

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE SCHOOL IN ADAPTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF KURIKULUM MERDEKA: A CASE STUDY OF INDONESIA'S BORDER AREA

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Abstract. This research aims to identify the challenges faced by teachers and schools while implementing Kurikulum Merdeka, as well as the strategy and support needed by teachers and schools in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka in the border area of Indonesia. This research used a case study approach. Data were collected through interviews and a questionnaire. Thematic analysis and statistical descriptive methods were employed to analyze the data. The research took place in Temajuk village, Paloh sub-district, Sambas regency, specifically at SMP N 4 Paloh and SMA N 2 Paloh. The subject included both school principals and five selected teachers from each school. This research was conducted on March 14, 2025. The principals were interviewed, followed by a questionnaire distribution to the selected teachers. The data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis and statistic descriptive technique. The research results show that SMA N 2 Paloh still faces the limitation of supporting facilities and the teachers' understanding due to a lack of special training. The schools have shown efforts to achieve maximum implementation through the optimization platform PMM and the teachers' study group. While SMP N 4 Paloh is still faced with the limitation of teachers' understanding, an inadequacy of training, and the limitation of supporting infrastructure. The infrastructure improvement and an in-depth training will certainly help the effectiveness of the Implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in the border area.

Keywords: Kurikulum Merdeka, Border Area, Challenges, Strategy, Support

Abstrak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi tantangan yang dihadapi oleh guru dan sekolah dalam implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka, serta strategi dan dukungan yang dibutuhkan oleh guru dan sekolah dalam implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di wilayah perbatasan Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara dan kuesioner. Analisis tematik dan metode deskriptif statistik digunakan untuk menganalisis data. Penelitian ini dilakukan di Desa Temajuk, Kecamatan Paloh, Kabupaten Sambas, khususnya di SMP N 4 Paloh dan SMA N 2 Paloh. Subjek penelitian meliputi kepala sekolah dan lima guru terpilih dari masing-masing sekolah. Penelitian ini dilakukan pada tanggal 14 Maret 2025. Kepala sekolah diwawancarai, diikuti dengan pembagian kuesioner kepada guru-guru terpilih. Data yang diperoleh kemudian di analisis menggunakan teknik tematik analisis dan statistic descriptive. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa SMA N 2 Paloh masih menghadapi keterbatasan fasilitas pendukung dan pemahaman guru akibat kurangnya pelatihan khusus. Sekolah-sekolah tersebut telah menunjukkan upaya untuk mencapai implementasi maksimal melalui platform optimasi PMM dan kelompok studi guru. Sementara SMP N 4 Paloh masih dihadapkan pada keterbatasan pemahaman guru, ketidakcukupan pelatihan, dan keterbatasan infrastruktur pendukung. Perbaikan infrastruktur dan peningkatan pelatihan tentu akan dapat membantu keefektifan implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di Perbatasan.

Kata Kunci: Kurikulum Merdeka, Perbatasan, Tantangan, Strategi, Bantuan

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INTRODUCTION

The curriculum has an important role as a main guideline in education, curriculum is designed to determine the flow of education. Curriculum is a device of concept which have plans and rules that determine the aims, structure, and also a way that is used as guidance to achieve certain educational purposes, according to (Effendi et al., 2020). The curriculum determines the process and outcomes of education. In line with Fauzan (2017) statement, the curriculum serves as a guide for teachers to determine the activities, aims, approaches, methods, strategies, processes, and evaluations of the learning process. Therefore, it is very important to always revise and develop the curriculum periodically to keep the relevance and the quality of the nation's children.

According to Sanjaya (2009), in Fauzan (2017) Several principles need to be considered in developing the curriculum, namely relevance, flexibility, continuity, and the effectivity. Therefore, the design of the curriculum needs to be in line with the circumstances of the education. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, the government of Indonesia has released a new curriculum named Kurikulum Merdeka to overcome the learning loss of Indonesian students. Kurikulum Merdeka was made to create such a fun school environment, in which the teacher can make a free decision to make an effective and creative learning method, making it possible to have learning activities inside or outside the class. According to Sasmita & Darmansyah (2022) Kurikulum Merdeka is designed to be simple so that the teacher can focus on the material essence and the students can be more active based on their interests.

However, the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka is still quite challenging for some schools based on several studies, due to the condition of the school or the readiness of the school to implement the Kurikulum Merdeka such as a study by Fatimatuzzahrah et al., (2023) found that the school had challenges in the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka related to the lack of resources, the teachers' training, workshops, and systemic support in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka. A similar study also conducted by Saragih & Marpaung (2024) found that the teachers are having challenges in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka at their school such as the lack of facilities, the limitation of material, and the less of teacher training. Hartawati & Karim (2024) found that the readiness of the teacher and school for the challenges during the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka confused the teacher in using the exact method while teaching using Kurikulum Merdeka. Therefore, the researcher considered that the study of the challenges in the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka at the border area of Indonesia is needed. According to Utomo (2019) the border area is underdeveloped areas

compared to other areas, confirmed that the border area was some areas that needed special support from the local and center government due to its condition.

This research was aimed to study the challenges, strategies, and support needed by the school based on their experiences in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka at the border area of Indonesia and Malaysia, specifically at the Temajuk Village, Paloh District, Sambas Regency, West Kalimantan. Two schools are involved in this research which is SMA N 2 Paloh and SMP N 4 Paloh, both schools involved are at different levels, and this study will retrieve two different perspectives on the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka at the border areas and gain deeper and richer data. Hopefully, the results of this research can be a reference for other schools that might have the same condition, and also become a reference for the local and center government in determining the exact support needed by the school in running the curriculum effectively.

METHOD

In this research, the researcher employs a case study as a method of research. This study aims to find out and understand the challenges faced by SMA N 2 Paloh and SMP N 4 Paloh in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka at the border area of Indonesia. Gerring (2007), a case study provides an opportunity to analyze a large number of cases, and the evidence is sometimes quite extensive. The collection of data in this research uses an interview and a questionnaire, so the qualitative and quantitative data were collected. Based on J. W. Creswell, (2018) The quantitative and qualitative data have their own limitations, and the combination of both data may strengthen the understanding of the information in order to answer the objective of the study.

The principals of both schools are the informants in this research, utilizing an interview to know the challenges and support needed by the school based on the principals perspective. And a teacher who is working at SMA N 2 Paloh and SMP N 4 Paloh are given a questionnaire to measure the level of agreement among the teachers about the challenges faced by the school during the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka, 5 respondents from each school will be participating in this study and which surely have a good understanding of the cases that are being studied, so the respondents being studied will be 10 teachers in total. In order to get more valid data, The interview utilized in this study is a structured interview considering that the researcher has already prepared the question before provided to the participant, and the questionnaire is a written question to gather systematic information from the respondents.

To ensure the validity of the data collection tools, the tools of this research was tested utilizing content validity test before distributed to the participants. Based on Mushtaq (2018) the content needs to be relevant and comprehensive to the item, and the validator will provide some feedback that will be the basis to revising the instrument. After the tools are validated by the expert validator the tools are once again the tools are tested by distributing it to the partial respondents in order to determine the readability level of each item of the instrument. At this stage, there is no scoring process because the aim is to get the respondent's feedback on each item that may be lacking or incomprehensible. Therefore, the researcher conducted the validity test with five teachers in SMP N 4 Paloh. Overall, the items tested can be well understood by the teachers, yet there are several items that are fixed to make it easier for the teachers to understand it.

The analysis of the data obtained from the interview was conducted using thematic analysis, which has 6 phases based on Braun & Clarke (2006), namely: familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming themes, and producing reports. While the data obtained from the interview was analyzed using statistic descriptive methods, which have 4 steps based on Ulfah et al., (2022), namely: problem identification, data collection, processing the data, and data display.

RESULTS

The results show that the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka at SMP N 4 Paloh is still facing some serious systemic, technical, and geographical challenges. The main challenges lies in the limitation of the teachers' understanding of the concept of Kurikulum Merdeka, the limitation of the teachers' training, the clarity of guidance, and also the inadequate infrastructure.

Most of teachers (80%) stated that they have difficulties in understanding the concept of Kurikulum Merdeka, this is reinforced by the qualitative data obtained from the interview with the principals which state that the transition from the Kurikulum 13 to the Kurikulum Merdeka is confusing for the teachers, in addition, the teachers also have difficulties related to the lack of the clarity guidance provided by the Kurikulum Merdeka, it can be seen that 80% of teachers disagree that the Kurikulum Merdeka has already provided clear guidance.

Table 1. Challenges faced by the teachers of SMP N 4 Paloh

INDICATOR	Very Large	Quite Large	Slightly	None
Challenges related to facilities in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka	20%	60%	20%	
Challenges related to the technology availability in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka	20%		80%	
Challenges related to access to information in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka	20%		80%	
Challenges related to teacher training in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka	20%	60%	20%	
Challenges related to the availability of teaching materials in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka	20%	60%	20%	

Related to the facilities 80% of the teachers in SMP N 4 Paloh still felt that the challenges are still significant in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka. While in the availability of the technology, the majority of teachers agree that it is not significantly challenging, although there small number of teacher still sees it as a significant challenges, which means that there are inequality of needs between the teachers in supporting them in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka, as same as the access of information the teachers has not considered it as a significant challenges, although the principals stated that the challenges related to the access of information is quite significant, the teachers seems have found a solution to overcoming the condition, and also the school principals certainly have a broader view of managerial matters that experience constraints due to limited access to information and do not only focus on the learning process in the classroom like teachers. The teachers training at SMP N 4 Paloh also considered as a major challenge by the teachers, 80% of the reaspondent sees that the training is inadequate to support the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka at their school, this results is also in line with the statement of the principals of SMP N 4 Paloh that the training of the teachers are constrained due to the remote location of the school. The adequacy of teaching materials also considered as a challenges by the 80% of the teachers, the teachers may have designed an innovative teaching methods but the it can not be realized without the adequacy of their teaching materials.

Several strategy has been conducted to overcoming these challenges as mentioned by the school principals by sending several teachers to participate an external training, forming an internal learning group of teachers led by the vice of principal of SMP N 4 Paloh, conducting an internal supervision by the principals to evaluate the implementation, and actively participated in the Subject Teachers Forum (MGMP) and the Principals working meeting (MKKS) to share the experience of practice and extending the understanding of the

implementation. However, this strategy is still constrained. The seminars are rarely conducted due to difficulties in accessing transportation, so support from the external and internal parties is very important, the teachers (80%) also agree that the support from the relatives parties, such as the Educational Department and the school supervisors, is important. However the 80% of the teachers stated that the communication between them and the school management is still rarely conducted, which points to the need for improved internal collaboration between teachers and the school management to make problem-solving more responsive and targeted. In terms of facility support, the principals admitted that they rely heavily on the assistance from the government because of the limited BOS funds due to the small number of students. Self-help efforts through committees are also limited by regulations prohibiting levies.

As many as 80% of teachers felt that the implementation was less effective, and most teachers (80%) felt that the impact of the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka on the students' learning outcomes is also low. Although the teachers considered that the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka has not been fully effective, the principal stated that students have begun to show increased learning activities and enthusiasm. This is an early indication that with more targeted support and strategies, the potential of the Kurikulum Merdeka to improve the quality of learning remains wide open.

In SMA N 2 Paloh the Kurikulum Merdeka has already implemented for 3 years, yet several challenges are still faced by the teachers and school, especially in the form of the readiness of the human resources and the supporting facilities. The main challenges faced by the school and teachers included the special training related to the Kurikulum Merdeka, the limitation of access to information, as well as the lack of a thorough understanding of the concept of Kurikulum Merdeka.

This findings was in line with Hayati et al., (2024) also stated that the low teachers understandings of the concept of the Kurikulum Merdeka and the lack of clarity of the implementation guideline were the main obstacle to the successfully implemented the Kurikulum Merdeka. In the context of SMA N 2 Paloh, these problems are also reflected in the limitations of deep and even teachers' learning related to the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka, as well as the challenges in the limitations of infrastructure, such as technology, in the learning process as mentioned by the school principals, the teachers (40%) also stated that the Kurikulum Merdeka did not provide a clear guidance in its implementation which shows that the special training for the teachers related to the Kurikulum Merdeka was uneven. The following table show the challenges faced by the teachers of SMA N 2 Paloh according to the questionnaire result:

Table 2. Challenges faced by the teachers of SMA N 2 Paloh

INDICATOR	Very Large	Quite Large	Slightly	None
Challenges related to facilities in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka	0	20%	80%	0
challenges related to the technology availability in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka	0	80%	20%	0
challenges related to access to information in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka?	0	40%	40%	20%
Challenges related to teacher training in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka	20%	20%	60%	0
challenges related to the availability of teaching materials in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka	0	40%	40%	20%

Related to the facilities at the school, the teachers (80%) seems not considering it as a major challenge, yet since there are 20% of the teachers feel it is quite challenging shows that there is a gap for improvement of the facilities. The most dominant challenges was related to the technology availability of their school, where 80% of the teachers felt that they felt a quite significant challenges related to the availability of the technology in their school, this is also mentioned by the school principals which is the teachers are usually take turns in using the technology to teach in their classes. In addition, the teachers challenges related to the acces of information is quite prominent, 40% of the teachers felt that it was quite challenging and the other 40% felt the opposite, and a small number (20%) of teachers seems not having any challenges related to the information access, this results shows that there are a different capacity for information literacy and the availability of resources to support the teachers in inderstanding Kurikulum Merdeka. Related to the teachers training, the majority of the teachers has considered that it is not really a significant challenges. These results still indicate the need for increased training and mentoring for teachers, as the principal said that they need special training related to the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka. In the teaching materials 40% of the teachers considered that it is not a significant challenges and the other 20% have faced no challenges related to the availability of the teaching materials, however there 40% who also considered the teaching material in their school was inadequate to support the implementation. This finding shows that some teachers still have difficulty accessing or developing teaching materials that are in accordance with the characteristics of the Kurikulum Merdeka.

The strategy that has been used by the SMA 2 Paloh to address these challenges focuses on collaborative approaches and strengthening the teachers' independent learning, through an optimization of the Merdeka Teaching Platform (PMM) application, forming the teachers'

learning communities, Participation in subject teachers' meetings (MGMP), as well as the implementation of class observation conducted by both principals or between the teachers. However, the effectiveness of the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka.

Based on the statement of the principals of SMA N 2 Paloh the support they need are the provision of supporting technological resources and also evenly distributed training for teachers related to the implementation of, it also means that the external parties engagement are also important for SMA N 2 Paloh, in line with the statement from Rahayu et al., (2022) who emphasize the importance of the engagement of the relevant parties in supporting the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka. Although that the teachers and school are still facing some challenges in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka, the teachers have felt that the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in SMA N 2 Paloh for 3 years has provide some positive impact for the students, as many as 80% of the teachers felt that the positive impact of the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka is quite significant. But it also highlighted aspects that still need to be developed systematically.

DISCUSSION

Based on the data results proves that the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka at the border area of Indonesia is still need an in depth evaluation to ensure its effectiveness and objectiveness, it is proven that the school located in the remote area is required an extra attention especially in the provision of supporting resources and procurement of technology facilities to support the the educational qualities, this situation makes the teachers difficult to design or determining the exact learning method for their students, while the statement from Hafis, (2016) teachers need to understand the suitable method to improve the students' motivation on learning. These results are also in line with the research findings from Yansah et al., (2023), who studied the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in the elementary school, found that the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka needs more availability of resources, teachers' training, and parental engagement to support the process of the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka. Which means it is also important to fulfill the teacher's needs for their teaching and learning process. Although each school has been implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka for several years, the SMA N 2 Paloh and SMP N 4 Paloh are still making extra efforts to achieve an optimal implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka. However, the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in both schools has shown a positive impact on the teachers and the students. This research indicates that the exact strategies and targeted support must be further enhanced to achieve equitable education. This means that the engagement from the related

parties is important to support the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka, in line with the statement from Rahayu et al., (2022), who emphasize the importance of the engagement of the relevant parties in supporting the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia's border regions faces serious challenges, particularly in terms of teacher understanding, availability of training, and limitations in supporting infrastructure. The two schools studied, SMA N 2 Paloh and SMP N 4 Paloh, demonstrate differing levels of readiness and response to the curriculum. Despite strategic efforts by the schools, such as forming study groups and optimizing digital platforms, geographical challenges and limited external support remain significant barriers. This study emphasizes the importance of equitable training and improved facilities to support the effective implementation of the curriculum. The findings recommend further involvement from the central and local governments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the research, there are several suggestions for related parties including the teachers, the school, and the local government, to enhance the effectiveness of the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in the border area. For the school, it is important to strengthen communication between management and teachers and improve the quality of internal teacher training. The teachers are also expected to be able to maximize the available facilities and infrastructure creatively, and also strengthen their skills and knowledge in digital literacy and Kurikulum Merdeka through an online sources. For the local government, the availability of facilities in the remote area should be accelerated to enhance the learning activity at the school, an in-depth evaluation about the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka are also important to find out the problems and solution in enhancing the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka. For the next researcher, it is important to have a comparative study between the remote areas and the urban areas in order to understand the differences in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum as a whole, as well as to develop curriculum evaluation instruments with a broader subject coverage.

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