

## The Implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in the *Penggerak* School at SD Negeri Jawisari, Limbangan District, Kendal Regency

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### Abstract

This study aims to examine the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SD Negeri Jawisari, Limbangan District, Kendal Regency, which is one of the *Penggerak* Schools. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through interviews, observations, and documentation. The findings indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SD Negeri Jawisari is carried out through four main stages: planning, organizing, mobilizing, and supervising. The thorough planning involves all teachers in the preparation of administration, academic supervision, budget management, and periodic evaluations. The organization of implementation includes the determination of human resources, organizational development, assignment, and delegation of authority adjusted to the teachers' competencies. The mobilization of implementation is carried out through guidance and motivation from the principal to ensure optimal understanding and execution of the curriculum. Supervision is done by setting assessment instruments, periodic evaluations, and follow-ups involving all relevant parties. The main challenges faced include limited resources and a lack of teacher training. In conclusion, the success of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation highly depends on the effective role of the principal, active involvement of teachers, and support from parents and the community.

**Keywords:** Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum; *Penggerak* School; Planning; Organizing; Mobilizing; Supervising

### Introduction

Education is an effort to optimize human resources to improve the quality of life, enabling Indonesia to become a developed nation. It also serves as a means for society to survive by adapting to rapid changes in the world (Vhalery et al., 2022). Baharuddin (2021) suggests that the skills needed to embrace the era of big data as the foundation for a developed country encourage the Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Education and Culture, to enhance human resource (HR) quality with digital skills and creative thinking. In its implementation, educational policies are necessary to standardize the quality of education across Indonesia.

The vision of Indonesian education is to create Pancasila students who are sovereign, independent, and have strong character, developing critical thinking, creativity, independence, faith, and high morality. Education quality is determined by many factors, one of which is the quality of teachers. As the front line of education, teachers play a crucial role in direct interaction with students (Ambarita, 2022). To realize this educational vision, the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, Nadiem Makarim, issued Circular No. 1 of 2020 on the Independent Learning or *Merdeka Belajar* policy. The concept of *Merdeka Belajar* aims to liberate educational institutions, encourage students to innovate, and think creatively. This concept aligns with Indonesia's future education vision and mission, which aims to produce high-quality talent capable of competing in various fields of life (Sibagariang & Murniati, 2021). *Merdeka Belajar* aims to advance education in Indonesia by giving educational

institutions (schools, teachers, and students) the freedom to innovate, be independent, and creative, creating a joyful educational atmosphere for teachers, students, and parents (Bayumie, 2020).

*Merdeka Belajar* represents a revolution in education in Indonesia, focusing on improving the quality of education. In its implementation, the *Merdeka Belajar* program aims to improve Indonesia's human resources. During the Covid-19 pandemic, remote learning presented its own set of challenges. However, the *Merdeka Belajar* policy facilitates student learning assessment using various assessment instruments, reduces the administrative burden on teachers, and minimizes intimidation or criminalization of teachers (Pinatih, 2021). *Merdeka Belajar* is not boundless freedom. The learning process still requires the teacher's role in guiding and directing students. Teacher-centered learning does not support optimal child development because children rarely interact or express their interests to teachers. Children also tend not to voice their opinions, limiting their social and motor skills development (Bayumie, 2020).

Education in Indonesia still lags behind developed countries. One of the main factors is the uneven distribution of education, both in terms of the presence of educational institutions and the quality of teachers. Learning in many schools still focuses on teaching knowledge without considering the development of children's skills (Aransyah, 2023). The government continues to strive to develop a curriculum that suits the needs of the times to improve the quality of education in Indonesia. The curriculum is the heart of education that determines the success of education (Aransyah, 2023). Various curriculum changes have been made, from the 1947 curriculum to the *Merdeka* curriculum applied in 2022 (Angga, 2022).

The *Merdeka* Curriculum is an educational policy initiated by the Indonesian government as part of efforts to develop a more relevant educational system in line with the demands of the times. This curriculum provides freedom for schools, teachers, and students to innovate in the learning process, aiming to foster critical, creative, and independent skills in students. *Merdeka Belajar*, the core of this policy, aims to provide flexibility in the learning process, enabling teaching that is more personalized and based on the individual potential of students while considering the diversity of their learning styles. Within this framework, teachers play the role of facilitators, guiding students in developing the necessary skills to face the increasingly complex challenges of the world.

The concept of *Sekolah Penggerak* (Driving Schools) is one of the key elements in the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. *Sekolah Penggerak* is a program designed to accelerate the improvement of education quality at the school level by strengthening students' competencies and character through the enhancement of human resources (HR) at the school principal and teacher levels. Through this program, schools are expected to become agents of change that not only prioritize academic achievement but also develop students' character dimensions, including Pancasila values, diversity, and life skills relevant to the needs of the 21st century. *Sekolah Penggerak* encourages school principals and teachers to play an active role in creating a learning environment that supports the holistic development of students, utilizing the freedom and flexibility granted by the *Merdeka* Curriculum. The *Merdeka* curriculum aims to strengthen students' skills and personality through the Pancasila student profile. The implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum also focuses on improving students' competencies and character, starting with enhancing human resources (HR) at the school leadership and teacher level (Nurasiah, 2022). One program within the *Merdeka Belajar* policy is the *Penggerak* School, which aims to develop students' learning outcomes holistically by realizing the Pancasila student profile through strengthening human resources, namely school principals and teachers (Kemendikbud, 2021).

The importance of studying the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in primary schools cannot be overlooked, as the primary education stage serves as the foundation for students' academic and social development. Primary school is the first place where students encounter the basic concepts of education that will form the foundation for their cognitive and social skills in the future. At this stage, students are in a very crucial developmental phase, where they develop their character, critical thinking skills, and social abilities, all of which will influence their attitudes and capacities in facing life's challenges in the future. The implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in primary schools can have a significant impact on the overall quality of education. This curriculum provides freedom for teachers to implement more personalized approaches that cater to the needs and potentials of each student. On the other hand, this policy also allows schools to be more creative in designing teaching methods that not only focus on knowledge acquisition but also on character development and life skills. Therefore, studying the implementation of this curriculum in primary schools is crucial, as it can provide a clearer understanding of how this policy can be applied at a very vital level of education for the development of a child.

*Penggerak* Schools aim to accelerate the improvement of education quality and serve as catalysts for other schools to adopt similar programs. In Kendal Regency, SD Negeri Jawisari became the first *Penggerak* School in Limbangan District to implement the *Merdeka* curriculum in 2021/2022. Despite facing various challenges, SD Negeri Jawisari has achieved numerous accomplishments at the district, regency, and provincial levels, which has led to an increase in community trust in the school's education quality. However, in the implementation process of the *Penggerak* School program, several challenges remain, such as suboptimal understanding of the *Merdeka* curriculum application, budget shortages, and lack of support from local government. Nonetheless, this program has had a positive impact on improving the quality of education in Kendal Regency, particularly in the development of student competencies and collaboration among stakeholders. Therefore, this study aims to delve deeper into the process of implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum at SD Negeri Jawisari as part of the *Penggerak* School program.

*Merdeka Belajar*, in terminology, consists of two words: *Merdeka* (free) and *belajar* (learning). *Merdeka* in the Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI) means free, not bound, and independent of any particular party. Meanwhile, "belajar" refers to the process of acquiring knowledge, leading to a transformation in an individual's mind. Conceptually, *Merdeka Belajar* is a systematic effort to create a learning process that is free, meaning both students and teachers are free from pressure, obstacles, and anything that makes the learning process unpleasant (Suwantoro, 2021). As the application of the curriculum in the learning process, *Merdeka Belajar* must be enjoyable, accompanied by the development of innovative thinking by teachers. This can foster positive attitudes in students in responding to learning (Bayumie, 2020). Students should not be burdened with achieving specific scores or grades, as each individual has their own potential, talent, and intelligence (Ulfa, 2021). *Merdeka Belajar* also emphasizes the development of students in alignment with Indonesian national values (Biduri, 2021). *Merdeka Belajar* gives freedom to both teachers and students in conducting learning activities. These activities can take place outside the classroom and be project-based, where students gather information independently by going directly to the field and becoming problem solvers. With this concept, it is expected that students gain hands-on experience and do not get bored with learning, which often feels monotonous (Ulfa, 2021). The essence of *Merdeka Belajar* is to explore the greatest potential of teachers and students to innovate and improve the quality of learning independently (Prayogo, 2020). *Merdeka Belajar* is

characterized by being critical, creative, innovative, and relevant in the learning process. This concept gives students the freedom to receive an education, with teachers acting as facilitators who help the self-directed learning process (Abidah, 2020).

The legal basis for *Merdeka Belajar* is grounded in various regulations aimed at improving Indonesia's human resources (HR), as outlined in the preamble of the 1945 Constitution, paragraph IV, and Article 31, paragraph 3, which states that the government shall endeavor and organize a national education system to educate the life of the nation (Saleh, 2020). The Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud) (2019) outlines four main policies for *Merdeka Belajar*: (1) The replacement of the National Standardized Examination (USBN) with competency assessments conducted by schools; (2) The substitution of the National Examination (UN) with minimum competency assessments and character surveys that cover literacy, numeracy, and character; (3) Simplification of Lesson Plan (RPP); and (4) The application of a zoning system in new student admissions (PPDB). These policies provide flexibility for teachers in assessing students and reduce administrative burdens (Hasim, Evi, 2020).

Operational curriculum refers to the plan of the learning process used by educational units as a guide in implementing learning activities (Badan Akuntansi Penelitian dan Pengembangan, 2022). According to Rusman (2015), curriculum is a set of plans containing objectives, content, materials, and methods used to achieve specific educational goals. The curriculum functions as a guide for teachers and schools to carry out learning effectively and efficiently. Suparman (2020: 23) argues that the curriculum serves as a tool to achieve educational goals and direct educational activities towards achieving the set objectives. This is in line with the National Education System Law (UU Sisdiknas) of 2003, which mentions that the curriculum is a guide to developing student competencies (Hamalik, 2017).

The *Merdeka* curriculum emphasizes the importance of linking learning with assessment as a learning cycle, especially formative assessment. Formative assessment aims to improve the quality of student learning processes (Umami, 2018). This assessment is intended to provide feedback for improving learning, not for determining rankings or accreditation (Retnawati, 2017). *Merdeka Belajar* gives freedom to both teachers and students in conducting learning activities. These activities can be conducted outside the classroom and be project-based, where students are expected to interpret data and become problem solvers (Skinner, 2016). Planning, organizing, mobilizing, and supervising are four stages of management used to ensure the success of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum implementation (Arikunto, 2016). Student-centered learning emphasizes the active role of students in the learning process, where students not only receive passive information but also engage in exploration and problem-solving. Tjipto (2016) mentions that in this approach, students are the center of learning, while teachers act as facilitators. The *Merdeka* curriculum provides freedom for both students and teachers to conduct a more creative and innovative learning process, focusing on the holistic development of students' character and competencies. Additionally, through a more flexible assessment policy, *Merdeka Belajar* supports achieving relevant and sustainable education.

Although numerous studies have discussed various aspects of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, most of these studies have focused on secondary education levels or the implementation of the policy at broader scales, such as provincial or national levels. However, there is still a lack of research specifically examining the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum at the primary school level, which plays a fundamental role in shaping students' character and basic competencies. Moreover, although *Sekolah Penggerak* has been implemented in several schools, research that explores the challenges and successes of this program at the primary school level remains limited. Existing studies



tend to focus on descriptive analyses or policy evaluations without delving deeper into the on-the-ground practices that could contribute to further development of the program. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by focusing on the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum within the context of *Sekolah Penggerak* at SD Negeri Jawisari, which could contribute to the understanding of how this policy can be effectively executed at the primary school level.

This study aims to explore in-depth the process of implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum at SD Negeri Jawisari as part of the *Sekolah Penggerak* program. The main focus of this research is to analyze how the application of the *Merdeka Belajar* policy in primary schools can strengthen students' competencies and character, as well as to examine the challenges faced by the program implementers, including school principals, teachers, and other relevant stakeholders. (1) How does the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum at SD Negeri Jawisari strengthen students' competencies and character? (2) What challenges are faced in the implementation of the *Sekolah Penggerak* program, particularly in terms of curriculum management, human resource development, and support from related stakeholders, such as local governments and the community? By addressing these questions, this study is expected to provide deeper insights into the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum at the primary school level and offer recommendations that can support the future development of educational policies.

## Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach as its design, aiming to understand social phenomena in-depth and comprehensively. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to explore participants' perspectives on the phenomena that occur. This research focuses on the phenomenon that takes place at SD Negeri Jawisari, Limbangan District, Kendal Regency, related to the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum through the *Penggerak* School program. In this approach, the researcher collects data using various techniques such as observation, interviews, and documentation to gain a clearer understanding of the situation in the field. This research aims to understand social phenomena from the participants' perspective by collecting data in the form of words, images, documents, and results from interviews and observations. The research was conducted at SD Negeri Jawisari, Limbangan District, Kendal Regency, from January to August 2024. This study uses a descriptive design to describe the situation related to the implementation of the *Penggerak* School program in the *Merdeka Belajar* policy. This study is also categorized as field research because the data was collected directly from the field using a qualitative approach. Qualitative research methods are known for their process, which is similar to an art form, where the data obtained are relevant to the interpretation of the phenomena found in the field. To ensure data validity, the researcher uses source and method triangulation techniques. Source triangulation is done by comparing data obtained from interviews with data from observations and documentation. Additionally, method triangulation is done by comparing the results of observations and interviews conducted using various data collection tools to verify and ensure the accuracy of the information obtained from different sources. The data collection techniques used in this study include observation, interviews, and documentation. In observation, the researcher conducts direct observation of the learning activities and interactions taking place in the field, either through participatory observation, where the researcher is directly involved in the activities, or non-participatory observation, where the researcher merely observes the ongoing activities. The data obtained from the observation are recorded in a field notebook to analyze the phenomena found. Interviews are conducted using two methods: structured

interviews and unstructured interviews. Structured interviews involve a list of pre-prepared questions, while unstructured interviews allow the researcher to explore information more freely and openly. Documentation is used to collect data from relevant documents such as the school's vision and mission, curriculum, lesson plans (RPP), and other documents that support the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* policy. The researcher plays a direct role as the main instrument in this study, with the help of recording devices such as cameras and tape recorders to document interviews and observations. The researcher uses observation and interview guides to ensure that the data collection aligns with the research objectives. In data analysis, the researcher uses the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman. The first step in data analysis is data condensation, which involves selecting and simplifying data relevant to the research focus. Next, the condensed data are presented in an organized form, such as interview notes, field notes, and documentation. The final step is drawing conclusions supported by strong evidence found during the data collection process.

## **Result dan Discussion**

### **1. Planning the Implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum at the *Penggerak* School SD Negeri Jawisari**

The implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum at SD Negeri Jawisari begins with systematic steps carried out by the principal in collaboration with all the teachers. This planning phase is an important initial step to ensure that the objectives and targets of the curriculum implementation are understood and followed by all parties involved. The principal leads the planning process, which covers six main aspects: curriculum administration, academic supervision programs, budget management, infrastructure management, administration, and the evaluation of the implementation plan. The process of preparing the curriculum administration takes place at the beginning of the school year or semester, where the principal instructs all teachers to be directly involved in creating teaching materials such as the Prota, learning outcomes, learning objectives flow, and teaching modules. The collective preparation of administration aims to build teamwork spirit, solidarity, and a sense of ownership among the teachers, as well as to ensure that all teaching materials can be used as a reference in the execution of learning activities.

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collective sense of responsibility (Suryana, A., & Sari, R. 2021). Additionally, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum aligns with key components, including the use of P5 projects (project-based learning) as part of the curriculum. The integration of differentiated learning and formative assessment techniques within the curriculum also contributes to the holistic development of students, aligning with the constructivist principles of curriculum development.

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## **2. Organizing the Implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum at the *Penggerak* School SD Negeri Jawisari**

After planning, the next stage is the organization of the available resources at the school. The principal conducts an analysis of each teacher's competencies and capabilities to ensure that the assignments given match their expertise. Teacher assignments are made at the beginning of the school year, with task allocation carried out through meetings and the issuance of official assignment letters. Additionally, the principal organizes school organizational development activities aimed at improving the quality of school management and teacher competencies. These activities involve teacher training, study visits to schools that are considered more advanced, and teacher participation in relevant seminars. Although no documentation related to these activities was available at the time of the study, interviews showed that organizational development activities had been well-programmed and carried out in accordance with the academic calendar without interfering with teaching hours. The organization carried out by the principal also includes the management of school facilities, ensuring that resources such as classrooms, libraries, and other supporting facilities contribute to the quality of learning activities.

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This organizational phase is supported by Rogers' Theory of Diffusion of Innovations, which emphasizes that the successful adoption of new educational innovations (such as the Merdeka Curriculum) requires careful organization of resources, proper planning, and aligning teachers' competencies with the implementation tasks. The principal's analysis of each teacher's competencies ensures the right resources are applied effectively, which is a crucial step for successful curriculum (Suryana, A., & Sari, R. 2021).

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### **3. Mobilizing the Implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum at the *Penggerak* School SD Negeri Jawisari**

The mobilization of the *Merdeka* Curriculum implementation at SD Negeri Jawisari is carried out by the principal with two main activities: direction and motivation. The principal provides guidance to the teachers to ensure that they understand the objectives and procedures for implementing the curriculum as planned. This guidance is comprehensive and aims to improve and assist teachers in performing their tasks to the best of their ability. In addition to providing guidance, the principal also offers motivation to create a comfortable working atmosphere and boost teachers' enthusiasm in performing their duties. This motivation is conveyed both in meetings and personally to ensure that all teachers feel valued and are encouraged to work with high spirits. The motivation provided by the principal is crucial in improving teachers' work quality and ensuring that the *Merdeka* Curriculum is implemented smoothly.

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#### **4. Supervising the Implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum at the *Penggerak* School SD Negeri Jawisari**

Both internal and the supervision of the *Merdeka* Curriculum implementation at SD Negeri Jawisari is carried out systematically to identify the strengths and weaknesses in the implementation of the curriculum. This supervision process consists of three main activities: the establishment of assessment instruments, the evaluation of the curriculum implementation, and follow-up actions. The principal, along with the school supervisors, determines the assessment standards used to measure the achievement of the implemented program. The establishment of these standards aims to ensure that the assessment is carried out objectively and measurably. Furthermore, evaluations are conducted regularly through monthly meetings to assess the successes and challenges faced during the implementation of the curriculum. The results of these evaluations serve as a basis for future improvements and finding solutions to problems encountered during the implementation process. Finally, follow-up actions are carried out through discussions between the principal and the teachers to determine the necessary corrective steps. This process demonstrates the principal's strong commitment to ensuring that the *Merdeka* Curriculum is implemented effectively and sustainably.

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This monitoring phase supports the formative assessment model integral to the Merdeka Curriculum. formative assessments are essential for ongoing improvements in the teaching-learning process. In the case of SD Negeri Jawisari, regular evaluations and corrective actions are taken based on formative assessments, allowing for continuous refinement of teaching methods and curriculum execution. This process demonstrates the principal's strong commitment to ensuring that the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented effectively and sustainably. As Fullan suggests, continuous assessment and feedback are critical for the successful implementation of educational reforms. The principal's role in overseeing the evaluation and follow-up actions plays a crucial part in sustaining the curriculum's impact

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## Conclusion

The implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum at SD Negeri Jawisari is carried out through four main stages: planning, organizing, mobilizing, and supervising. Specifically, the implementation begins with thorough planning, which includes the

preparation of administration, academic supervision, budget management, and periodic evaluations. The principal plays a crucial role in guiding and motivating teachers to apply more innovative teaching methods that align with the principles of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Although the curriculum provides freedom in learning, it still requires guidance from teachers to ensure that students develop optimally. The main challenges faced during this implementation include limited resources, lack of teacher training, and resistance to change. Therefore, active involvement from teachers, parents, and the community becomes a key factor in ensuring the success of the *Merdeka* Curriculum implementation, creating a more effective, innovative, and enjoyable learning environment for students. The organization of the *Merdeka* Curriculum implementation at SD Negeri Jawisari is carried out through four main stages: the determination of human resources, organizational development, assignment, and delegation of authority. The principal plays an important role in ensuring that each teacher is placed according to their competencies so that the learning process can proceed optimally. Organizational development is carried out through teacher training, study visits, and in-house training to improve the quality of educators. Furthermore, a competency-based assignment system and the delegation of authority to teachers and staff aim to improve efficiency and their involvement in decision-making. With good organization, the *Merdeka* Curriculum implementation can be more effective and systematic. Support from the principal, teachers, and other stakeholders is a key success factor in creating a more innovative learning environment that meets the needs of students. The mobilization of the *Merdeka* Curriculum implementation aims to ensure that all school components understand and optimally execute the curriculum. The principal acts as a supervisor, motivator, mediator, and facilitator in supporting teachers and educational staff. The two main aspects of this mobilization are direction through meetings, workshops, and training, and motivation through appreciation, reflection, and professional development. Although there are challenges such as the lack of teacher understanding and limited facilities, solutions like socialization and training can help overcome these challenges. Effective leadership will ensure that the *Merdeka* Curriculum is implemented optimally and benefits students. Supervision of the *Merdeka* Curriculum implementation plays an important role in ensuring its execution aligns with standards and improves the quality of education. Supervision includes assessment using instruments, systematic evaluation, and follow-up for continuous improvement. Assessments are conducted using instruments that measure the achievement of learning objectives, while evaluations aim to identify challenges and provide recommendations for improvement. Follow-up actions, including discussions, training, and reflection, are necessary to address any obstacles. The principal has a crucial role in supervision to ensure the effective implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. With systematic supervision, implementation challenges can be addressed, promoting innovation, and improving the quality of education in the school.

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