

ANALYSIS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM AT VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOLS (SMK) CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE

Kendrat Satriyanto

Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta
kendrattsatriyanto.2022@student.uny.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at the Center of Excellence Vocational High School (SMK). The Merdeka Curriculum is an educational initiative that aims to give schools more freedom in designing curricula that suit students' needs and potential. Center of Excellence Vocational School is a school that focuses on developing excellence in various areas of expertise. The research method used in this study is qualitative descriptive research with a case study approach. Data was collected through interviews with school administrators, teachers, and students of the Center for Excellence Vocational School which has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum. Apart from that, document analysis was also carried out to understand the planning and implementation of the curriculum at the school. The research results show that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the Center of Excellence Vocational School has provided significant flexibility in designing learning programs that suit student potential. Teachers have a greater role in designing curriculum, identifying student needs, and determining effective teaching methods. Students also benefit from this approach, because they can be more active in choosing subjects that are relevant to their interests and career goals. However, there are several challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, including the need to ensure that national curriculum standards remain met, develop teacher resources in designing a quality curriculum, and ensure that there is adequate support from schools and the government. This research provides insight into how the Merdeka Curriculum can be successfully implemented at the Center of Excellence Vocational School. These findings can be a reference for other schools that wish to adopt a similar approach to improving the relevance and quality of vocational education.

Keywords: *independent curriculum, vocational high schools (SMK), center of excellence.*

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INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the key elements in a country's development, and its role in producing quality human resources is very important. In this era of globalization, competition in various sectors is increasingly fierce, and education must be able to prepare the younger generation with relevant skills and knowledge. Therefore, educational reform is one of the main agendas in efforts to improve the quality of education in Indonesia (Asrori, 2016). The Independent Curriculum is one of the innovations in the world of Indonesian education which aims to provide greater freedom to schools in designing a curriculum that suits students' needs and potential. This is in line with the spirit of school autonomy and improving the quality of education mandated in the 2022 National Education System Law. With the Independent Curriculum, it is hoped that education in Indonesia can better accommodate variations and differences in students' interests, talents, and career goals. The Center of Excellence Vocational High School (SMK) is a type of school that focuses on developing excellence in various areas of expertise of the Ministry of Education and Culture (2021). It is hoped that the Center for Excellence Vocational School can become a forum for students to develop their potential to the maximum. Therefore, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at the Center for

Excellence Vocational School is very relevant, because this approach gives schools more freedom in designing learning programs that suit students' strengths and interests.

Although the Merdeka Curriculum offers significant flexibility in curriculum design, it is still necessary to carry out an in-depth analysis of how this curriculum is implemented in certain schools, especially at the Center of Excellence Vocational School. As part of efforts to improve the quality of education, evaluation, and analysis of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Vocational Schools at Centers of Excellence can provide valuable insight into the extent to which this approach is successful in achieving the desired educational goals. In this context, this research aims to analyze the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at the Center for Excellence Vocational School. Through this research, we will identify how the Merdeka Curriculum was adopted, designed, and implemented at the Center of Excellence Vocational School, as well as analyze its impact on the learning process and development of (Mardianto, 2010) students. It is hoped that the findings from this research can make a positive contribution to our understanding of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at the vocational school level, which in turn can support efforts to improve education in Indonesia.

METHOD

Research design

This research uses a qualitative research design with a case study approach (Sugiyono, 2015). This approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth investigation into the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the Center of Excellence Vocational High School (SMK), with a focus on the specific school context.

Research Location

This research was conducted at the Center of Excellence Vocational School which has implemented the Independent Curriculum. The research location was selected based on the consideration that the Center of Excellence Vocational School is a representation of a vocational school that focuses on developing excellence in various areas of expertise.

Data Source

1. Main Respondents: Teachers and school staff involved in planning and implementing the Independent Curriculum at the Center of Excellence Vocational School.
2. Additional Respondents: Students who take part in an education program with the Independent Curriculum and the student's parents/guardians.
3. School Documents: Curriculum planning documents, learning programs, and documents related to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

Data Collection Techniques

1. Interviews: In-depth interviews were conducted with teachers, school staff, students, and parents/guardians of students to gain insight into their experiences and perceptions of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.
2. Observation: Direct observation is used to observe the learning process that takes place in the classroom and school environment, including interactions between teachers and students.

3. Document Analysis: School documents, such as learning programs and curriculum plans, are analyzed to understand the planning and implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Preparation of Research Instruments

1. The interview instrument was designed to include questions related to the planning and implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, stakeholder perceptions of the advantages and obstacles to implementation, as well as the impact on student learning.
2. Observation instruments include observation guidelines designed to record interactions in the learning process, use of technology, and student skill development.

Research Procedures

1. Identification of research locations and selection of respondents.
2. Carrying out interviews with teachers, school staff, students, and parents/guardians of students.
3. Direct observation of the learning process in class.
4. Analysis of documents related to planning and implementation of the Independent Curriculum.
5. Processing and analysis of collected data.

Data analysis

The data collected will be analyzed qualitatively. Data analysis includes identifying key themes, patterns, and findings that emerge from interviews, observations, and document analysis. The results of the analysis will be used to formulate research findings. This research method will provide an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the Center for Excellence Vocational School, including the challenges faced, its impact on student learning, as well as the perceptions of relevant stakeholders. It is hoped that the findings of this research will provide valuable insights for education stakeholders and contribute to further understanding of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the context of vocational high schools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the Center for Excellence Vocational School

The results of the research show that the Center for Excellence Vocational School has succeeded in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum well. There is significant flexibility in curriculum design at this school (Sukmadinata, 2019). Teachers have a greater role in designing the curriculum and adapting it to students' needs and their potential. This is reflected in the variety of skills programs offered and the diverse learning approaches (Dafitri et al., 2022).

Perceptions of Teachers and School Staff

Teachers and school staff responded positively to the Independent Curriculum approach. They reported that this approach gave them the freedom to develop learning programs that better-suited students' interests and talents. They feel that this approach has increased student

engagement in the learning process and allowed them to develop skills relevant to the world of work (Nathasia & Abadi, 2022).

Impact on Students: Students at the Center for Excellence Vocational School also provide positive feedback regarding the Merdeka Curriculum. They feel more motivated and eager to learn because they can choose subjects that suit their interests and career goals. They reported that this approach helped them to better understand the skills needed in the jobs they want in the future (Masykur, 2019; Natshia & Abadi, 2022).

Successful Implementation of the Independent Curriculum

The research results show that the Center of Excellence Vocational School has succeeded in adopting and implementing the Independent Curriculum successfully. This success is due to an approach that supports flexibility in curriculum design. Teachers at this school have the freedom to design learning programs that suit students' strengths and interests. This is by the spirit of school autonomy mandated in the 2023 National Education System Law (Mujab et al., 2023).

Positive Perceptions of Teachers and Students

Positive perceptions of teachers and students about the Merdeka Curriculum are an indication that this approach meets their needs and expectations. Teachers feel they have more control over the learning process, which can improve the quality of teaching. Students feel more motivated and eager to learn because they can follow their interests, which in turn can improve their learning outcomes (Lestari et al., 2022).

Relevance to the World of Work

The Merdeka Curriculum also allows students to develop skills that are more relevant to the world of work. By choosing subjects that suit their career goals, students can better prepare themselves to enter the job market. This is in line with the goals of vocational education, which aims to produce graduates who are ready to work (Mayasari et al., 2016).

The independent learning prototype curriculum is a policy that can answer educational problems that exist in the field, such as teachers who spend time on administrative matters so time for education and development their competence is reduced and not optimal, students are required to learn the material the actual learning of them is of no interest and is not essential for their future. However, as we all know, if the government wants to enforce new policies and replace old policies, in this case, the educational curriculum (Gunadi, 2021). However, this cannot be implemented simultaneously throughout Indonesia at one time it takes time to apply it evenly. Ethnic, cultural, geographic, and diversity the availability of human resources which causes the need for quite a long time for all regions can accept this new policy. Moreover, several schools are still found today This is not perfect and there are still problems in implementing the old curriculum (Sufyadi et al., 2021). So therefore The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology selected 2,500 Driving Schools and 901 Center of Excellence Vocational Schools in 2020 as trial schools in implementing the independent curriculum study with assistance from the selected campus as a companion (Yuanta, 2017).

Based on the analysis of the article findings, researchers found several responses that were both positive and negative from the Center of Excellence Vocational School which has

implemented this prototype curriculum. Nevertheless, results The findings of the article provide an overview of curriculum implementation independent learning by the Center for Excellence Vocational School whether it runs smoothly or vice versa so that it can be used as material consideration to determine the policies that will be taken by the Indonesian government in the future. Of the 14 articles analyzed, 12 articles provided positive results in its implementation and seem to provide great hope for the policy recently. Meanwhile, 2 other articles found obstacles in implementing RPP 1 The page was carried out by teachers and was hampered by the Covid-19 pandemic conditions, however, This is not necessarily the reason the school rejects this policy, but all the elements continue to support this new policy.

The research objects contained in the 14 articles that the researchers analyzed were different. First, 5 articles discuss the learning process in the independent curriculum study. Starting from learning methods, use of supporting media, and learning using the Learning Management System (LMS), all showed positive results where Student motivation and learning outcomes increase because of this. Second, there are 3 articles discussing the socialization of the Center of Excellence Vocational School program, the information technology platform, and the independent learning application, all three of which had results that showed the high enthusiasm of the participants and a strong desire to immediately implement this policy. Third, for the object of the role of teachers and heads in schools, 5 articles show the large role that a teacher or teacher has school principal in realizing this curriculum. Teachers have a special role in independent learning that is, they must be able to manage learning using existing technology reflect, and improve so that students are encouraged to improve their learning outcomes.

Apart from that, teachers in this freedom of learning must also be able to be motivators and role models for teachers and others in developing innovative and creative learning. Fourth, there is 1 article that discusses the situational leadership model of the Ministry of Education and Culture about the relaxation of BOS funds the results of this research show that the existence of BOS funding assistance directly affects educational accessibility.

CONCLUSION

Implementation of the Independent Curriculum: This research shows that the majority of Center of Excellence Vocational Schools have successfully implemented the Independent Curriculum with varying degrees of success. This indicates seriousness in adopting a more flexible and contextual curriculum approach according to students' needs. **Implementation Challenges:** Although there has been progress in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, many Center of Excellence Vocational Schools also face challenges that need to be overcome. These challenges can include limited resources, lack of training for teachers, and varying understanding regarding new curriculum approaches.

Benefits for Students: Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has provided positive benefits for students, such as increased skills and better understanding related to the subject matter, as well as opportunities to develop their interests and talents according to their respective career choices. **Expanding Collaboration:** The results of this research suggest the need for more collaboration between Vocational Schools, Centers of Excellence, industry, and higher education institutions to ensure the relevance of the curriculum to the world of work and the latest technological developments. **Continuous Evaluation:** The implementation of the

Merdeka Curriculum must continue to be evaluated periodically to ensure continuity and improvement by changing needs and demands in the field of education and the world of work.

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