching retirement, and the misalignment of the administrative system. It is hoped that the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum can be implemented in the new school year 2023/2024 and bring a greater positive impact on the progress of Indonesian education.

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