

Management of the Independent Curriculum Towards Effective Learning in Senior High Schools of South Aceh Regency

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ABSTRACT

The Merdeka Curriculum, introduced by the government, has been implemented in various regions, including South Aceh Regency, aiming to provide schools with flexibility in designing learning processes suited to students' needs and potential. The management of the Merdeka Curriculum involves organizing and overseeing its implementation in schools. This study aims to explore: (1) the planning of the Merdeka Curriculum for effective learning in high schools in South Aceh; (2) its implementation; (3) the evaluation process; and (4) follow-up actions to ensure effective learning. Using a qualitative approach, the research focuses on SMA Negeri 1 Labuhan Haji Timur, SMA Negeri 1 Samadua, and SMA Negeri 1 Kluet Selatan. Data collection methods include observation, interviews, and document analysis, while data analysis involves collection, reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. Key findings include: (1) Planning begins with the work plans of school leadership teams. (2) The Merdeka Curriculum has been implemented for two years and is currently at level 2, "Merdeka Berubah." (3) Evaluation is conducted through input, process, output, and outcome analysis. (4) Follow-up actions include identifying challenges, teacher training, provision of learning facilities, scheduled supervision, and effective communication. Proper management of the Merdeka Curriculum is expected to optimize its implementation, ensuring effective learning.

INTRODUCTION

The Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System serves as a legal framework that outlines the vision of national education. This vision aims to shape Indonesian citizens who possess strong morality and religiosity, are intelligent, creative, independent, able to participate democratically, and have a sense of social responsibility. Education is seen as a means to develop individual potential, whether in terms of academic abilities, relational skills, talents, physical abilities, or artistic inclinations, as explained by Wiyani (2021). Education does not only occur in formal environments such as schools or universities, but it also happens throughout life and encompasses all experiences faced by individuals in their daily lives.

In this context, the concept of effective learning becomes highly relevant. According to Yusuf (2018), effective learning is the process of individual change in cognitive, behavioral, and psychomotor aspects as a result of learning experiences and environmental influences. Effective learning is not only limited to formal contexts but also includes all life experiences that provide positive impacts on individual development.

On the other hand, good management is necessary for the administration of schools as educational organizations. Usman (2016) emphasizes that management includes the processes of planning, implementation, and monitoring, aiming to optimize the use of resources effectively and efficiently. In education, management covers various fields, including curriculum, students, personnel, facilities and infrastructure, funding, administration, and public relations. Among these fields, curriculum management plays a crucial role in achieving the educational goals that have been outlined.

In the past five years, Indonesia has undergone two curriculum changes, from the 2013 Curriculum to the revised 2013 Curriculum, and then to the Merdeka Curriculum. According to Mulyasa (2022), these curriculum changes must be understood by all stakeholders because the curriculum plays a strategic role in determining learning outcomes, both in terms of process and results. The Merdeka Curriculum is designed to provide more freedom to schools in designing their own curriculum, aiming to produce graduates who are ready to face real-world challenges. However, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in secondary schools, particularly in South Aceh, faces its own challenges. As of the 2022/2023 academic year, only about 54.54% of secondary schools in South Aceh have adopted the Merdeka Curriculum level 2 (Merdeka Berubah).

To address this change, school principals as school leaders must possess good managerial skills, including the ability to plan, formulate, implement, and develop the curriculum. Principals also play a role in ensuring that all teachers are prepared to face the changes, particularly in terms of mastering information technology in the learning process. Therefore, the management of change and school development strategies toward effective learning in the face of the Merdeka Curriculum are important topics that need further exploration.

- Problem Statement

Based on the above explanation, the research problem is: How is the management of the Merdeka Curriculum towards effective learning in secondary schools in South Aceh?

- Research Objectives

To understand how the management of the Merdeka Curriculum can support the achievement of effective learning in secondary schools in South Aceh.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Lazwardi (Nihayah, 2019) explains that management encompasses planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling activities to achieve predetermined objectives by utilizing available resources through others. According to (Niswanto et al. 2023), educational management is the key to the success of educational programs in continuously improving quality. The development of educational management must align with technological advancements and the needs of the workforce and social environment.

Kristiawan (Nihayah, 2019) describes curriculum management as the cooperative, comprehensive, systematic, and systemic organization of the curriculum to achieve its goals. Curriculum management includes activities related to planning, implementing, and evaluating the curriculum, determining how the curriculum is planned, executed, and controlled, by whom, when, and within what scope. (Zaini. 2020) states that effective curriculum management consists of four functions: planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling. Planning involves setting organizational goals and designing the strategies, policies, and methods needed to achieve them. Organizing entails grouping people, tools, tasks, responsibilities, and authority to form a cohesive community aimed at achieving goals. Implementation is the process of carrying out planning through direction, guidance, communication, and coordination to ensure effective program execution. Controlling ensures that all functions run effectively to achieve the curriculum's objectives.

The Merdeka Curriculum offers an option for schools ready to implement it for learning recovery from 2022 to 2024 due to the pandemic. According to (Heryahya et al. 2022), the advantage of the Merdeka Curriculum lies in its focus on essential materials and the development of student competencies, enabling deeper and more meaningful learning. The Merdeka Curriculum embodies the concept of "Merdeka Belajar," granting freedom to schools, teachers, and students to innovate, learn independently, and be creative. (Mulyasa. 2023) notes that the Merdeka Curriculum is flexible and based on character, competence, and creativity, allowing it to be adapted to societal needs and developments. Implementation requires teachers and students to be prepared to adopt technology as a learning tool, as (Romadhon et al., 2023) explain. This preparation is not only focused on learning materials but also on the readiness to integrate technology into the learning process.

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to gather data and insights on strategies for managing change and developing schools towards becoming effective learning organizations in high schools across South Aceh Regency. Using a qualitative descriptive method, the research focuses on current issues by collecting and analyzing data. According to Bog and Taylor (Sujarweni, 2023:19), qualitative research produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from observed behaviors. This study seeks to describe data related to change management and school development strategies.

Schools play a crucial role in society by shaping future leaders. Effective school-community relationships are vital for achieving this mission. Strong connections with parents, community members, and local businesses can increase support, resources, and funding, benefiting students' educational experience. Collaboration fosters communication and problem-solving, creating a more inclusive environment that enhances student success and well-being.

Scope of Research

Research subjects refer to individuals, groups, or objects that are the focus of a study. In qualitative research, only sources that provide complete and accurate information on observed events or situations are considered subjects. In this study, the subjects include principals, vice principals (curriculum and student affairs), teachers, and staff from high schools in South Aceh Regency implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

The detailed number of subjects per school is as follows:

No.	Position	Labuhan Haji Timur	Samadua	Kluet Selatan	Total
1	Principal	1	1	1	3
2	Vice Principal (Curr.)	1	1	1	3
3	Vice Principal (Stu.)	1	1	1	3
4	Teacher	2	2	2	6
Total					15

According to Sujarweni (2023:72), purposive sampling is a technique based on specific criteria. Based on 2023-2024 data from the Ministry of Education, 18 high schools in South Aceh use the Merdeka Curriculum. The study selected three schools with a minimum accreditation rating of "B."

Research design

The collected data will be analyzed in several stages: preparation, analysis, and presentation of the results. Data analysis is defined as the process of analyzing data to answer research questions (Sujarweni, 2023:103). This involves systematically organizing data from interviews, field notes, and documentation into categories, units, and patterns, followed by synthesis and conclusions for better understanding.

The research design is descriptive and qualitative, aimed at providing a comprehensive understanding of the strategies employed in the management and development of schools. By focusing on direct observations, interviews, and document analysis, the study seeks to explore the dynamic processes involved in creating effective learning organizations within high schools in South Aceh Regency. The qualitative design allows for an in-depth exploration of how these schools implement and manage educational change, offering valuable insights into their practices and outcomes.

Research Procedure

The primary instrument in qualitative research is the human element, specifically the researcher themselves. Moleong (2016) states, "The role of the researcher in qualitative research is quite complex. They serve as the planner, executor of data collection, analyzer, interpreter, and ultimately the reporter of the research findings." A qualitative researcher must be sensitive to social and cultural contexts, flexible in responding to changes, and skilled in managing the complexities of qualitative data. Overall, the qualitative researcher plays an integral role in deeply understanding and explaining human phenomena.

The instruments used to collect data on curriculum management towards effective learning in high schools in South Aceh Regency include interview guides, observation guides, and document studies. These tools are used to pose questions formulated in line with the research objectives to obtain answers that serve as qualitative data, ensuring their validity and reliability.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Miles and Huberman, as cited by Sugiyono (2018:248), outline four steps for qualitative data analysis: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The steps include:

1. Data Collection: Gathering as much relevant data as possible regarding strategies for managing change and school development towards effective learning in high schools in South Aceh Regency.
2. Data Reduction: Summarizing and selecting the most essential data, discarding irrelevant or invalid information to provide a clearer picture.
3. Data Display: Presenting the findings in a narrative form to facilitate understanding and guide future actions.
4. Conclusion Drawing/Verification: Reviewing reduced and displayed data to form conclusions that address the research questions.

These steps ensure accurate and reliable findings on the management of change and school development towards effective learning in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in high schools in South Aceh.

RESEARCH RESULT

The "Merdeka Curriculum" at SMA Negeri 1 Kluet Selatan has been implemented as planned, although it is not yet fully optimal. The principal added that the implementation of this curriculum is still being developed to ensure that students can actively participate in learning activities. The school has made significant efforts to implement the necessary changes, hoping that students will

be more engaged in extracurricular activities that support the development of their interests and talents.

The evaluation results from the three schools indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum still faces challenges, particularly in terms of available resources. At SMA Negeri 1 Labuhan Haji Timur, the principal (HS) stated that although the curriculum has been implemented well, regular evaluations are still needed to adjust the content and teaching methods to meet the students' needs. This evaluation involves feedback from teachers, students, and parents to create a better learning environment.

Meanwhile, the principal of SMA Negeri 1 Samadua (ML) emphasized the importance of continuous evaluation, especially since the ongoing renovations affect the teaching and learning process. The school needs to be more flexible in adjusting the timing and location of learning activities to ensure the curriculum can still be effectively implemented.

At SMA Negeri 1 Kluet Selatan, curriculum evaluation is conducted by a team consisting of teachers and the vice principal. The Vice Principal for Curriculum (SH) explained that curriculum evaluation is essential for improving the quality of education and ensuring that learning aligns with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. The evaluation team regularly collects data from the learning process and makes adjustments according to the needs.

Overall, the research findings indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMA Negeri 1 Labuhan Haji Timur, SMA Negeri 1 Samadua, and SMA Negeri 1 Kluet Selatan is progressing quite well, although there are some challenges, particularly at SMA Negeri 1 Samadua, which is undergoing renovations. However, each school is committed to continuously improving the curriculum implementation through ongoing evaluation, collaboration, and adjustments based on the conditions of each school.

DISCUSSION

The research concluded that curriculum management in the implementation of the "Merdeka Belajar" curriculum in schools can be divided into three main stages: curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation. These stages are interconnected in managing the curriculum effectively. Below are the key findings summarized in the stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation:

1. Curriculum Planning in Aceh Selatan High Schools:

Curriculum planning serves as the blueprint for schools to achieve their vision, mission, and goals. It is a collaborative process involving school leaders, teachers, students, and parents, ensuring that the curriculum meets educational standards and addresses students' needs. However, many teachers still face challenges in preparing teaching materials, including lesson modules, due to insufficient offline training opportunities.

2. Curriculum Implementation in Aceh Selatan High Schools:
The "Merdeka Belajar" curriculum is designed to provide more flexibility and student-centered learning. Schools in Aceh Selatan have adapted to this approach, but face challenges such as limited resources, lack of teacher training, and mindset changes. The schools are currently at the "Mandiri Berubah" phase, using available resources to implement the curriculum efficiently.
3. Curriculum Evaluation in Aceh Selatan High Schools:
Evaluation is essential to assess the effectiveness of the curriculum in achieving educational objectives. Schools have identified several challenges, including limited understanding of the curriculum by teachers and insufficient infrastructure, such as projectors and digital tools. The solution includes teacher capacity building through comprehensive training, improving infrastructure, and conducting regular evaluations to monitor progress.
4. Follow-Up Actions:
To address the challenges in implementing the "Merdeka Belajar" curriculum, the following steps are recommended:
 - a) Identify key obstacles, including resource limitations and gaps in teachers' understanding.
 - b) Enhance teacher capacity through comprehensive workshops.
 - c) Strengthen school infrastructure, particularly in terms of IT-based learning tools.
 - d) Develop regular supervision and mentoring programs to ensure continuous improvement in education quality.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the study, analysis, and discussion of the research findings on the management of the independent curriculum in South Aceh Regency high schools, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The planning of the independent curriculum in South Aceh high schools begins with the formulation of short-term, medium-term, and long-term work plans, collaboratively designed by the school principal and vice principal. Teachers play an active role in developing innovative and creative teaching modules.
2. The implementation of the independent curriculum in South Aceh high schools has been ongoing for one year and is currently in the second phase, known as "Merdeka Berubah." The curriculum has been applied to the fullest extent possible according to the capacity and resources available at each school.
3. The evaluation of the independent curriculum in South Aceh high schools follows four stages: input analysis, process/implementation, graduate outcomes (output), and long-term results (outcome). It revealed that teachers require regular training to enhance their knowledge and potential, and ongoing observation is recommended.

Follow-up actions to improve the independent curriculum in South Aceh high schools include identifying challenges, providing teacher training, acquiring learning resources, scheduling supervision and support, and fostering effective collaboration and communication among school members, parents, institutions, and the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Enhancing Planning:

High schools in South Aceh should continue improving the planning of the independent curriculum by fostering closer collaboration among school principals, vice principals, and teachers. Developing comprehensive short-term, medium-term, and long-term work plans is essential to ensure effective implementation at every stage.

2. Optimizing Implementation:

In the current "Merdeka Berubah" phase, schools must make the most of their available resources. Continuous capacity building through training and mentoring is vital to ensure that the curriculum is implemented effectively across all schools, despite any limitations.

3. Regular Evaluation and Teacher Competency Development:

Evaluating the independent curriculum should be done regularly, following four stages: input analysis, process/implementation, graduate outcomes (output), and long-term results (outcome). It has been identified that teachers need regular training to enhance their knowledge and potential. Therefore, professional development programs for teachers should be prioritized, along with consistent supervision and guidance.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Future research directions can encompass the following areas: Firstly, evaluating the effectiveness of the Independent Curriculum in high schools within South Aceh Regency is essential. This research would focus on assessing how the Independent Curriculum enhances student learning outcomes. By employing comprehensive and diverse evaluation methodologies, deeper insights into the curriculum's impact on educational quality can be obtained. This would help identify areas of strength and improvement, ensuring the curriculum meets educational objectives effectively.

Secondly, investigations into the pivotal role of teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum are crucial. Understanding the necessary training and professional development required for teachers to maximize the curriculum's potential is vital. This research would provide valuable information on how to support and equip teachers to deliver high-quality education, ultimately improving educational outcomes for students.

Lastly, research into the influence of learning facilities on effective learning is essential. This study would examine how the physical school environment supports or hinders learning outcomes within the context of the Independent Curriculum. By providing valuable information for optimizing educational settings, this research could help create an environment conducive to effective teaching and learning, ensuring students can achieve their full potential.

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