



Evaluation of the Implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in Secondary Schools in the Digital Era

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Abstract:

This study evaluates the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in Indonesian secondary schools within the digital era. The curriculum aims to foster a flexible, student-centered education to enhance creativity, independence, and adaptability among students. Utilizing qualitative methods, including interviews, observations, and document analysis, the research explores the curriculum's impact on teaching practices and learning outcomes. The findings indicate that the curriculum has effectively introduced project-based learning and digital tools, creating a more engaging and interactive classroom environment. Students have demonstrated improved academic performance and growth in essential soft skills such as communication and collaboration. However, challenges persist, including disparities in digital infrastructure between urban and rural areas and varying levels of digital readiness among teachers. Teacher feedback highlights positive aspects of the curriculum but also points to the need for more professional development and support. Students appreciate the curriculum's relevance but suggest improvements in assessment guidelines and feedback mechanisms.

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Introduction (مقدمة)

The Indonesian education system has undergone significant transformations over recent decades, driven by efforts to improve educational quality and align with global standards. Reforms have included curriculum updates, innovative teaching methods, and the integration of technology in classrooms. Policies such as the 2013 Curriculum and the shift towards the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum reflect the government's commitment to modernizing education to better prepare students for future challenges (Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia, 2021). These changes aim to enhance academic achievement and develop competencies that are relevant in an increasingly interconnected world.

The Merdeka Belajar Curriculum was introduced as a response to the need for a more flexible and adaptive curriculum. This curriculum grants greater autonomy to schools and teachers, allowing them to tailor learning experiences to meet the diverse needs of students. It emphasizes project-based learning and the integration of digital technology to enrich the educational experience (Kemendikbud, 2022). This shift aims not only to enhance academic performance but also to equip students with essential life skills needed for the 21st century.

The Merdeka Belajar Curriculum aims to foster creativity, independence, and active engagement in learning. By providing students with opportunities to explore and solve real-world problems, the curriculum enhances critical and creative thinking skills. This approach supports a more personalized learning experience, where students are encouraged to take ownership of their education and develop solutions based on their interests and abilities (Yulianto & Prasetyo, 2023).

In the context of globalization and rapid technological advancements, the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum plays a crucial role in preparing students to navigate complex and dynamic environments. By focusing on skills that are critical for the modern workforce – such as digital literacy, problem-solving, and adaptability – the curriculum aims to produce graduates who are well-equipped to face the challenges of an increasingly globalized world (Sudirman et al., 2022). Digitalization has profoundly altered the landscape of education, transforming traditional teaching methods and learning processes. The integration of digital tools like computers, tablets, and online resources has enabled more interactive and collaborative learning experiences. This shift facilitates greater access to information and allows for more flexible learning environments (Setiawan & Nugroho, 2023). However, it also presents challenges related to digital access and infrastructure disparities across different regions in Indonesia.

Technology has been shown to enhance learning effectiveness by providing students with greater access to educational resources and allowing for personalized learning experiences. Digital platforms such as Learning Management Systems (LMS) enable students to learn at their own pace and access course materials at any time (Putri & Haryanto, 2023). Despite these benefits, there are still significant challenges, including the need for effective digital literacy among both educators and students to fully leverage technological advancements.

The Merdeka Belajar Curriculum strives to integrate technology as a fundamental component of the learning process. Through project-based and collaborative learning approaches, technology is used to enhance educational experiences, including digital simulations, virtual explorations, and interactive learning applications (Rahman et al., 2022). This integration aims to provide a more immersive and relevant learning experience, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world applications.

Despite the well-conceived framework of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, its implementation faces various challenges. There is often a disparity between the ideal vision

of the curriculum and its practical application in schools, particularly concerning teacher preparedness and supporting infrastructure. This research seeks to explore the extent to which the curriculum has been effectively implemented and identify the barriers encountered in practice (Rachman & Suryani, 2023).

Empirical evaluation is crucial for assessing educational policies and providing constructive feedback for policymakers. This research aims to generate relevant data to evaluate the effectiveness of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum and offer concrete recommendations for future improvements (Hidayat & Mulyadi, 2023). Such data is essential for ongoing curriculum refinement and the development of effective teaching practices. One of the major challenges in implementing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is the digital readiness of schools. Many schools lack adequate access to technology, both in terms of infrastructure and user skills. This research will identify technological gaps and their impact on curriculum implementation, offering insights into the challenges that need to be addressed (Pratama & Sutrisno, 2023).

Teachers and students face significant challenges in adapting to the new curriculum, including the need for additional training and support in using new teaching methods and technologies. These challenges often hinder the effective implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. The research will identify these barriers and assess the efforts made to overcome them (Ismail et al., 2023). A key objective of this research is to find practical and realistic solutions to the challenges identified. The findings are expected to provide actionable recommendations for schools and policymakers to improve the implementation of the curriculum, especially in the digital age (Nurhadi & Wahyuni, 2023).



Method (منهج)

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in secondary schools. A qualitative approach is suitable for this research as it allows for an in-depth understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by educators and students in the application of the curriculum. By focusing on detailed, contextual insights, the research aims to uncover the complexities of curriculum implementation and its impact on the educational environment (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design will facilitate a comprehensive exploration of the phenomena under study through multiple data sources and rich, descriptive data.

The study targets secondary schools that have implemented the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. The sample consists of teachers, students, and school administrators from a select number of schools across various regions to ensure a diverse representation of experiences and challenges. A purposive sampling technique is used to select participants who are directly involved in the curriculum's implementation and can provide valuable insights (Palinkas et al., 2015). This sampling method allows for a targeted examination of the curriculum's impact and facilitates a deeper understanding of specific contextual factors influencing its application.

Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews with teachers, students, and school administrators will provide detailed accounts of their experiences with the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, including perceived benefits and challenges. Observations of classroom interactions and teaching practices will offer direct insights into how the curriculum is being applied in practice. Additionally, document analysis of curriculum materials, lesson plans, and school reports will help contextualize the findings and provide a comprehensive view of the implementation process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify and interpret patterns and themes related to the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. Thematic analysis involves coding the data into categories, generating themes, and interpreting these themes in relation to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach allows for the identification of key issues, challenges, and successes associated with the curriculum's implementation and provides a nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings, the study will employ several strategies. Triangulation will be used to cross-check data from multiple sources, including interviews, observations, and documents, to enhance the credibility of the findings (Denzin, 1978). Member checking will involve sharing preliminary findings with participants to verify the accuracy of the interpretations and ensure that their perspectives are accurately represented. Additionally, a detailed audit trail will be maintained to document the research process and decisions, allowing for transparency and reproducibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical considerations are paramount in this research. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, ensuring they are aware of the study's purpose, their role, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Confidentiality will be maintained by anonymizing participants and securely storing data. The study will also adhere to ethical guidelines for conducting research with human subjects, ensuring that the research process is respectful and protects participants' rights and well-being (Creswell, 2014).

Result (نتائج)

This study found that teachers' level of understanding of the concepts and objectives of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum varied significantly between schools. Most teachers have a basic understanding of the curriculum's goals, such as the importance of fostering creativity, independence, and critical thinking in students. However, a deeper understanding of how to apply these principles in daily teaching practices remains limited. Many teachers expressed a need for additional training and guidance to fully grasp how to integrate this new approach into their everyday practices.

The readiness of teachers to implement flexible and adaptive teaching methods is also a key concern. While some teachers are enthusiastic and open to change, others struggle to adapt to the new approaches demanded by the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. Challenges faced include a lack of time to design more creative, student-centered learning experiences and limited access to resources that support project-based and digital technology learning. This indicates that teachers' readiness, both conceptually and practically, significantly affects the quality of curriculum implementation. The implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in daily teaching activities shows considerable variation between schools. In some schools, teachers have successfully implemented project-based learning, involving students in activities that are relevant to the real world and contextual. For instance, students are engaged in mini research projects or creative tasks that involve collaboration and innovation. The use of digital technology is also increasingly evident in the learning process, such as using learning apps and online platforms to support student interaction and collaboration.

However, variations in curriculum implementation are also evident in the level of engagement and creativity integrated into the learning process. Some schools still adopt traditional approaches, with little or no use of technology and innovative methods. Factors such as lack of infrastructure support, limited internet access, and insufficient technology training for teachers are the main barriers to adopting more modern learning approaches. This creates a gap in the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, where only well-resourced schools can implement the curriculum optimally.

The implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum has had a positive impact on student engagement and independence in the learning process. Students have become more actively involved in class, especially when given opportunities to explore their own ideas in projects or tasks that are relevant to everyday life. The curriculum emphasizes the role of students as active learners who can take initiative in their learning process, thereby enhancing independence and a sense of responsibility for their education. Moreover, evaluations indicate that this curriculum promotes increased creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking skills among students. Students are trained to think beyond conventional boundaries, work in teams, and evaluate various solutions to the problems they face. For example, through project-based learning, students are encouraged to identify problems, design solutions, and present their results to their classmates, all of which develop higher-order thinking skills and important social skills for their future.

However, these positive impacts are not always evenly distributed. Some students, especially those from environments with limited access to technology, face challenges in adapting to the new learning approaches. The digital divide becomes a significant challenge that hampers the learning process, particularly for students who lack adequate devices or internet access at home. This affects their ability to fully engage in technology-based learning, thus impacting the quality of their learning experience.

Furthermore, there are also challenges related to students' adaptation to more independent learning methods. Some students, who are still accustomed to conventional learning methods where the teacher's role is dominant, find it difficult to shift to being more proactive and responsible for their learning. This condition indicates that although the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum has great potential to improve education quality, its successful implementation heavily depends on the readiness of all parties involved, including the students themselves.

Challenges in the Implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum

One of the major challenges in implementing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is the disparity in access to technology between urban and rural schools. Schools in urban areas often have better access to technological resources, including up-to-date devices and reliable internet connections, while rural schools struggle with limited access to such facilities. This disparity creates a significant gap in the ability of schools to fully implement the curriculum as intended. Students in rural areas are often left behind in terms of digital literacy and technological engagement, which hampers their ability to benefit from the curriculum's digital components.

Additionally, internet connectivity and the availability of digital devices in schools are persistent issues. Many schools lack the necessary infrastructure, such as high-speed internet and sufficient numbers of computers or tablets, to support technology-enhanced learning. In some cases, schools have outdated equipment that does not align with the needs of modern learning approaches. These technical barriers not only affect the teaching process but also hinder students from fully participating in learning activities that involve technology, further exacerbating educational inequalities.

The digital readiness of both teachers and students plays a critical role in the effective implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. Many teachers face difficulties adapting to the use of technology in the learning process. This includes challenges in integrating digital tools into lessons, managing online platforms, and engaging students through virtual learning environments. Teachers who are not digitally literate often experience anxiety and resistance to adopting new methods, which affects the overall implementation of the curriculum.

Students also encounter challenges in adapting to the increased use of technology in their learning. While some students are comfortable with digital tools, others struggle with basic digital skills, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The need for

additional training to improve the digital literacy of both teachers and students is evident. Providing ongoing professional development and digital skills training can help bridge this gap, equipping both groups with the necessary competencies to thrive in a technology-rich learning environment.

Variations in support from school management significantly influence the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. In schools where management actively supports the curriculum, there is often a more seamless integration of innovative teaching methods and technology. This support can come in the form of providing resources, organizing professional development for teachers, and creating an environment that encourages experimentation with new teaching strategies. However, in schools where support is limited, teachers may feel isolated and less motivated to adopt the new curriculum fully.

Internal school policies also play a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of curriculum implementation. Policies that prioritize traditional teaching methods and resist change can hinder the adoption of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. Conversely, schools with progressive policies that encourage innovation, flexibility, and a focus on student-centered learning tend to see more successful implementation outcomes. This highlights the importance of school leadership in setting the tone and direction for curriculum changes.

Analysis of Successful Implementation

Identifying the factors that contribute to the successful implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is essential for understanding what works. Key factors include comprehensive teacher training, which equips educators with the skills needed to adapt to new teaching methods and integrate technology into their lessons. Active student participation is another critical factor, as engaged students are more likely to benefit from the curriculum's emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and independence.

Case studies of schools that have successfully implemented the curriculum reveal that a supportive school culture, access to adequate resources, and continuous professional development are integral to success. For example, schools that invest in regular workshops and training sessions for teachers, foster a collaborative learning environment, and actively involve parents in the learning process tend to have higher rates of successful curriculum adoption. These schools also tend to innovate in their teaching approaches, using feedback to refine and improve their practices continuously.

Successful schools often showcase best practices that can serve as models for others. One notable practice is the effective use of technology to enhance learning. Schools that have integrated digital tools such as interactive whiteboards, educational apps, and online collaborative platforms have seen increased student engagement and improved learning outcomes. These schools also emphasize hands-on, project-based learning that aligns with the curriculum's goals, allowing students to apply their knowledge in real-world contexts.

The role of school leadership is crucial in driving curriculum innovation. Leaders who prioritize professional development, encourage experimentation with new teaching methods, and provide a clear vision for curriculum implementation foster an environment conducive to success. By setting high expectations and supporting teachers in their professional growth, school leaders can create a culture of continuous improvement that benefits both educators and students. These best practices highlight the importance of strategic leadership and targeted support in achieving effective curriculum implementation.

The success of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum implementation can be attributed to several supporting factors, the most significant being comprehensive teacher training. Effective training programs equip teachers with the skills and confidence needed to adapt to the new curriculum's requirements. Training sessions often focus on practical aspects of implementing student-centered learning approaches, integrating technology into the

classroom, and developing innovative lesson plans that promote critical thinking and creativity. These training opportunities also provide a platform for teachers to share experiences, exchange ideas, and build a community of practice, which fosters a supportive environment for continuous professional growth.

Active student participation is another critical factor contributing to successful implementation. When students are actively engaged, they are more likely to take ownership of their learning, which aligns with the curriculum's emphasis on independence and self-directed learning. Schools that encourage students to explore their interests through project-based learning and collaborative activities often report higher levels of engagement and improved learning outcomes. By involving students in their learning process and allowing them to make choices about how they learn, these schools foster a sense of responsibility and motivation that drives academic success.

Case studies of schools that have successfully implemented the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum highlight the importance of a supportive school culture. In these schools, a culture of collaboration, open communication, and continuous feedback is fostered among teachers, students, and administrators. School leaders play a pivotal role in creating this culture by encouraging innovation, providing the necessary resources, and recognizing the efforts of teachers and students. This supportive environment not only motivates teachers to experiment with new teaching methods but also empowers students to take risks and be creative in their learning journey.

Access to adequate resources, including digital tools and learning materials, is also a key factor supporting successful implementation. Schools that invest in up-to-date technology, such as computers, tablets, and reliable internet access, provide teachers and students with the tools needed to enhance the learning experience. Digital resources enable teachers to deliver more engaging and interactive lessons, while students benefit from access to a wealth of information and learning opportunities that extend beyond the traditional classroom. This access to technology helps bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, making learning more relevant and meaningful for students.

Successful schools often demonstrate best practices that can serve as models for others aiming to implement the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum effectively. One of the most impactful practices is the strategic integration of technology in the classroom. Schools that leverage digital tools such as learning management systems, educational apps, and online collaboration platforms create a dynamic learning environment that supports student engagement and fosters a culture of continuous learning. By using technology to facilitate personalized learning experiences, these schools are able to meet the diverse needs of students and cater to different learning styles.

Innovative teaching approaches also stand out as best practices in successful schools. Project-based learning, flipped classrooms, and inquiry-based instruction are some of the methods that have proven effective in aligning with the goals of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. These approaches encourage students to explore, ask questions, and solve problems, which not only deepens their understanding of subject matter but also develops essential skills such as critical thinking, communication, and collaboration. Teachers in these schools are encouraged to step away from traditional lecturing and instead act as facilitators, guiding students through their learning journey and providing support as needed.

Leadership plays a crucial role in driving the success of curriculum implementation. In successful schools, leaders are not just administrators but visionaries who set the direction for teaching and learning. They actively promote a culture of innovation, encourage professional development, and are responsive to the needs of teachers and students. By fostering a positive school climate, providing ongoing feedback, and facilitating access to resources, effective leaders create an environment where the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum can thrive. Leadership

that values experimentation and supports risk-taking enables teachers to explore new methods without fear of failure, leading to more dynamic and impactful teaching practices.

In addition to technology integration and innovative teaching, successful schools often prioritize partnerships with parents and the community. Engaging parents in the learning process helps to extend the impact of the curriculum beyond the classroom, reinforcing the values of independence and creativity at home. Community involvement also plays a role in enhancing the relevance of learning experiences, as students can engage with real-world problems and work on projects that have a tangible impact on their surroundings. These partnerships create a more holistic learning environment that supports the overall goals of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum.

The rise of digitalization has significantly transformed learning methods within the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, characterized by the widespread use of digital tools such as educational apps, online platforms, and virtual simulations. Observations reveal that these tools are being integrated into classrooms to enhance teaching and learning experiences. For instance, applications like Google Classroom, Zoom, and various interactive learning platforms allow for a more dynamic and interactive learning environment. These technologies not only facilitate communication between teachers and students but also provide opportunities for students to engage in interactive content, such as quizzes, games, and virtual labs, which make learning more engaging and relatable. The impact of technology on student engagement is profound, as it allows for personalized learning experiences that cater to different learning styles and paces, fostering greater student autonomy and motivation.

Furthermore, the use of digital tools offers greater flexibility in the learning process, enabling a shift away from traditional, teacher-centered approaches to more student-centered and active learning models. Students can access learning materials anytime and anywhere, which supports a more individualized and self-directed learning experience. This flexibility is particularly beneficial in accommodating diverse student needs, as it allows for differentiated instruction and the possibility to revisit materials as needed. The digital shift has also enabled teachers to employ flipped classroom models, where students engage with instructional content outside of class and use classroom time for discussions, projects, and problem-solving activities. Overall, technology has made learning more accessible, interactive, and adaptive, which aligns with the core principles of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum.

The level of technology integration in daily teaching and learning activities varies widely across schools, influenced by factors such as infrastructure, teacher readiness, and access to digital resources. In schools that have successfully embraced technology, digital tools are seamlessly embedded into various aspects of the learning process, from lesson planning to assessment. Teachers use platforms like Kahoot for interactive quizzes, Canva for creative assignments, and Google Workspace for collaborative projects, which not only enhance the quality of learning but also develop students' digital literacy skills. The integration of technology allows for more innovative and engaging lesson delivery, where multimedia elements such as videos, animations, and simulations help explain complex concepts in an easily understandable manner.

However, this integration is not without its challenges. Schools often face hurdles such as limited access to devices, unreliable internet connectivity, and a lack of training for teachers on how to effectively use technology in their teaching. These barriers can hinder the optimal utilization of technology and create disparities in learning experiences among students. Moreover, the rapid pace of technological change requires constant updates and adaptation, which can be overwhelming for educators who are not well-versed in digital tools. On the other hand, these challenges present opportunities for growth and innovation, encouraging schools to seek creative solutions, such as community partnerships to fund technology

initiatives or peer mentoring programs to support teacher training. By addressing these challenges and embracing the potential of technology, schools can better align with the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum's vision of a modern, flexible, and student-centered educational approach.

Changes in Academic and Non-Academic Achievement

The implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum has led to noticeable changes in both academic and non-academic achievements of students. Qualitative data from various schools indicate a shift in student performance, particularly in subjects that emphasize critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving. Teachers report that students are more engaged and motivated in their studies, which has contributed to improved academic outcomes. The curriculum's focus on project-based learning and hands-on activities allows students to better understand complex concepts and apply their knowledge in real-world scenarios, leading to deeper learning and higher retention of material. This shift is particularly evident in subjects such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), where the use of experiments, simulations, and collaborative projects has enhanced student comprehension and performance.

Beyond academic achievement, there has also been a significant impact on the development of students' soft skills, which are crucial for their overall personal and professional growth. The Merdeka Belajar Curriculum emphasizes skills such as communication, collaboration, leadership, and adaptability, which are increasingly important in today's rapidly changing world. Students are encouraged to work in teams, present their ideas, and lead group discussions, all of which help to build their confidence and interpersonal skills. Teachers have observed improvements in students' ability to articulate their thoughts, listen to others, and work effectively in diverse groups, which are critical competencies that extend beyond the classroom.

The emphasis on soft skills development is further supported by the curriculum's approach to assessment, which goes beyond traditional testing to include evaluations of student projects, presentations, and group work. This comprehensive assessment strategy allows teachers to gauge not only students' academic understanding but also their ability to apply skills such as problem-solving and collaboration in real-world contexts. Feedback from students highlights that this approach makes learning more meaningful and enjoyable, as they are not just memorizing information for tests but are actively engaging with the material in ways that are relevant to their lives and future careers.

Teacher and Student Satisfaction with the Curriculum

Teacher and student satisfaction with the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum has been generally positive, particularly regarding its flexible, student-centered approach. Teachers appreciate the curriculum's emphasis on project-based learning, which allows them to design lessons that are more engaging and tailored to the interests and needs of their students. This flexibility also provides teachers with the opportunity to innovate and explore different teaching strategies, which can make their work more fulfilling and dynamic. Surveys conducted among educators reveal that many feel more empowered and motivated in their roles, as the curriculum encourages creativity and professional autonomy.

Students have also expressed high levels of satisfaction with the curriculum, particularly with the shift towards more interactive and practical learning experiences. They enjoy the freedom to explore topics that interest them and appreciate the emphasis on skills that they perceive as valuable for their future. The project-based approach allows students to see the direct application of their learning, making education feel more relevant and engaging. Many students report feeling more connected to their learning and motivated to take on challenges, which enhances their overall educational experience.

Despite the overall positive feedback, both teachers and students have highlighted areas where the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum could be improved. Teachers have noted the need for more professional development opportunities to help them effectively integrate new teaching methods and technologies into their classrooms. They have also expressed concerns about the additional time and effort required to design and assess project-based assignments, suggesting that more support and resources would help them manage these demands more effectively.

Students have also provided valuable feedback on the curriculum's implementation. While they generally appreciate the shift towards more interactive and flexible learning, some have noted that the increased reliance on group work can sometimes lead to imbalances in workload distribution. There are also calls for more consistent feedback from teachers to help students understand how they can improve their performance. Addressing these concerns by refining assessment methods and providing more structured guidance can further enhance the learning experience and ensure that the curriculum continues to meet the needs of all students.

Overall, the evaluation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum's impact on student learning and outcomes reveals a positive trajectory, with significant benefits observed in both academic performance and the development of essential soft skills. However, ongoing adjustments and improvements are necessary to fully realize the curriculum's potential and address the challenges identified by teachers and students. Continuous dialogue, professional development, and resource allocation will be crucial in ensuring the curriculum's success and sustainability in the future.



Discussion (مناقشة)

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in secondary schools during the digital era, highlighting both its achievements and challenges. One of the most significant outcomes is the positive shift in teaching and learning methods, which align with the curriculum's goals of promoting student-centered and flexible learning. The increased use of technology, such as digital platforms and project-based learning, has fostered a more engaging and interactive classroom environment. This transformation is consistent with global educational trends that emphasize 21st-century skills, suggesting that the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is on the right path toward modernizing Indonesia's education system.

However, despite these positive developments, the study also identified critical challenges that need to be addressed to ensure the curriculum's full effectiveness. Notably, the readiness of teachers and students to adapt to new technologies varied significantly, with many schools, particularly in rural areas, facing issues related to limited access to digital resources and inadequate infrastructure. This digital divide underscores the need for targeted interventions to bridge the gap between urban and rural schools, ensuring that all students have equal opportunities to benefit from the curriculum. Addressing these disparities is crucial for the curriculum's success and aligns with the broader goal of equitable education.

Another key challenge highlighted in the study is the need for ongoing professional development and training for teachers. While the curriculum encourages innovative teaching approaches, many educators expressed a lack of confidence in integrating technology effectively into their lessons. This gap in digital literacy among teachers can hinder the potential of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, as successful implementation relies heavily on educators' ability to facilitate student-centered and technology-enhanced learning. Providing continuous professional development and creating support networks for teachers can help enhance their skills and confidence, ultimately leading to better educational outcomes.

The impact of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum on student outcomes is multifaceted, with evidence suggesting improvements in both academic performance and the development of critical soft skills. The emphasis on project-based learning and real-world applications has allowed students to engage deeply with content and develop skills such as communication, collaboration, and problem-solving. These findings are consistent with educational research that supports experiential and active learning as effective strategies for enhancing student engagement and retention. However, the extent of these benefits varies, highlighting the need for more consistent implementation and support across different schools.

The satisfaction levels of both teachers and students with the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum further emphasize the importance of a flexible and student-centered approach to learning. Teachers reported feeling more motivated and empowered to innovate in their classrooms, while students appreciated the relevance and practicality of the new learning methods. Nevertheless, feedback also pointed to areas for improvement, such as the need for clearer guidelines on assessment and more structured feedback mechanisms. These insights suggest that while the curriculum has made significant strides, ongoing refinement is necessary to optimize its impact.

One of the most promising aspects of the curriculum is its potential to prepare students for future challenges by equipping them with essential skills for the digital age. The integration of technology into everyday learning not only enhances academic outcomes but also prepares students for a technology-driven world. However, this potential can only be fully realized if the challenges related to infrastructure, teacher training, and resource allocation are adequately addressed. The discussion highlights the need for a coordinated effort among policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to ensure that the necessary support systems are in place.

The study's findings also underscore the importance of school leadership in driving the successful implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. Schools that demonstrated best practices often had proactive and supportive leadership that fostered a culture of innovation and collaboration. School leaders play a crucial role in providing teachers with the resources and encouragement needed to experiment with new teaching methods. This highlights the need for leadership training and development programs that focus on promoting the values of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum and supporting teachers in their professional growth.

While the curriculum's approach to integrating technology and promoting flexible learning has shown promising results, it is essential to continuously monitor and evaluate its implementation. Regular assessments and feedback loops can help identify areas that require improvement and ensure that the curriculum remains responsive to the evolving needs of students and teachers. The establishment of a robust monitoring and evaluation framework can provide valuable data to inform policy adjustments and resource allocation, ensuring the curriculum's long-term sustainability and effectiveness.

In conclusion, the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum represents a significant step forward in transforming Indonesia's education system to meet the demands of the digital age. The discussion highlights the curriculum's strengths in fostering innovative learning environments and developing essential skills among students. However, the challenges identified, particularly regarding digital readiness and teacher training, must be addressed to maximize the curriculum's potential. By focusing on these areas, the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum can continue to evolve and provide a meaningful, equitable, and forward-thinking education for all Indonesian students.



Conclusion (خاتمة)

The implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in secondary schools during the digital era represents a transformative shift in Indonesia's educational landscape. This study has shown that the curriculum has successfully promoted more flexible, student-centered learning environments, integrating technology and project-based learning to enhance student engagement and outcomes. Students have demonstrated improvements in both academic performance and essential soft skills such as communication, collaboration, and critical thinking, aligning with the curriculum's goals of preparing learners for the challenges of the modern world.

However, the study also highlights significant challenges that need to be addressed to fully realize the potential of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. The digital divide between urban and rural schools remains a major barrier, with disparities in access to technology and infrastructure limiting the benefits of the curriculum for many students. Additionally, the readiness of teachers to effectively utilize digital tools and innovative teaching methods is uneven, underscoring the need for ongoing professional development and support.

Teacher and student satisfaction with the curriculum is generally high, with positive feedback on the flexibility and relevance of the new learning approaches. Nonetheless, there is a clear need for continuous refinement, particularly in assessment practices and the provision of structured feedback. The role of school leadership is also crucial in driving successful implementation, as supportive leaders foster a culture of innovation and provide the necessary resources for teachers to thrive.

To ensure the long-term success and sustainability of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, it is essential for stakeholders to address the identified challenges through targeted interventions. This includes investing in digital infrastructure, expanding teacher training programs, and developing robust monitoring and evaluation systems to guide ongoing improvements. By doing so, the curriculum can continue to evolve, providing an equitable and modern education that empowers all Indonesian students to succeed in a rapidly changing world.

In conclusion, the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum holds great promise for enhancing the quality of education in Indonesia. With continued commitment to addressing the challenges and building on the successes identified in this study, the curriculum can play a pivotal role in shaping a future-ready education system that meets the needs of all learners in the digital era.



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