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School Management in the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum: Challenges and Implications for Student Learning Outcomes and Character Development

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Abstract

The Merdeka Curriculum is a national education policy that grants greater autonomy to schools in designing learning processes aligned with students' needs, interests, and characteristics. Its implementation requires fundamental changes not only in classroom practices but also in school management and governance. This study aims to analyze the challenges of school management in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and to examine its implications for student learning outcomes and character development. The research employed a literature review method by analyzing scholarly books, national journal articles, and relevant educational policy documents. Data were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach through organizing, reducing, and synthesizing findings from previous studies. The results indicate that major challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum include teachers' readiness in developing instructional planning and learning modules, the shift of teachers' roles from knowledge transmitters to learning facilitators, the management of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), the integration of educational technology, and limitations in infrastructure and managerial support. Nevertheless, the Merdeka Curriculum has significant potential to enhance students' motivation, 21st-century skills, and character development when supported by effective school leadership, collaborative school culture, and sustainable evaluation systems. Therefore, the success of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation largely depends on the quality of school management in coordinating resources, fostering professional capacity, and managing curriculum change in an adaptive and sustainable manner.

Kata Kunci:

Kurikulum Merdeka; Manajemen Sekolah; Manajemen Kurikulum; Hasil Belajar; Pendidikan Karakter.

Abstrak

Kurikulum Merdeka merupakan kebijakan pendidikan nasional yang memberikan keleluasaan kepada satuan pendidikan dalam merancang pembelajaran yang berorientasi pada kebutuhan, minat, dan karakteristik peserta didik. Implementasi kurikulum ini menuntut perubahan mendasar tidak hanya dalam praktik pembelajaran di kelas, tetapi juga dalam manajemen dan tata kelola sekolah. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis tantangan manajemen sekolah dalam penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka serta implikasinya terhadap hasil belajar dan penguatan karakter peserta didik. Metode penelitian yang

digunakan adalah studi kepustakaan dengan menelaah buku ilmiah, artikel jurnal nasional, dan dokumen kebijakan pendidikan yang relevan. Data dianalisis secara deskriptif kualitatif melalui proses pengorganisasian, reduksi, dan sintesis temuan penelitian sebelumnya. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa tantangan utama dalam implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka meliputi kesiapan guru dalam menyusun perangkat ajar, perubahan peran guru menjadi fasilitator pembelajaran, pengelolaan Proyek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5), pemanfaatan teknologi pembelajaran, serta keterbatasan sarana prasarana dan dukungan manajerial sekolah. Meskipun demikian, Kurikulum Merdeka memiliki potensi besar dalam meningkatkan motivasi belajar, keterampilan abad ke-21, serta penguatan karakter peserta didik apabila didukung oleh kepemimpinan sekolah yang efektif, budaya kolaboratif, dan sistem evaluasi yang berkelanjutan. Dengan demikian, keberhasilan penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka sangat bergantung pada kualitas manajemen sekolah dalam mengoordinasikan sumber daya, meningkatkan profesionalisme guru, dan mengelola perubahan kurikulum secara adaptif dan berkelanjutan.

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INTRODUCTION

The Merdeka Curriculum has been implemented nationally at every level of education, from early childhood education to secondary school. This implementation is based on the Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology Number 12 of 2024 concerning Curriculum for Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, and Secondary Education.

In this curriculum, educators are given the freedom to choose teaching materials and tools so that the learning process can be aligned with students' interests and needs. However, the successful implementation of this curriculum requires adaptive and adequately competent teachers. This is due to the direct relationship between the ability of the teacher and the achievement and quality of student learning outcomes.

To support this, every teacher is required to master four types of competencies, namely: pedagogical (ability to manage learning), personality (being a role model), social (ability to interact), and professional (comprehensive mastery of material) (Annisa Alfath et al., 2022). The role of the principal is a key factor in developing teacher competence, which includes functions as an educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, work climate creator, and innovator (Norniati, 2023).

The official implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in 2024 is predicted to shift the teaching paradigm and practices. This curriculum was born in response to the development of science and technology and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Its presence creates its own challenges for teachers, including the demand for time to design lessons that are creative, innovative, and spark student interest every day (Hartawati & Karim, 2024).

At the institutional level, the Merdeka Curriculum demands a fundamental transformation in school management. Schools no longer just carry out administrative tasks of the curriculum, but

must also be able to design learning, increase teacher capacity, and create an ecosystem that supports differentiated and project-based learning. Thus, the success of this curriculum is highly dependent on the effectiveness of school governance (Mulyasa, 2017). School management plays a strategic role in coordinating all resources, from planning, teacher development, curriculum management, to the formation of a positive school culture.

However, the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum at the practical level still faces various managerial obstacles. These challenges include the limited conceptual understanding of school principals and teachers, the readiness of human resources, the adjustment of teaching tools, and the transformation of work culture in education units (Sagala, 2018). In addition, limited infrastructure and uneven support also hinder the optimization of curriculum implementation (Rusman, 2021).

Since the Merdeka Curriculum policy was gradually implemented at all levels of Indonesian education, various studies have shown that curriculum changes not only have an impact on classroom learning practices, but also require significant changes in school management. As a curriculum that gives educational units the flexibility to develop contextual and student needs-based learning, the Merdeka Curriculum encourages the role of school management to take a more active role in planning, organizing, controlling, and evaluating the learning process according to the context of their respective schools (Ragil Nazar et al., 2024).

However, various studies at the primary and secondary school levels have found that managerial challenges are still a major obstacle in implementing this policy. Some schools experience difficulties in preparing human resources, including the understanding of the curriculum by teachers and principals, as well as the readiness of adequate learning facilities, this condition affects the school's ability to optimally implement the Merdeka Curriculum (Seftiani et al., n.d.) (Seftiani et al., n.d.).

In addition, other studies have shown that school management must also be able to prepare response strategies to the demands of curriculum flexibility such as the use of differentiated learning and the implementation of projects to strengthen the Pancasila learner profile, which requires the understanding of teachers and principals in designing appropriate learning programs (Firza et al., 2025)

These conditions indicate that the success of the Merdeka Curriculum is highly dependent on the quality of school governance, not only the teacher's understanding of teaching materials but also the principal's managerial ability to mobilize all stakeholders to support learning success. Therefore, a study of school management challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is important to provide a comprehensive understanding of the obstacles faced and the improvement strategies needed.

In addition to policy and managerial aspects, the Merdeka Curriculum also requires a paradigm shift in learning evaluation at the school level. The assessment system is no longer oriented towards final results alone, but emphasizes formative, authentic, and continuous assessment to monitor the development of students' competencies comprehensively. This change requires the readiness of school management in developing an internal evaluation system, providing relevant assessment instruments, and building a reflective culture among teachers so that the assessment results can be used as the basis for continuous learning improvement (Mardapi, 2017). Without the support of a planned and coordinated evaluation system, the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum has the potential to run inconsistently between classes and between educational units.

At the same time, the development of digital technology and the social dynamics of society also strengthen the urgency of implementing Merdeka Curriculum adaptively. Digital transformation in education requires schools to integrate technology as part of learning strategies

and curriculum management. However, various studies show that the teacher digital literacy gap and limited technological infrastructure are still the main challenges, especially in schools in the regions (Suryadi, 2019). This condition places school management in a strategic position to design policies for developing teacher capacity, optimizing learning facilities, and sustainable use of technology.

Furthermore, Merdeka Curriculum also has implications for strengthening national character and values through the Pancasila Student Profile. The implementation of these values cannot be separated from the role of school management in building an inclusive, collaborative, and meaningful learning-oriented school culture. According to Sudrajat, the success of character education is strongly influenced by the consistency of school policies, the exemplary behavior of principals and teachers, and the involvement of all school members in the education process. Therefore, school management does not only function as an administrative manager, but also as a director of vision, values and educational culture (Sudrajat, 2020).

Based on the description above, this study aims to analyze and describe the various challenges of school management in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The results of the study are expected to provide an in-depth understanding of effective school governance to support the curriculum, as well as become reference material for schools and stakeholders in the education sector.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a literature review design to examine school management challenges in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The literature review method was selected because it allows for a comprehensive understanding of conceptual frameworks, empirical findings, and policy perspectives related to curriculum management and educational reform. By synthesizing findings from various scholarly sources, this study aimed to construct an in-depth analysis of how school management practices influence the effectiveness of Merdeka Curriculum implementation, particularly in relation to learning outcomes and character development of students.

The data sources used in this study consisted of academic books, peer-reviewed national journal articles, and official government policy documents relevant to the Merdeka Curriculum and school management. The selection of literature was conducted through a systematic search process using keywords such as *Merdeka Curriculum*, *school management*, *curriculum management*, *learning outcomes*, and *character education*. Sources were selected based on their relevance, credibility, and publication recency to ensure that the analysis reflected current educational policies and practices in Indonesia. Only sources that directly discussed curriculum implementation, management challenges, and educational outcomes at the school level were included in this review.

Data collection was carried out by organizing and documenting selected literature according to thematic relevance. Each source was carefully read and reviewed to identify key concepts, theoretical perspectives, and empirical findings related to the management of the Merdeka Curriculum. Important information from each source was recorded in analytical notes, which facilitated the comparison of ideas and identification of recurring patterns across studies. This process enabled the researcher to develop a structured understanding of the major managerial issues and implementation strategies reported in previous research.

The data analysis process employed a qualitative descriptive-analytical technique. The collected data were analyzed through stages of data reduction, data organization, and data synthesis. During data reduction, irrelevant or overlapping information was eliminated, while essential findings were categorized into key themes such as teacher readiness, leadership and school management, instructional planning, implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile

Strengthening Project (P5), and the use of educational technology. Subsequently, the organized data were synthesized to establish relationships between school management practices and the outcomes of Merdeka Curriculum implementation, allowing for a coherent interpretation of the findings.

To enhance the validity and reliability of the analysis, triangulation was applied by comparing findings from different types of sources, including theoretical literature, empirical studies, and policy documents. This approach helped ensure consistency and minimize potential bias in interpreting the data. The results of this literature review were then used to draw conclusions regarding effective school management strategies and to provide recommendations for improving the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in schools. Overall, this methodological approach enabled a comprehensive and systematic examination of school management challenges and their implications within the context of educational reform.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Merdeka Curriculum was officially launched through Permendikbudristek Number 12 of 2024, which guides its implementation in all educational units along with provisions for the transition period. This curriculum focuses on developing student competencies that are aligned with the Pancasila Learner Profile, through a flexible and contextual approach. In general, this curriculum is a national framework designed to form competent and complete Pancasila learners, using the Deep Learning approach. The basis is to create an education that liberates, humanizes, and ennobles learners, so that it is not only centered on cognitive aspects but also on the character building of learners (Zainuri & Zulfi, n.d.). This curriculum integrates the educational thoughts of Ki Hajar Dewantara and K.H. Ahmad Dahlan with modern educational theories, providing flexibility for education units to innovate and develop the potential of teachers, schools and students (Maulidia et al., 2023). The goal is to develop eight dimensions of the learner profile: faith, citizenship, critical reasoning, creativity, collaboration, independence, health, and communication.

The curriculum structure is built on three main pillars:

1. Intracurricular: Academic learning based on Learning Outcomes, which are a refinement of Basic Competencies, in the form of a holistic narrative (Maulidia et al., 2023).
2. Co-curricular: Activities such as the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) which aims to strengthen the student profile. P5 is allocated 20 to 30% time and is theme-based, not learning outcomes (Ansari, 2022).
3. Extracurricular: Development of students' talents and interests.

The Merdeka Curriculum is based on the principles of flexibility, focus on essence, and strengthening character (Ansari, 2022). Learning is designed to be meaningful, fun, and relevant to the context of life, with formative and authentic assessments to measure the development of student competencies (Lestari et al., 2023).

In addition to the curriculum basis as stipulated in Permendikbudristek Number 12 of 2024, Permendikdasmen Number 13 of 2025 also provides reinforcement for the direction and implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum without replacing the existing curriculum. This Permendikdasmen emphasizes that there is no change in the name or structure of the national curriculum. Merdeka Curriculum and 2013 Curriculum remain the basis for managing learning in educational units according to the readiness of each school. This regulation focuses more on strengthening the deep learning approach that encourages students not only to memorize material, but to understand concepts thoroughly, think critically, and connect knowledge with real life contexts.

In this Permendikdasmen there is also an affirmation of the eight dimensions of the graduate profile, which is a development of the Pancasila Student Profile framework to strengthen student character and competency achievements, as well as adjustments to cocurricular activities that are more flexible and integrative with main learning. In addition, the addition of elective subjects such as Coding and Artificial Intelligence starting in the 2025/2026 school year is part of the effort to provide students with 21st century skills in facing digital challenges and technological developments.

Thus, although the general structure of Merdeka Curriculum is maintained, Permendikdasmen 13 Year 2025 strengthens the direction of implementation through a more in-depth learning approach, development of graduate profiles, and adaptation of learning content that is relevant to the needs of the times. This affirmation expands the space for schools to apply curriculum principles in a more contextual and responsive manner to the dynamics of students and the educational environment.

A. Implementation and Challenges in Curriculum Management at the School Level

1. Planning and Development of Teaching Tools: With Merdeka Curriculum, school administration becomes simpler for teachers

Teachers no longer prepare complex Lesson Plans (RPP), but instead, Teachers prepare simple but essential Learning Paths and Learning Objectives, and Teaching Modules (Maulidia et al., 2023). Although teacher administration is simplified, such as replacing lesson plans with Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran (ATP) and Teaching Modules, many teachers experience difficulties in analyzing learning outcomes, formulating learning objectives, and preparing teaching tools (Lestari et al., 2023). Keterbatasan Limited facilities and digital literacy also hamper the development of teaching materials (Ansari, 2022).

2. Implementation of Learning: Shifting Teacher Roles and New Approaches

The Merdeka Curriculum shifts the role of teachers from information providers to facilitators who create a collaborative and supportive learning environment. Teachers are required to apply different learning methods and must be learner-centered, adjusting to the needs, interests and learning styles of each student. However, the transition process is not easy. Many teachers are still accustomed to conventional methods such as lectures, so it takes time to adapt and change (Nurjanah & Mustofa, 2024). In addition, teachers are also required to understand technology for learning needs and always reflect (Maulidia et al., 2023).

3. The Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) as a Distinctive Feature

P5 is an implementation in shaping student character in the independent curriculum. This activity is designed separately from intracurricular activities and aims for knowledge learning and learning from the environment. Although favored by students, the implementation of P5 faces challenges such as: school limitations in preparing independent project modules, the absence of assistants/facilitators, students who are still passive, and inappropriate scheduling (Nurjanah & Mustofa, 2024).

4. Utilization of Digital Platforms and Infrastructure Support

The government provides the Merdeka Teaching Platform (PMM) as a reference and means of sharing practices in teaching. However, its use is still not optimal. Some teachers, especially older ones, are not used to or understand its functions. Technical obstacles such as difficulty editing videos to upload their implementation practices (Nurjanah & Mustofa, 2024).

5. Resource Management and School Leadership

The school principal plays a key role as a driver and motivator in this change (Nurjanah & Mustofa, 2024). School management challenges include: providing infrastructure and budget for appropriate learning media, organizing advanced training to improve teachers' pedagogical competence, and building collaboration with the community and the world of work to support P5. Intensive curriculum socialization to all stakeholders (teachers, parents, community) is also needed to build understanding and support (Zainuri & Zulfi, n.d.).

The implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in primary and secondary schools is a complex process that involves not only changes in curriculum documents, but also changes in culture and educational practices in the field. Based on empirical studies, one of the core aspects to focus on is the preparation of learning tools. For example, administrative simplification in the form of replacing traditional lesson plans with ATPs and teaching modules provides space for teachers to be creative, but in reality many teachers have difficulty in identifying and translating learning outcomes into appropriate and meaningful learning objectives. This is in line with research findings showing that teachers' level of understanding of the structure and philosophy of the Merdeka Curriculum still varies, so intensive professional development support is needed to help them develop teaching tools that are truly suitable for their school context (Sucipto et al., 2024).

In the implementation of learning, changes in the role of teachers from "material givers" to active and reflective learning facilitators often present practical challenges, especially in the diversity of teacher readiness levels in various regions. Research shows that some teachers still experience barriers in integrating new learning strategies such as context-based projects with differentiated learning principles and formative assessment. This is especially evident in teachers' ability to design authentic assessments that are able to measure students' critical and collaborative thinking skills holistically (Kause et al., 2025).

Furthermore, another significant challenge is the coordination and management of the P5 (Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project). Although P5 is a hallmark of Merdeka Curriculum designed to integrate academic and character learning, its implementation in many schools has been hampered by limited resources, such as the lack of adequate project modules or facilitators. The literature study also revealed that without a clear support structure and collaboration between teachers across subjects, P5 implementation can be fragmented and have less than optimal impact on student character development (Aulia et al., 2023).

In addition, the role of school management becomes very central in overcoming these obstacles. School principals and management teams are required not only to manage administrative aspects, but also to be the drivers of changes in learning culture, facilitators of academic supervision, and liaisons between national level policies and practices in schools. The absence of effective communication and socialization strategies is often one of the factors that cause the understanding of the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum at the school level to remain uneven (Pertiwi et al., 2023).

B. Implications of the Independent Curriculum for Learning Outcomes and Character Development

1. Increased 21st Century Skills and Learning Motivation

The Merdeka Curriculum, with its emphasis on project-based learning and differentiation, aims to develop 21st century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication (Bungawati, 2022). Research in several schools shows that students become more active, enthusiastic, and motivated because they feel they have freedom in learning and can explore their interests (Siregar et al., 2024). For example, at SDN No 16 North Pontianak, the implementation of this curriculum successfully improved students' literacy and numeracy skills through the integration of educational games and technology (Qurniawati & Madura, n.d.).

2. Strengthening Character Values and the Pancasila Learner Profile

The Strengthening Profile of Pancasila Students (P5) project is the main mechanism for instilling character values. Through P5, students not only understand the theory but also experience first-hand the application of values such as gotong royong, tolerance, and global diversity (Qurniawati & Madura, n.d.). Studies at Al-Husnayain Integrated Islamic High School show that learning Islamic Religious Education (PAI) within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum has succeeded in strengthening students' moral values, ethics, and attitudes of tolerance and openness (Siregar et al., 2024). The integration of Islamic values with modern educational concepts also helps strengthen students' religious identity.

3. Challenges in Equitable Understanding and Learning Focus

Despite the positive impact, there are also challenges that affect the depth and uniformity of learning outcomes. The freedom given to teachers in selecting and processing materials can lead to gaps in understanding between students in different classes. In addition, there are concerns that a focus on skill development and projects may detract from attention to spiritual aspects and mastery of deep academic content, particularly in subjects such as Islamic Religious Education (Siregar et al., 2024). A more holistic evaluation also requires a paradigm shift from merely pursuing academic grades to assessing processes and competencies, which still requires refining the assessment system and rubrics (Muliawan, 2024).

The Merdeka Curriculum is designed to develop learners as a whole, not only cognitive aspects but also 21st century skills and Pancasila character. This is reflected in the stronger orientation towards context- and project-based learning that provides space for students to learn through direct experience. Research shows that this kind of approach can increase students' learning motivation and engagement in the learning process because they feel that learning is relevant to real life. Students also tend to be more active in exploring their interests and potential (Afifah Salsabila et al., 2024).

In addition, the Pancasila Learner Profile is an important component of the Merdeka Curriculum designed to systematically embed learners' character values in learning. Research shows that implementing the Pancasila Learner Profile through various learning activities, including project-based learning, habituation, and contextual activities in the classroom can help learners understand Pancasila values such as gotong royong, independence, critical reasoning, and responsibility. For example, a study in an elementary school stated that the implementation of the Pancasila Learner Profile program has been successfully implemented through differentiated learning, character habituation, and project activities that actively involve learners, although there are still challenges in paying attention to students' focus while learning in class. This finding shows that a planned and sustainable learning strategy can strengthen students' character building and competence in accordance with the dimensions of the Pancasila Learner Profile more concretely in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum (Primantiko et al., 2024).

However, challenges in equalizing learning outcomes and character development remain real. Teachers' lack of understanding of contextual learning principles and authentic assessment often results in variations in learning outcomes between different classes or schools. There is a tendency for some students to have richer and more challenging learning experiences than others, depending on teacher readiness and school infrastructure support. In addition, some schools still face obstacles in systematically integrating character values in each subject, especially subjects that are less familiar with the project approach or authentic assessment (Sucipto et al., 2024).

Overall, the Merdeka Curriculum has great potential to encourage learning that is more meaningful, adaptive, and relevant to the needs of the 21st century, but the elements of success still depend heavily on the quality of implementation at the school level, teacher competence, and effective school management support to answer these challenges.

C. Analysis of Inhibiting and Supporting Factors for Implementation

Based on the synthesis of various literatures, the inhibiting and supporting factors for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum can be categorized as follows:

Table 1. Supporting and inhibiting factors for the Merdeka Curriculum.

Category	Inhibiting Factors	Supporting Factors
Human Resources (Teachers)	• Conventional teaching mindsets and habits (Nurjanah & Mustofa, 2024). • Limited understanding of the new curriculum concepts and difficulties in developing instructional tools such as Learning Objectives Flow (ATP) and teaching modules (Sucipto et al., 2024). • Low levels of technological competence, particularly among senior teachers (Sucipto et al., 2024). • Perceived administrative workload that remains burdensome for teachers (Muliawan, 2024).	• Teachers' willingness to learn and adapt to change (Qurniawati & Madura, n.d.). • Training programs and workshops organized by schools or the government. • Collaboration and sharing of best practices among teachers through professional learning communities (Sucipto et al., 2024).
School Leadership and Management	• Lack of visionary and transformational leadership from school principals in leading curriculum change. • Limited capacity in planning and scheduling learning activities effectively, particularly for the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) (Nurjanah & Mustofa, 2024).	• School policies that support innovation and the provision of learning resources (Muliawan, 2024). • Principals who act as change agents, motivators, and facilitators, supported by continuous supervision and mentoring (Qurniawati & Madura, n.d.).
Infrastructure and Resources	• Limited facilities and infrastructure such as laboratories, libraries, and project-based learning spaces (Ansari, 2022), • Unequal access to technology and internet connectivity, particularly in rural or remote areas (Muliawan, 2024). • Limited budget allocation for media development and project implementation (Zainuri & Zulfi, n.d.).	• Collaboration with parents and the community in providing learning resources. • Financial support from the government, such as School Operational Assistance (BOS) funds (Sucipto et al., 2024) • Availability of the *Merdeka Teaching Platform* (Platform Merdeka Mengajar) as a free learning resource (Nurjanah & Mustofa, 2024).

External Environment	• National and local government policies that are not fully aligned or supportive. • Resistance from parents or communities who have limited understanding of the new curriculum concept (Sucipto et al., 2024). • Limited partnerships with business and industry sectors to support contextual learning and P5 activities (Ansari, 2022).	• Active involvement of parents in supporting students' learning processes, particularly in project-based activities (Muliawan, 2024). • Strong partnerships with industry, local communities, or higher education institutions (Siregar et al., 2024). • Intensive socialization and communication from the government and schools to all stakeholders (Zainuri & Zulfi, n.d.).

Principal supervision is an important part of school management in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Continuous academic supervision helps teachers understand and implement the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum more precisely, especially in implementing differentiated and project-based learning. Supervision not only functions as supervision, but also as a means of professional development for teachers to be in line with applicable curriculum policies (Wullur et al., 2025).

In addition to supervision, the implementation of school-based management (SBM) is also an important finding in the study of the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum. School autonomy in curriculum planning and management allows education units to adapt learning to the characteristics of students and the school environment. In this context, school management plays a role in coordinating teachers, developing learning programs, and ensuring the involvement of all stakeholders so that curriculum implementation runs according to goals (Supriyanti et al., 2024).

Other research results show a link between curriculum management and teacher performance. The planned and collaborative management of the Merdeka Curriculum encourages teachers to be more creative in preparing teaching tools and more active in implementing learner-centered learning. School management that is able to organize curriculum planning, implementation, and supervision consistently contributes to increasing teacher professionalism (Kuswahyuni et al., 2025).

At the elementary school level, Merdeka Curriculum management requires the involvement of all school elements, from principals, teachers, to education personnel. The study shows that good coordination in planning and implementing learning is the main feature of school management that is adaptive to the Merdeka Curriculum. This indicates that curriculum implementation cannot be separated from the school's ability to effectively manage internal cooperation (Essa Puspa Yanita et al., 2023).

Furthermore, at the senior high school level, it is revealed that education unit management is required to be more flexible in organizing learning structures and resource allocation. The Merdeka curriculum encourages schools to adjust internal policies to student learning needs without ignoring educational quality standards. This finding confirms that school management has a strategic role in maintaining a balance between learning freedom and achieving national education goals (Puspita et al., 2024).

D. Evaluation and Monitoring of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

Evaluation and monitoring in the Merdeka Curriculum acts as a means of continuous reflection to measure the achievement of learning outcomes, the effectiveness of learning strategies,

and the quality of curriculum management in schools (Firani Putri & Supratman Zakir, 2023). Evaluation that emphasizes formative and authentic assessment helps teachers understand the development of learners' competencies as a whole, not only oriented to the final result (Enawati et al., 2024). Monitoring through academic supervision, classroom observation, and teachers' collective reflection is proven to improve the consistency of implementing learner-centered and project-based learning (Mardiana & Emmiyati, 2024). However, teachers' limited understanding of the competency-based assessment system and the absence of comprehensive evaluation instruments are still obstacles in ensuring uniformity in the quality of curriculum implementation (Enawati et al., 2024).

Evaluation and monitoring of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is an important part of educational quality assurance that is integrated into learning practices in schools. Systematic evaluation provides an overview not only of the achievement of student learning outcomes, but also of the effectiveness of the implementation of learning strategies and school readiness in implementing curriculum principles. Research at SMP Negeri 31 Semarang using the CIPP evaluation model shows that a comprehensive evaluation (including context, input, process, and product) is able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation as a whole, so that schools can formulate follow-up in planning and developing more effective learning (Nafisah & Prasandha, n.d.).

Similarly, a case study at SMP Negeri 1 Lubuk Pakam Subdistrict showed that continuous evaluation monitoring involving classroom observations, interviews, and documentation was able to improve the quality of flexible and learner-centered learning. The findings of this study reveal that a structured monitoring approach assists schools in aligning learning practices with Merdeka Curriculum objectives and increases the involvement of teachers, principals, and students in the evaluation process (Puspa Nurmasyitah, n.d.).

E. School Management Solutions and Strategies

The main strategy in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is to strengthen teacher capacity through continuous training, mentoring, and utilizing the Merdeka Mengajar Platform to improve pedagogical competence and digital literacy (Arofaturrohman & Muhibbin, n.d.). Transformational principal leadership is essential in driving change, strengthening academic supervision, and building a collaborative culture in schools (Wulandari et al., 2024). In addition, collaboration with parents, communities, and external partners can help overcome infrastructure limitations and support the implementation of the Pancasila Learner Profile Strengthening Project (P5) program as a whole (Mardiana & Emmiyati, 2024). However, teachers' limited understanding of the competency-based assessment system and the unavailability of comprehensive evaluation instruments are still obstacles in ensuring the uniform quality of curriculum implementation (Enawati et al., 2024).

In terms of school management strategies, various studies reveal the importance of strengthening learning communities and internal school strategies as part of efforts to increase the effectiveness of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. For example, the assistance of an organized learning community in utilizing Merdeka Mengajar Platform can improve teacher competence in preparing teaching tools and implementing project-based learning more effectively. This learning community serves as a collaborative space for teachers, principals, and stakeholders to share good practices and reflections on the challenges of implementing the curriculum, so that professional capacity building occurs in a more contextual and sustainable manner (Meuthia, n.d.).

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the literature review and discussion that have been described, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum requires fundamental changes not only in the aspect of learning in the classroom, but also in overall school governance and

management. The Merdeka Curriculum provides flexibility to education units and teachers to develop contextual, flexible, and learner-centered learning, but at the same time demands the readiness of human resources, adaptive school leadership, and an effective and collaborative management system.

At the school level, the main challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum include teacher readiness in preparing teaching tools based on learning outcomes, changing the role of teachers to learning facilitators, implementing the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), utilizing technology and the Merdeka Teaching Platform, and limited infrastructure and budget support. In addition, variations in teachers' and principals' understanding of the philosophy and principles of the Merdeka Curriculum also affect the quality and equity of curriculum implementation in various educational units.

School management has a strategic role in responding to these challenges. Visionary and transformational principal leadership, strengthening academic supervision, implementing school-based management, and developing teacher learning communities have proven to be key factors in supporting the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Planned and participatory management is able to encourage collaboration between teachers, improve the professionalism of educators, and create a conducive and sustainable learning ecosystem.

In terms of learning outcomes and character development, the Merdeka Curriculum has the potential to increase learning motivation, 21st century skills, and strengthen the values of the Pancasila Student Profile through project-based learning and differentiation. However, this potential can only be optimally realized if it is supported by effective school management, continuous evaluation and monitoring, and alignment between national policies and internal school policies.

Thus, the success of the Merdeka Curriculum is highly dependent on the quality of school management in planning, implementing, evaluating, and developing the curriculum contextually according to the needs of students and the school environment. Therefore, strengthening the managerial capacity of school principals, continuously improving teacher competencies, and adequate policy and resource support are strategic steps that need to be continuously developed to ensure that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is effective and sustainable.

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