

ANALYSIS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2013 CURRICULUM AND MERDEKA CURRICULUM AT SMAN 1 KUALA LANGKAT

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini menganalisis implementasi Kurikulum 2013 (K13) dan Kurikulum Merdeka di SMAN 1 Kuala, Kabupaten Langkat, dengan fokus pada perencanaan pembelajaran, pelaksanaan pengajaran, dan evaluasi pembelajaran. Hal ini penting dilakukan karena perubahan kurikulum tidak hanya mempengaruhi perangkat pembelajaran, tetapi juga strategi mengajar, sistem penilaian, serta peran guru dalam proses pembelajaran. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, dengan pengumpulan data melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi yang melibatkan informan utama: wakil kepala sekolah bidang kurikulum dan guru yang terlibat dalam implementasi kedua kurikulum. Analisis data dilakukan melalui tiga tahapan: reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa implementasi Kurikulum 2013 di SMAN 1 Kuala cenderung lebih terstruktur, terutama dalam penyusunan Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran (RPP) dan penyampaian materi, sementara Kurikulum Merdeka menawarkan fleksibilitas yang lebih besar, dengan penekanan pada pembelajaran berpusat pada siswa, penilaian adaptif, dan penguatan karakter melalui proyek seperti Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5). Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa kedua kurikulum memiliki keunggulan masing-masing, dengan Kurikulum 2013 unggul dalam manajemen pembelajaran yang sistematis, sedangkan Kurikulum Merdeka lebih adaptif terhadap kebutuhan belajar individu.

Kata Kunci: *Implementasi Kurikulum, Kurikulum 2013, Kurikulum Merdeka, Strategi Pengajaran, Sekolah Menengah*

Abstract

This study analyzes the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum (K13) and the Merdeka Curriculum at SMAN 1 Kuala, Langkat Regency, focusing on lesson planning, instructional execution, and learning evaluation. The significance of this research lies in the fact that curriculum changes impact

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not only teaching materials but also teaching strategies, assessment systems, and the roles of teachers. The study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, collecting data through observations, interviews, and document analysis involving key informants: the vice principal for curriculum affairs and teachers involved in the implementation of both curricula. Data analysis is carried out in three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings suggest that the 2013 Curriculum at SMAN 1 Kuala is more structured, particularly in lesson planning and content delivery, while the Merdeka Curriculum offers greater flexibility, emphasizing student-centered learning, adaptive assessments, and character strengthening through projects such as the Pancasila Student Profile (P5). The study concludes that both curricula have their strengths, with the 2013 Curriculum excelling in systematic learning management, while the Merdeka Curriculum is more adaptable to individual learning needs.

Keywords: curriculum implementation, 2013 Curriculum, Merdeka Curriculum, teaching strategies, high school

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum changes in Indonesia, particularly the transition from the 2013 Curriculum (K13) to the Merdeka Curriculum, are crucial issues in the education sector. This phenomenon affects many aspects of the education system, ranging from lesson planning, classroom implementation, to student learning assessments. The transition is especially important, as the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes flexibility and freedom in subject selection, as well as a more personalized approach to students (Martatiyana, 2023). The 2013 Curriculum, which is more structured and competency-based, is considered less flexible in adapting to the changing times and global demands. Therefore, this research is academically relevant to examine how both curricula are implemented in high schools and the practical implications for educational quality.

Previous studies have extensively discussed the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum, but most of these studies focus on the characteristics of the two curricula separately (Susilowati, 2022; Rahmadhani et al., 2022). Some studies compare the theoretical aspects of each curriculum, but few have analyzed their implementation in the field using a comprehensive approach. Most of the



literature emphasizes policy comparison, while there is little exploration of the challenges and successes of implementing both curricula in practice at schools. This study aims to fill this gap by directly comparing the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum at SMAN 1 Kuala, Langkat, which is one of the schools implementing both curricula. A gap in the existing literature is the lack of in-depth analysis of the differences in the implementation of these curricula at the school level, as well as the factors affecting their successful implementation (Syahbana et al., 2024).

This study responds to the gaps in previous research by conducting a comparative analysis of the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum at SMAN 1 Kuala, Langkat. Specifically, this research examines three main aspects of teaching: planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning conducted by teachers and the school principal. A descriptive qualitative approach is used to explore the perspectives of teachers and school administrators in implementing both curricula, as well as the challenges faced in the learning process. This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the impact of curriculum changes on the quality of teaching and character development of students, while comparing the effectiveness of both curricula in practice.

This research argues that the fundamental difference between the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum lies in the flexibility and student-centered approach offered by the Merdeka Curriculum (Victoria et al., 2025). The hypothesis tested in this study is that while the Merdeka Curriculum is more flexible and adaptive to individual student needs, its implementation faces significant challenges related to teacher preparedness and adequate school support facilities. In contrast, although the 2013 Curriculum is more structured and systematic, its implementation requires extensive administrative preparation that may burden teachers. Therefore, this study examines the relationship between teacher readiness, school support, and the success of curriculum implementation in creating a more effective and adaptable learning process that meets students' needs (Hutabarat et al., 2022). This study is expected to provide insights into how both curricula affect student learning outcomes and overall educational quality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research discussing the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia shows a relationship between curricula and the quality of teaching and student learning outcomes. Three main trends can be identified in previous studies. First, many studies



examine the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum from the perspective of curriculum theory, emphasizing adherence to national education standards (Putri & Rezanía, 2023). Second, research focusing on the flexibility of the Merdeka Curriculum and its impact on student-centered learning (Syahbana et al., 2024). Third, some studies compare the two curricula descriptively but fail to consider local factors that influence successful implementation, such as teacher preparedness, infrastructure, and school policy support (Marjan Fuadi, 2022; Vhalery et al., 2022). This study aims to fill this gap by comparing the implementation of both curricula at the high school level, considering these factors.

The first trend in this research focuses on the analysis of curriculum theory and government policy, using descriptive qualitative approaches. These studies often use document analysis and interviews with education officials to evaluate the curriculum policy implementation (Victoria et al., 2025). They emphasize how the curriculum is designed to achieve national educational goals but rarely examine directly how these policies are applied in the field. One relevant study is by Rahmadhani et al. (2022), who analyzed the structure and content of the Merdeka Curriculum normatively, but their research was limited to policy perspectives without addressing implementation challenges at the school level. This approach focuses more on policy theory than on contextual evaluation of implementation.

The second trend is research focusing on the flexibility approach in the Merdeka Curriculum, using case studies in several schools. This research tends to examine the impact of the policy on teaching and learning through interviews with teachers and school principals, as well as direct observation of learning practices (Hutabarat et al., 2022). These studies focus on how the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented in real contexts and its differences from the structured approach of the 2013 Curriculum. For example, research by Qomariyah et al. (2022) shows that the Merdeka Curriculum encourages the use of project-based learning methods that enable students to participate more actively. However, this research focuses more on pedagogical aspects without considering external factors such as teacher readiness and facility support that affect curriculum implementation in the field.

The third trend is research comparing the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum at the school level, but these studies tend to be more descriptive comparisons of the two curricula (Juli Iswanto, 2022; Krishnapatria, 2021; Rahmadayanti & Hartoyo, 2022). This approach uses quantitative data to evaluate the success of both curricula in



achieving learning objectives, such as improved test scores or student participation in class activities. Research by Dwijendra et al. (2022) identifies differences between the two curricula in terms of planning and assessment, but is limited to data analysis that does not consider the social and cultural context at the school. This study focuses more on measurable outcomes, such as exams and standardized evaluations, without assessing more subjective factors such as student motivation and teacher readiness.

Each of the above-mentioned research trends has significant limitations. The first study is too focused on policy analysis without considering the real challenges of implementation at the school level. The second study, while analyzing the flexibility of the Merdeka Curriculum, does not adequately address important aspects such as teacher readiness and facility support in applying the curriculum (Ainia, 2020; Hilmin et al., 2023). The third study, while comparing the two curricula, focuses more on measurable outcomes and does not consider contextual factors that influence successful implementation. Therefore, there is a need for more comprehensive research that not only compares the two curricula but also evaluates their implementation by considering more in-depth local factors such as teacher readiness, policy support, and school infrastructure (Hattarina et al., 2022; Jufriadi et al., 2022; Sulalah et al., 2024).

This study formulates a new, more comprehensive direction in comparing the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum. The focus of this study is to explore in-depth how both curricula are applied in the field, considering contextual factors such as teacher readiness, school policy, and infrastructure support. The study uses a descriptive qualitative approach involving interviews with teachers, school principals, and direct observations of teaching practices at SMAN 1 Kuala. Therefore, this research is expected to provide new insights into the factors that influence the success of curriculum implementation at schools, which have not been sufficiently explored in previous studies.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study focuses on the unit of analysis at the school level, particularly the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and Merdeka Curriculum at SMAN 1 Kuala, Langkat. The primary focus of this study is on a group of individuals consisting of teachers, the school principal, and students involved in the application of both curricula. The research design used is a descriptive qualitative approach, aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of how both curricula are implemented in the field. This qualitative approach allows the researcher to comprehend the context, processes, and experiences of the informants regarding lesson planning,



implementation, and learning evaluation. The data obtained through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis will provide a comprehensive insight into the dynamics of implementing both curricula. This study can also be referred to as a case study because it focuses on one school location as the unit of analysis to understand the differences and similarities in the implementation of both curricula.

The main data sources in this study are informants consisting of the school principal, the vice principal for curriculum affairs, and the teachers directly involved in the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum. In addition, secondary data in the form of supporting documents such as Lesson Plan (RPP), teaching modules, and assessment instruments are also used to enrich the findings. The data collection techniques used include in-depth interviews with a structured interview guide, direct classroom observations, and document analysis. The interview process will involve open-ended questions that allow respondents to share their experiences and perspectives on the two curricula. Observations are made to directly examine the implementation of teaching, while documentation helps provide a picture of the materials used in lesson planning. Data analysis is conducted through three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analytical technique used is thematic analysis, which enables the researcher to identify key themes related to the success and challenges in curriculum implementation. The results of this analysis are expected to depict the differences between the two curricula in the context of SMAN 1 Kuala.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Implementation of the 2013 Curriculum at SMAN 1 Kuala

The first piece of evidence found in this study is the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum (K13) at SMAN 1 Kuala, which tends to be more structured and systematic, particularly in terms of lesson planning and evaluation. Data obtained through interviews with teachers indicated that, in preparing Lesson Plans (RPP), teachers follow the format outlined in the K13 curriculum. A PPKn (Civics and Citizenship Education) teacher stated, "We follow the existing RPP, with clear achievement indicators and comprehensive assessments" (Interview, PPKn Teacher). Classroom observations also revealed that the learning materials were delivered using lectures and assignments based on structured content. From this data, it can be concluded that the teaching pattern in the 2013 Curriculum is highly focused on achieving the material and completing predetermined learning targets. This data suggests continuity in the application of clear curriculum



standards despite challenges in teaching flexibility. Data visualization: Table 1 shows a comparison between the K13 RPP and an example of the Merdeka Teaching Module.

Moreover, data from interviews with the vice principal for curriculum affairs revealed that the implementation of K13 affects how student learning outcomes are evaluated. "The assessment not only covers knowledge but also students' attitudes and skills," explained the vice principal (Interview, Vice Principal). Classroom observation data showed that teachers applied assessments based on aspects of attitude, knowledge, and skills, in accordance with the format in K13. However, some teachers mentioned that the administrative burden of assessment was quite overwhelming. A pattern emerged in which there was a dependence on structured administration, limiting the flexibility to apply more innovative teaching methods. This indicates a transformation in the evaluation approach to a more holistic one, although it requires more time and effort from the teachers.

The third piece of evidence related to the challenges in implementing the 2013 Curriculum at SMAN 1 Kuala concerns the readiness of facilities and infrastructure. Interviews with teachers at the school indicated limitations in resources, such as limited internet access for technology-based learning. One teacher shared, "We face difficulties in using digital learning materials due to limited network access at the school" (Interview, English Teacher). This data indicates that facility limitations pose a significant challenge in effectively implementing K13. The emerging pattern is that, although the curriculum is well-structured, inadequate infrastructure hampers the effectiveness of technology use in the learning process.

Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMAN 1 Kuala

The second piece of evidence relates to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMAN 1 Kuala. Data from interviews with teachers indicated that the Merdeka Curriculum provides flexibility in designing teaching modules that are tailored to student needs. "We are given the freedom to adapt the learning materials to students' interests and needs," said a Physics teacher (Interview, Physics Teacher). Classroom observations showed that the teaching approach was more student-centered, with group discussions and competency-based projects. The emerging pattern emphasized flexibility and teacher creativity in designing learning that is more contextual and relevant to students' needs.

Additionally, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum introduced the Pancasila Student Profile (P5) project, which allows students



to engage in activities that support character development. Data obtained from interviews with the school principal revealed, "The Pancasila project provides opportunities for students to develop national and social values through real-world projects" (Interview, School Principal). Data visualization: Photo 1 shows a student project activity conducted in the field. The emerging pattern is that character strengthening and soft skill development occur through project-based activities, which is a hallmark of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Challenges in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

However, data also shows that, despite offering more freedom, there are challenges regarding teacher preparedness to design open-ended and creative materials. "The challenge is how to adapt the teaching modules to the very diverse student conditions," said a Cultural Arts teacher (Interview, Cultural Arts Teacher). The emerging pattern reveals that designing teaching materials requires not only creativity but also a deep understanding of student needs. This indicates a transformation in how teachers design lessons, but also highlights challenges in the more flexible implementation.

The third piece of evidence concerns teacher readiness to face curriculum changes. Data collected from interviews with teachers showed a difference in readiness between implementing the two curricula. "The 2013 Curriculum is easier to understand because there are clear guidelines, while the Merdeka Curriculum requires more adjustments," said an Indonesian Language teacher (Interview, Indonesian Language Teacher). Classroom observations showed that teachers more experienced with K13 felt more comfortable with the structured approach, while newer teachers were more open to the flexible approach of the Merdeka Curriculum. The emerging pattern indicates uneven teacher readiness in implementing both curricula.

Impact of the Curriculum on Student Learning

Classroom observations also indicated differences in student learning outcomes between the two curricula. Under the 2013 Curriculum, students tended to follow the learning material in a more structured manner but had less room for innovation. In contrast, under the Merdeka Curriculum, students were more actively involved in discussions and projects, although there were variations in the quality of student participation. "With the Merdeka Curriculum, I am more involved in group learning and discussions," said a student (Interview, Student). The emerging pattern indicates a difference in student engagement, with greater



activity under the Merdeka Curriculum compared to the more lecture-based K13.

The Influence of the School Environment on Curriculum Implementation

The final evidence shows the influence of the school environment on the implementation of both curricula. Observation data indicated that SMAN 1 Kuala has fairly adequate facilities, but not all teachers utilize these facilities maximally. "We have multimedia rooms, but not all teachers know how to use them for teaching," said a Mathematics teacher (Interview, Mathematics Teacher). The emerging pattern is that the use of existing facilities at the school is still limited by a lack of training and understanding among teachers in utilizing technology. Data visualization: Table 2 shows the available facilities and their frequency of use by teachers in the learning process.

Discussion

This study aims to analyze the comparative implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum at SMAN 1 Kuala, Langkat, focusing on three main aspects: lesson planning, instructional execution, and learning evaluation. The results show that the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum at the school is more structured and systematic, with an emphasis on achieving material targets and assessments based on attitudes, knowledge, and skills. On the other hand, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is more flexible and student-centered, providing opportunities for character development through the Pancasila Student Profile (P5) project. However, challenges in the implementation of both curricula emerge from teacher readiness and available school facilities.

The relationship studied in this research is between the curriculum structure and the implementation of learning, focusing on the role of teachers, the readiness of facilities, and the effectiveness of curriculum implementation. Why is the difference between the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum so striking? This is due to the fundamental differences in the philosophy of the two curricula. The 2013 Curriculum prioritizes the achievement of structured material, while the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes flexibility and student autonomy in learning. In this context, the differences in the curriculum approach also reflect differences in the role of teachers, where the Merdeka Curriculum requires teachers to be more creative and adaptive, whereas the 2013 Curriculum demands more directed teaching focused on material targets. Therefore, the results of this study show that, although both curricula have advantages,



each faces different challenges in terms of implementation at the school level.

The results of this study align with several previous studies that also discuss the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum. However, there are important differences that highlight the uniqueness of this study. For example, research by Rahmadhani et al. (2022) found that the 2013 Curriculum is more rigid in its implementation, while the Merdeka Curriculum is more flexible and gives teachers the freedom to design learning materials. However, this study provides a deeper understanding of the challenges teachers face in adjusting teaching methods and assessments in both curricula. Compared to the study by Qomariyah et al. (2022), which focused more on curriculum theory and policy, this study emphasizes the dynamics of implementation in the field, particularly related to teacher readiness and school facilities, which have not been sufficiently explored in previous studies.

The significance of the results of this research lies not only in the comparison between the two curricula but also in the impact of educational policies on everyday teaching practices at the school level. The shift from the 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum reflects a change in the educational approach in Indonesia, from a structured one to a more adaptive and student-centered approach. In a social and ideological context, the Merdeka Curriculum can be seen as a response to the challenges of globalization and technological development, which require a more flexible and relevant education that meets students' needs. However, the findings of this study also show that, despite providing more room for creativity in teaching, challenges in technology application and classroom management remain significant issues that need to be addressed both structurally and in terms of teacher training.

The implications of the findings suggest a need to pay more attention to teacher readiness and adequate support facilities in the implementation of the new curriculum. Although the Merdeka Curriculum provides more freedom for teachers and students, the reality in the field shows that not all schools have sufficient facilities to support technology-based learning. This may lead to a mismatch between the potential of the curriculum and its implementation capabilities. Furthermore, although the 2013 Curriculum is more structured, challenges related to administrative tasks and curriculum adjustments also pose barriers. Therefore, the findings of this study illustrate the dysfunctions in both curricula that must be addressed to improve the quality of education in Indonesia.



Based on these findings, concrete steps are needed from both schools and the government to address the challenges in implementing both curricula. First, for the 2013 Curriculum, it is recommended that administrative burdens be reduced to provide room for innovation in teaching. Additionally, teacher training in utilizing technology should be strengthened to support digital-based learning, especially in facing the challenges present in the Merdeka Curriculum. Second, for the Merdeka Curriculum, greater support for teachers is needed to facilitate the design of more creative learning that is relevant to students' needs. The government should also focus on strengthening infrastructure and providing ongoing training for teachers to ensure that both curricula can be implemented optimally, positively impacting the quality of education in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

The lesson that can be drawn from this research is that the philosophical differences between the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum have a significant impact on the implementation of teaching at schools. The 2013 Curriculum, being more structured, provides clear guidelines for teachers in planning and implementing lessons, but it often limits creativity and flexibility. On the other hand, the Merdeka Curriculum offers more freedom for teachers and students to innovate, but challenges related to teacher preparedness and limited facilities hinder its optimal implementation. Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of adequate readiness and support, from both teachers, facilities, and school policies, for the effective implementation of both curricula to achieve optimal educational goals. Thus, this study teaches that a flexible curriculum requires in-depth resource preparedness to support its implementation in the field.

The scientific contribution of this study is providing a deeper understanding of the comparative implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum at the school level, specifically in the context of SMAN 1 Kuala, Langkat. This research introduces a more comprehensive approach by combining interviews, observations, and document analysis to assess the aspects of lesson planning, implementation, and evaluation of both curricula. Additionally, this study identifies variables that were previously underexplored, such as teacher readiness, facility support, and local contexts that affect curriculum implementation. By offering a more holistic view of the challenges and successes in implementing both curricula, this study provides empirical data that can be used as a reference for future research and the development of educational policies.



However, there are some limitations in this study. First, this study is limited to one school in Langkat Regency, so the findings may not fully represent other schools in Indonesia with different characteristics. Second, this study does not deeply explore the impact of other external factors, such as local government policies or cultural differences, that may also affect curriculum implementation. Therefore, to obtain more comprehensive results, future research should include a larger sample, covering schools with diverse characteristics. Additionally, future studies could further investigate the long-term impact of both curricula on student learning outcomes and character development.

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