



Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum Learning Management at SMPN 1 Bastem

Hadijah¹, Wisran², Bustanul Iman³

¹⁻³State Islamic University of Palopo, Indonesia

E-mail: wisrans@uinpalopo.ac.id

(Received: July-2024; **Reviewed:** August-2024; **Accepted:** September-2024;

Available Online: November-2024; **Published:** November-2024)

ABSTRACT

This study explores the implementation of learning management in the Kurikulum Merdeka framework at SMP Negeri 1 Bastem, a junior high school located in a 3T (frontier, outermost, disadvantaged) area of Luwu Regency, South Sulawesi. Using a qualitative embedded case study design, data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews with the principal, vice principal for curriculum, and subject teachers, as well as document analysis of KOSP, teaching modules, and project modules. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that the management of Kurikulum Merdeka follows a relatively systematic cycle of planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation. Planning is reflected in the preparation of the Kurikulum Operasional Satuan Pendidikan, development of differentiated teaching and project modules, and the use of the Merdeka Mengajar Platform. Organizing appears in the allocation of 20–30% lesson hours for project-based learning and the determination of local content in the form of regional language subjects to strengthen local wisdom. Implementation combines differentiated intrakurikuler learning with kokurikuler Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila using themes of local wisdom, engineering and technology, and entrepreneurship. Evaluation is conducted through diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments followed by remedial and enrichment programs. The study also identifies key challenges, including uneven teacher readiness, limited training and facilities, and students' low learning autonomy, while highlighting the school's adaptive strategies through collegial collaboration and contextual innovation in managing Kurikulum Merdeka.

Keywords: Learning Management, Kurikulum Merdeka, Differentiated Instruction, Project-based Learning, Profil Pelajar Pancasila.

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a fundamental role in shaping high-quality human resources in intellectual, social, and moral domains (Sakhiyya & Rahmawati, 2021). In the Indonesian context, the national education system is designed not only to produce Education in Islam positions knowledge and faith as mutually reinforcing foundations for the formation of individual character and civilizational progress. In contemporary national education discourse, curriculum and learning management are viewed as the “core system” that translates these foundations into structured learning experiences and measurable learning outcomes at the school level (Indarti, 2020; Wiji et al., 2021). In Indonesia, successive curriculum reforms from the post-independence period up to the most recent Kurikulum Merdeka reflect the state’s effort to respond to rapid socio-economic change, technological development, and widening disparities in learning quality across regions (Rohmat, 2023; Rusdiana & Ratnawulan, 2022).

The Kurikulum Merdeka was formally introduced as a flexible and competency-based curriculum designed to address learning loss in the post-pandemic period and to strengthen higher-order thinking, creativity, collaboration, and character through intracurricular learning and *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5) (Priatna, 2023; Rahayu et al., 2022). Implementation of this curriculum requires schools to redesign learning scenarios, reorganise teaching duties, and adopt differentiated instruction that is sensitive to learners’ needs and local context (Priyono et al., 2021; Winarti & Handayani, 2022). Effective learning management therefore becomes a critical determinant of whether the ideals of Kurikulum Merdeka can be translated into day-to-day instructional practice in the classroom (Indarti, 2020; Prasetyo & Lestari, 2022).

Schools in disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost (3T) regions face a more complex landscape. Empirical studies show that implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in 3T areas is characterised by limited digital infrastructure, uneven teacher professional development, and strong dependence on local innovation to contextualise learning (Rachmadtullah et al., 2023; Setiawan & Putri, 2024). Research in Eastern Indonesia similarly highlights that teacher agency and school-level leadership are decisive in adapting curriculum policy to real classroom constraints such as large class sizes, multi-grade teaching, and low digital literacy (Ulinniam et al., 2021; Winarti & Handayani, 2022). These findings indicate that learning management in Kurikulum Merdeka cannot be reduced to technical compliance with national guidelines, but must be understood as a dynamic process of planning, organising, implementing, and evaluating instruction under locally specific conditions (Abdul Hamid et al., 2017; Wiji et al., 2021).

SMP Negeri 1 Bastem represents a lower-secondary school located in a 3T context where Kurikulum Merdeka has been formally adopted yet still encounters structural and managerial challenges. The school is required to develop a *School Operational Curriculum* (KOSP), manage intracurricular learning that accommodates differentiated instruction, and organise P5 projects that integrate local wisdom and community participation, while operating with limited resources and sporadic access to training (Rachmadtullah et al., 2023; Setiawan & Putri, 2024). This situation raises important questions regarding how learning management is actually implemented at the school,

how intracurricular and co-curricular components of Kurikulum Merdeka are operationalised, and what kinds of constraints and problem-solving strategies emerge at the practice level (Priatna, 2023; Rohmat, 2023).

Previous studies have discussed curriculum management and the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in general, yet there remains a paucity of in-depth qualitative research that examines learning management as a holistic cycle in specific 3T school settings (Rahayu et al., 2022; Rohmat, 2023; Rusdiana & Ratnawulan, 2022). The present study seeks to address this gap by exploring the implementation of learning management in the Merdeka Curriculum at SMP Negeri 1 Bastem. The article focuses on three interrelated questions: how planning, organising, implementing, and evaluating learning are carried out; how intracurricular and co-curricular learning, including P5, are implemented; and what challenges arise and how the school responds to them within the constraints of a 3T environment (Hadijah, 2025; Setiawan & Putri, 2024).

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with an embedded case-study design to explore how Merdeka Curriculum learning management is implemented at SMP Negeri 1 Bastem. A qualitative design was chosen because it allows the researcher to understand social and educational phenomena in depth within their natural context, with emphasis on process, meaning, and interpretation rather than numerical generalisation (Ramadhan, 2021). The case-study design focused on a single school as the main unit of analysis, with sub-units consisting of the principal, vice-principal for curriculum, and subject teachers who are directly involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating Merdeka Curriculum learning.

The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Bastem, a public junior secondary school located in Pantilang, Basse' Sangtempe Utara, Luwu Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The school is situated in a rural 3T (frontier, remote, disadvantaged) area, making it a relevant setting for examining how curriculum reform is managed under conditions of limited resources. Data were collected between April and May 2025 to capture one complete cycle of instructional planning and implementation within the Merdeka Curriculum framework.

Data sources comprised primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly from key informants through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and systematic observations. The principal, vice-principal for curriculum, and selected subject teachers provided detailed information about how they plan, organise, implement, and evaluate learning, both intracurricular and co-curricular. Primary data included verbal accounts, behaviours, and interactions observed during classroom activities and school routines. Secondary data were collected from institutional documents such as the Kurikulum Operasional Satuan Pendidikan (KOSP), teaching modules, annual and semester programmes, lesson schedules, and the official school profile. These documents were used to corroborate and enrich the primary data and to provide a structural picture of Merdeka Curriculum implementation at school level (Sugiyono, 2019).

Three techniques were used for data collection: observation, interview, and documentation. Classroom and school observations were carried out openly to examine the conduct of intracurricular lessons, the organisation of *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5)*, the roles of school leaders in coordinating learning, teacher–student interactions, and the use of learning resources and assessment practices. Semi-structured interviews, guided by an interview protocol, allowed the researcher to probe issues such as planning routines, differentiation strategies, evaluation procedures, and perceived challenges in implementing the *Merdeka Curriculum*. Documentation analysis focused on written and visual records (e.g., *KOSP*, modules, lesson plans, and photos of learning activities) to strengthen and triangulate findings from observations and interviews (Kusumastuti & Khoiron, 2019).

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which consists of three concurrent stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). In the condensation stage, interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were selected, summarised, and coded according to themes related to planning, organising, implementation, evaluation, and challenges. Thematic displays were then constructed in the form of descriptive narratives and matrices to facilitate comparison across informants and data sources. Conclusions were drawn by identifying patterns and relationships, and then verified through repeated checks against the raw data and comparison between sources. The credibility of the findings was strengthened through methodological and source triangulation, careful documentation of the analytic process, and ongoing reflection throughout the research (Creswell, 2014; Sugiyono, 2019).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Management of Merdeka Curriculum Implementation at SMP Negeri 1 Bastem

The findings show that the implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum* at SMP Negeri 1 Bastem is managed through a structured cycle of planning, organising, implementation, and assessment. At the planning stage, the school first decided collectively to adopt the *mandiri berubah* option as an introductory and adaptive phase for the new curriculum. The principal initiated internal discussions with teachers, followed by a comparative visit to another junior high school in Luwu Regency to learn from existing practice. Based on these inputs, the school developed its *Kurikulum Operasional Satuan Pendidikan (KOSP)*, subject-based teaching modules, and project modules, while simultaneously conducting internal socialisation and training for teachers on the use of the *Merdeka Mengajar Platform* and preparation of differentiated assessment plans.

From the curriculum management side, the vice principal for curriculum coordinated teacher assignment for *Merdeka* classes, ensured that each teacher prepared teaching modules and project modules, and guided the alignment of learning with *Capaian Pembelajaran (CP)* and differentiated assessment. Planning therefore involved

not only the drafting of KOSP but also systematic preparation of lesson modules for both intracurricular and co-curricular learning, along with capacity building so that teachers understood diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment in the Merdeka framework.

Organising the Merdeka Curriculum was carried out through a structured allocation of teaching loads and learning time. SMP Negeri 1 Bastem applied a rolling system in which teachers rotated across Grades VII to IX over different years, so that each teacher experienced teaching multiple levels and could better understand diverse learner characteristics. Time allocation followed national regulations, with 20–30% of subject hours in each year reserved for project-based learning related to the strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile. For example, subjects that previously had five lesson hours per week were reorganised into four hours for intracurricular learning and one hour for project work. The school also selected local language as its local-content subject to promote local wisdom, and institutionalised the use of regional language every Thursday as part of school culture.

Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in classrooms combined intracurricular differentiated learning with co-curricular project-based activities. Intracurricular learning was designed to be student-centred and differentiated based on three diagnostic dimensions: students' readiness, learning interest, and learning style. Before starting new learning units, teachers conducted diagnostic assessments to categorise students' understanding of target learning objectives into "understand", "sufficiently understand", and "do not yet understand". Data on interest and learning style were drawn from guidance and counselling records collected at the point of student admission. These data informed teachers' decisions in adjusting task difficulty, grouping students, and varying media (audio-visual, kinesthetic, and others) to ensure that learning was responsive to individual needs.

Co-curricular implementation took the form of *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5)*. The school selected three themes that matched its context: Local Wisdom, Engineering and Technology, and Entrepreneurship. Two themes were implemented in the first semester and one in the second semester. Project implementation was guided by project modules prepared in advance, which allowed teachers across subjects to collaborate in delivering them. P5 activities required students to work in groups, explore real issues, design simple solutions or products, and present their work, thereby integrating cognitive, social, and character development.

Assessment management in the Merdeka Curriculum was also structured and documented in teaching modules. Teachers referred to three assessment stages: diagnostic, formative, and summative. Diagnostic assessment was conducted at the beginning of instruction to map student profiles and readiness. Formative assessment took place during learning through observation, simple response tools (for example, icon-based satisfaction checks), quizzes, and performance tasks in order to monitor progress and adjust instruction. Summative assessment provided evidence of achievement for each learning objective and formed the basis of reporting in Merdeka Curriculum report cards. Students who did not reach the *Kriteria Ketuntasan Tujuan Pembelajaran (KKTP)* were given remedial programmes, while those who had met or exceeded KKTP received enrichment tasks with higher levels of difficulty.

Forms of Intracurricular and Co-curricular Implementation

The study identified that intracurricular learning at SMP Negeri 1 Bastem has been oriented towards competency development rather than mere content coverage. Teachers are given flexibility to design teaching modules that correspond to students' characteristics, and to integrate character values into daily instruction. Lessons commonly involve group work, class discussions, contextual tasks, and the use of varied learning media. Intracurricular implementation thus reflects the principles of Merdeka Curriculum by placing students as active learners and teachers as facilitators.

Co-curricular implementation is primarily realised through structured P5 projects scheduled in three phases across the academic year. The themes selected—Local Wisdom, Sustainable Living, and “Bangunlah Jiwa dan Raganya”—are used as vehicles for students to engage in authentic activities such as environmental campaigns and the exploration of local culture. These projects are designed and coordinated by the curriculum team, implemented collaboratively by teachers from different subjects, and function as an extended learning space that reinforces values and competencies targeted in intracurricular lessons.

Challenges in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and School Responses

Despite positive progress, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMP Negeri 1 Bastem faces several challenges. The first group of challenges relates to teacher readiness. A number of teachers still feel more comfortable with teacher-centred instructional models and need time to adapt to their new role as facilitators. Not all teachers have attended formal training from the Ministry of Education or the local education office, which results in uneven understanding of the curriculum structure, the use of the Merdeka Mengajar Platform, and the design of differentiated learning and assessment. These differences contribute to variation in lesson quality and confidence levels among teachers.

The second group of challenges is linked to limited infrastructure and learning resources in the 3T context. The school experiences constraints in terms of access to technology, availability of teaching materials aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum, and facilities to support project-based learning. These limitations make it more difficult to fully realise the ideals of flexible, technology-rich, and highly resourced learning envisaged by the curriculum. In addition, students' independent learning skills are still developing, so not all students are immediately able to take advantage of the greater autonomy offered by Merdeka learning.

In response, the school has adopted several strategies. At the pedagogical level, teachers engage in ongoing self-learning and collegial sharing through internal workshops, mentoring from a curriculum team, and collaborative preparation of teaching and project modules. Teachers who have attended external training share their knowledge with colleagues who have not yet had the same opportunity. At the organisational level, the principal strengthens support for Merdeka implementation by providing policy backing, scheduling flexibility, and encouragement for innovation

within existing resource constraints. Locally available materials and simple media are utilised creatively to support P5 projects and classroom activities, reducing dependence on sophisticated technology. These efforts illustrate that, while challenges remain, the school is actively managing the transition towards Merdeka Curriculum implementation in a way that is adaptive to its local conditions

The analysis of observational records, interview transcripts, and school documents generated three interrelated themes that address the research questions. First, the study reveals how project-based and collaborative learning are planned, implemented, and reflected upon as part of the school's learning management practices. Second, it identifies a set of challenges that emerge at the levels of teacher readiness, student readiness, and external conditions, particularly in a remote and resource-limited context. Third, the findings illuminate how the integration of project-based and collaborative learning contributes to students' character development in line with the dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile. These three themes are presented and discussed in the following subsections

DISCUSSION

The discussion of this study indicates that the management of Kurikulum Merdeka implementation at SMP Negeri 1 Bastem has proceeded in a relatively coherent cycle, starting from planning, organizing, implementation, to evaluation. The preparation of the School Operational Curriculum (KOSP), the development of teaching modules and project modules, as well as the use of the Merdeka Mengajar Platform, demonstrate that the school strives to translate national curriculum policy into an operational learning design that is contextually aligned with the conditions of an educational unit in a 3T area (frontier, outermost, and disadvantaged regions) (Teguh, 2019; Rusdiana, 2018; Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

From the perspective of planning and organizing, the school began by determining the mandiri berubah implementation track, forming a curriculum development team, and designing teaching devices for both intrakurikuler and kokurikuler learning. The allocation of 20–30% of instructional time for projects that strengthen the Pancasila Student Profile reflects an adjustment to the learning time structure that follows the provisions of Kemendikbudristek, while at the same time requiring teachers to be more selective and oriented toward learning outcomes rather than mere completion of content (Fattah, 2012; Ramadhan, 2021; Kemendikbudristek, 2021). The selection of local content in the form of a regional language as an additional subject also shows an effort to link Kurikulum Merdeka with the preservation of local wisdom that is relevant to the socio-cultural characteristics of students.

At the implementation stage, the application of intrakurikuler and kokurikuler learning at SMP Negeri 1 Bastem is evident through the use of differentiated instruction and the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5)*. Teachers conduct diagnostic assessments to map students' readiness, interests, and learning styles, then adjust the learning process to be more student-centered. On the other hand, kokurikuler projects are developed by selecting three main themes—local wisdom, engineering and technology, and entrepreneurship—which are considered most relevant to the school

context and its surrounding environment (Kemendikbudristek, 2021; Rahayu et al., 2022). The combination of these efforts indicates that Kurikulum Merdeka is not only operationalized at the level of documents but has begun to materialize in flexible and contextual classroom practices.

Learning evaluation is carried out through three forms of assessment—diagnostic, formative, and summative—which complement one another as a basis for instructional decision-making. The results of assessment do not stop at scoring, but are followed up with remedial programs for students who have not yet achieved the Minimum Mastery Criteria for Learning Outcomes (KTTP) and enrichment programs for those who have exceeded the standard (Sugiyono, 2019; Kemendikbudristek, 2022). This pattern is in line with the character of Kurikulum Merdeka, which emphasizes assessment as a tool to support learning processes and to provide services that are more responsive to students' needs.

Nevertheless, the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka at SMP Negeri 1 Bastem still faces a number of challenges. Teachers' readiness to shift from a teacher-centered approach to the role of facilitator, unequal access to training, limited facilities and technology in a 3T region, and students' ability to manage independent learning are among the key factors that must be gradually addressed (Ramadhan, 2021; Rahayu et al., 2022). The school's efforts through benchmarking visits, internal workshops, utilization of the Merdeka Mengajar Platform, and the strengthening of a culture of gotong royong among educators and stakeholders indicate that this implementation process is understood as a long-term journey that requires continuous capacity-building. Within this framework, the findings of the study affirm that learning management under Kurikulum Merdeka at SMP Negeri 1 Bastem is moving in the right direction, although further reinforcement is needed in teachers' competencies, students' learning autonomy, and structural support so that the gap between policy ideals and classroom realities can be progressively narrowed.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka at SMP Negeri 1 Bastem has been managed through a relatively coherent cycle of planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation, which is contextually adapted to the characteristics of a 3T-area school. The planning stage is reflected in the preparation of the Kurikulum Operasional Satuan Pendidikan (KOSP), the development of teaching and project modules, and the use of the Merdeka Mengajar Platform as a reference for learning outcomes and differentiated assessment. The organizing stage appears in the structuring of lesson hours, including the allocation of 20–30% of instructional time for project-based kokurikuler activities and the determination of local content in the form of regional language subjects to strengthen local wisdom. Implementation is realized through intrakurikuler learning that applies differentiated instruction based on diagnostic assessment of students' readiness, interests, and learning styles, alongside kokurikuler learning in the form of *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* with themes of local wisdom, engineering and technology, and entrepreneurship. Evaluation is conducted systematically using diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments,

followed by remedial and enrichment programs according to students' achievement of learning outcomes. At the same time, the school faces challenges related to teacher readiness to shift from teacher-centered to facilitator roles, unequal access to training, limited facilities and technology, and students' limited independence in learning. However, these obstacles are gradually addressed through benchmarking activities, internal workshops, the utilization of digital platforms, and a culture of collaboration among school stakeholders, indicating that the management of Kurikulum Merdeka at SMP Negeri 1 Bastem is moving in the right direction while still requiring continuous strengthening.

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