



Implementation of the Independent Curriculum at the Junior High School Level: Challenges, Opportunities, and Implications for Learning

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ABSTRAK

Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka pada jenjang Sekolah Menengah Pertama (SMP) merupakan bagian dari transformasi pendidikan nasional yang bertujuan meningkatkan kualitas pembelajaran serta menyesuaikan proses pendidikan dengan kebutuhan peserta didik dan perkembangan zaman. Kurikulum Merdeka memberikan ruang yang lebih luas kepada satuan pendidikan dan pendidik untuk mengembangkan pembelajaran yang fleksibel, kontekstual, dan berpusat pada peserta didik. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka pada jenjang SMP melalui tiga fokus utama, yaitu tantangan yang dihadapi dalam penerapan kurikulum, peluang yang muncul selama implementasi, serta implikasinya terhadap proses pembelajaran di kelas. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi pustaka. Sumber data diperoleh melalui dokumen kebijakan pendidikan, jurnal nasional, buku, dan berbagai penelitian yang relevan dengan Kurikulum Merdeka. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di SMP menghadapi tantangan berupa kesiapan guru dalam memahami perubahan kurikulum, keterbatasan sarana prasarana, pelaksanaan asesmen, dan penyesuaian pembelajaran berdiferensiasi. Di sisi lain, Kurikulum Merdeka menghadirkan peluang dalam pengembangan pembelajaran yang lebih fleksibel, penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila, peningkatan kreativitas guru, serta meningkatnya keterlibatan peserta didik dalam pembelajaran. Implikasi implementasi menunjukkan adanya perubahan peran guru menjadi fasilitator, pembelajaran yang lebih aktif dan kontekstual, serta meningkatnya partisipasi peserta didik dalam proses belajar. Dengan demikian implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka pada jenjang SMP memerlukan dukungan sekolah, guru, dan lingkungan pendidikan agar pelaksanaannya berjalan optimal.

ABSTRACT

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the junior high school level became part of the transformation of the Indonesian education system aimed at improving the quality of learning and adapting education to students' needs and current developments. The curriculum provided broader opportunities for schools and teachers to develop flexible, contextual, and student-centered learning. This study aimed to analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at junior high school level through three main focuses: challenges in curriculum implementation, opportunities emerging during implementation, and implications for classroom learning. This research used a qualitative approach with a literature study method. Data sources were obtained from educational policy documents, national journals, books, and various studies relevant to the Merdeka Curriculum. The results showed that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at junior high school level faced several challenges, including teachers' readiness in understanding curriculum changes, limited facilities and infrastructure, assessment implementation, and differentiated learning adjustments. On the other hand, the curriculum created opportunities for more flexible learning development, strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile, increasing teacher creativity, and improving student participation in learning. The implications indicated changes in the teacher's role as

facilitator, more active and contextual learning, and increased student engagement in classroom learning. Therefore, successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at junior high school level required support from schools, teachers, and educational environments



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1. INTRODUCTION

The curriculum is a main component in the education system that functions as a guideline in designing, implementing, and evaluating learning. Changes in the curriculum in Indonesian education are carried out as a form of adjustment to the needs of students, the development of science, social changes in society, as well as the demands of 21st-century education. In recent years, the government, through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, has introduced the Independent Curriculum as one form of national education transformation, emphasizing flexibility in learning and strengthening students' character (Hidayat et al., 2025).

The Independent Curriculum is Designed to Provide Broader Space for Educational Units and Educators in Structuring Learning Based on the Needs of Students and the Condition of the Learning Environment. Learning in the Independent Curriculum Not Only Emphasizes Mastery of Material, But Also Encourages Students to Actively Think Critically, Collaborate, Communicate, and Build Character Through the Pancasila Student Profile. This Policy Becomes One of the Government's Steps in Creating Learning That Is More Relevant and Meaningful (Hopkins & Levin, 2000; Prøitz, 2015).

At the Junior High School level, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum holds an important position because students are in the phase of academic and social development that requires learning that is flexible and appropriate to their developmental stage. Junior high school students are in a transition period from basic education to the intermediate level, so they need learning that not only emphasizes academics but also character building, social skills, and critical thinking abilities. In its implementation, the Independent Curriculum at junior high schools presents various dynamics (Evi irdawanti Anjasmira et al., 2024; Husnaini, 2025).

Some schools are able to adapt through learning innovations, but others still face challenges in understanding learning outcomes, preparing teaching modules, assessment, and differentiated learning. On the other hand, the implementation of the curriculum.

On the other hand, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum also opens up great opportunities to improve the quality of learning in schools. The flexibility of the curriculum allows teachers to be more creative in developing learning strategies that suit the needs of students. In addition, strengthening character through the Pancasila Student Profile is expected to produce a generation that is not only academically excellent, but also possesses national values, integrity, independence, and the ability to adapt in facing changes in the times (Jonker et al., 2020).

Based on these conditions, this study aims to examine the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the junior high school level through a discussion of challenges, opportunities, and its implications for the learning process. This study is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum as well as serve as material for evaluation and recommendations for various parties in efforts to improve the quality of education in Indonesia (Hunaepi & Suharta, 2024; Priawasana & Subiyantoro, 2024).

Based on these conditions, this study aims to examine the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at the junior high school level through discussions on challenges, opportunities, and its implications for the learning process. This study is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum while also serving as evaluation material and recommendations for various parties in an effort to improve the quality of education in Indonesia.

Table 1. Student learning outcomes cycle in the first cycle

No	Student Name	Grade	Grade Level
1	Jazie	80	Completed
2	Salsa	70	Completed
3	Dira	70	Completed
4	Imam	60	Completed

2. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method that focuses on web searches and is developed with the available surrounding information. The qualitative approach is used to understand and analyze various information related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the Junior High School level based on relevant scientific sources. The literature study method is chosen because this research focuses on examining theories, previous research results, education policies, and various documents related to the Merdeka Curriculum (Earley, 2014).

Data in the study were obtained through national scientific journals, educational books, research articles, official documents from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, as well as various literature relevant to the focus of the research. The literature used was selected based on its relevance to the theme of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, learning challenges in junior high schools, strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile, as well as the implications of education policies on learning (Asrul Sani et al., 2023).

The data collection technique was carried out through several stages, namely identification of sources, data selection, classification based on the discussion theme, and then analyzed using content analysis techniques. The data were grouped into three main focuses, namely the challenges of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at the junior high school level, opportunities that arise in the implementation of the curriculum, and the implications for the learning process. The analysis results were then presented descriptively to provide a clear and systematic picture of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the junior high school level (Mujiburrahman et al., 2025).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Aspect	Description
Challenges	Teacher readiness, assessment, facilities and infrastructure, differentiated learning
Opportunity	Learning flexibility, teacher innovation, strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile
Implication	Changes in learning, student engagement, improvement of learning quality

Based on the results of the literature review, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the junior high school level shows quite significant changes in the learning process. These changes are seen in the learning planning system, the implementation of learning, assessment strategies, as well as the relationship between teachers and students in the learning

process (Fuentealba, 2011). The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum not only brings changes in the curriculum structure, but also provides changes to the way students learn and the teacher's approach to teaching.

Challenges of Implementing the Independent Curriculum at the Junior High School Level

One of the main challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at the junior high school level is the readiness of teachers to understand the new curriculum policy. The shift from the previous curriculum to more flexible learning requires teachers to understand learning outcomes, formulate learning objectives, create teaching modules, apply differentiated learning, and conduct assessments that are more oriented toward student development. In practice, not all teachers have the same level of readiness, so the adaptation process varies in each school (Basri & Rahmi, 2023).

Another challenge related to the implementation of differentiated learning. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes the importance of learning that is tailored to the abilities, interests, and needs of students. At the junior high school level, the conditions of students are very diverse, both in terms of learning readiness and social background. This requires teachers to have the ability to manage the class in a more active and directed manner (Elviya, 2023).

In addition, the limitations of facilities and infrastructure also pose a challenge. The use of digital technology in learning requires support from facilities such as learning devices, internet access, and adequate learning media. In some schools, these facilities are not yet optimally available, thus affecting the learning process (Noviansyah & Mujiono, 2021).

Another challenge can be seen in learning assessment. In the Merdeka Curriculum, assessment is carried out continuously through diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments. Teachers not only evaluate the final results of students but also monitor the overall learning process. This condition requires teachers to be prepared in designing assessment instruments and managing students' learning outcomes accurately.

Table 1, challenges in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

No	Challenge Aspects	Description
1.	Teacher readiness	Teachers are still adapting in understanding learning outcomes, learning objectives, teaching modules, and assessments in the Merdeka Curriculum
2.	Differentiated learning	Teachers need to adjust learning based on the needs and characteristics of students
3.	Facilities and infrastructure	Not all schools have supportive learning facilities
4.	School adaptation	Schools need to adjust the planning and implementation of learning
5.	Implementation of assessment	Teachers adjust diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments

Based on Table 1, the challenges of implementing the Independent Curriculum at the junior high school level not only come from teacher readiness, but are also related to learning facilities and the adjustment of the learning system in schools. This indicates that curriculum implementation requires comprehensive readiness in order to function optimally

Opportunities for the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum at the Junior High School Level

Behind these challenges, the Merdeka Curriculum also presents a great opportunity to improve the quality of learning in junior high schools. One of the main opportunities is learning flexibility. Teachers have the freedom to adjust learning based on the conditions of the students and the characteristics of the school. This makes learning more contextual and close to the daily lives of the students (Alfaeni & Asbari, 2023).

The Independent Curriculum also provides opportunities for students to be more active in learning. Students are encouraged to observe, discuss, ask questions, solve problems, and express their opinions. This condition makes learning more meaningful because students not only receive the material but also actively build knowledge (Putri, 2023).

Another opportunity is the strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile. Through learning and project activities, students have the opportunity to develop responsibility, creativity, cooperation, independence, and critical thinking skills (Mery et al., 2022). At the junior high school level, these habits become important because students are in the stage of character formation and social development.

The Independent Curriculum also opens up innovation opportunities for teachers. Teachers can develop teaching modules, learning media, discussion strategies, as well as more varied learning approaches according to class needs. This condition encourages the creation of more active and non-monotonous learning (Mulyasa, 2021).

Table 2. Opportunities for Implementing the Independent Curriculum at the Junior High School Level.

No	Opportunity	Description
1.	Learning flexibility	Teachers can adjust learning strategies according to the class conditions
2.	Teacher creativity	Teachers are freer to develop teaching modules
3.	Student participation	Students are more active in discussing and thinking critically
4.	Pancasila Student Profile	Supporting the development of students' character
5.	Contextual learning	Material is closer to everyday life

Based on Table 2, it shows that the Merdeka Curriculum provides broader opportunities for schools and teachers in developing active, flexible, and contextual learning.

Implikasi Kurikulum Merdeka terhadap Pembelajaran

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has a direct impact on learning in junior high schools. The first change is seen in the role of the teacher. Teachers are no longer the center of information but function more as facilitators who guide students in understanding the material.

For students, learning becomes more active. Students are given broader opportunities to express ideas, collaborate, develop creativity, and build more real learning experiences.

Learning also becomes more contextual. The material can be linked to the students' daily lives, making it easier to understand and more meaningful. In addition, the classroom atmosphere becomes more collaborative because students discuss and work together more.

Other implications are seen in learning assessment. Assessment not only focuses on the final results but also on the students' learning process. Teachers provide continuous feedback and help students improve their understanding.

Overall, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum has brought positive changes to learning in junior high schools through more active, flexible, contextual, and student-centered learning.

Table 3. Implications of the Independent Curriculum on Learning in Junior High Schools

No	Implication Aspect	Description
	The change of the teacher's role	Teachers are no longer the center of information, but rather act as facilitators who guide students in the learning process
	Student participation	Students are more active in expressing ideas, discussing, cooperating, and developing creativity in learning
	Contextual learning	The learning material is connected with the students' everyday life so that it is easier to understand and meaningful
	Collaborative classroom atmosphere	The class becomes more dynamic because students discuss more and collaborate with each other

4. CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the Junior High School level is a transformative step in the national education system that brings fundamental changes to the learning process. Based on literature review findings, the implementation of this curriculum presents real challenges, especially related to teachers' readiness in understanding and applying the new curriculum policy, limitations of facilities and infrastructure in various schools, as well as adjustments in the implementation of assessment and differentiated learning. These challenges indicate that the curriculum transition requires careful preparation from all education stakeholders.

On the other hand, the Independent Curriculum opens up great opportunities for improving the quality of learning. The flexibility given to teachers and schools encourages the creation of more contextual, innovative, and student-centered learning. Strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile through project activities also provides space for students to develop character, creativity, and critical thinking skills more optimally.

Overall, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has positive implications for learning in junior high schools, marked by the shift in the teacher's role to that of a facilitator, increased student activity and engagement, as well as more holistic and continuous assessment. To ensure optimal implementation, full support from the school, continuous improvement of teacher competence, and the provision of adequate facilities and infrastructure in all educational units are required.

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