



Curriculum Management Strategies in Implementing the Independent Curriculum at SMP Negeri 24 Samarinda

Novi Dwi Astuti^{1*}, Haeruddin², Akhmad³

Mulawarman University

Corresponding Author: Novi Dwi Astuti kennovimanuhara84@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe curriculum management strategies in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SMP Negeri 24 Samarinda. A qualitative approach with a descriptive design was employed. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, with key informants including the principal, vice principal for curriculum affairs, teachers, and educational staff. The findings indicate that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum has been carried out in stages since 2022 and was fully adopted across all grade levels by 2024. The curriculum management strategy includes collaborative planning, structured role organization, project-based and differentiated learning implementation, as well as formative and reflective evaluations. One significant innovation is the establishment of the Learning Community (Komunitas Belajar or Kombel) as a collaborative space for teachers to share best practices, learn from each other, and deepen their understanding of the Independent Curriculum. Despite challenges such as disparities in teacher competencies and limited parental involvement, the management strategies implemented have had a positive impact on the quality of learning and the strengthening of student character through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a vital aspect in shaping high-quality human resources and enabling them to adapt to changing times. In the context of globalization that continues to move dynamically, the education system in Indonesia faces demands to constantly transform, both in terms of curriculum structure, learning approach, and management. One of the major efforts made by the Indonesian government in responding to changing times and community needs is through the development and implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This curriculum is designed to be more flexible, provide space for freedom of learning, encourage creativity, and strengthen the character and competence of students in facing future challenges. However, the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is highly dependent on the curriculum management strategy implemented in educational units. Curriculum management is the process of planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating the applicable curriculum, so that educational goals can be achieved effectively and efficiently (Nasbi, 2017). In the context of secondary education, the principal, deputy principal for curriculum, and all teachers are important actors in ensuring that the curriculum runs according to the characteristics of the education unit and the needs of students. SMP Negeri 24 Samarinda is one of the schools that has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum in stages since 2022. Based on the results of initial observations and researcher interviews with the Deputy Principal for Curriculum, it is known that this school began implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in 2022 for grades VII, while grades VIII and IX are still using the 2013 Curriculum. Furthermore, in 2023, the Merdeka Curriculum is applied to grades VII and VIII, and in 2024, all levels (grades VII, VIII, and IX) have fully implemented the Merdeka Curriculum. This transition process certainly requires a mature managerial strategy so that curriculum implementation is not only an administrative obligation, but also able to improve the quality of learning. The implementation of the new curriculum is not without obstacles. As revealed by Hartawati & Karim (2024), curriculum changes require teachers to adapt to a more contextual and student-centered learning approach, and demand better mastery of technology to support the teaching and learning process. On the other hand, based on a study at SMP Negeri 2 Sipoholon, teachers experienced difficulties in preparing teaching tools according to student needs, indicating that the success of the curriculum is not only determined by the substance of the policy, but also by the readiness of the school's internal management (Sipahutar, 2024). From an educational management perspective, successful curriculum implementation is strongly influenced by four important aspects: planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating. Azhari (2017) emphasizes that good curriculum management must involve setting clear goals, developing relevant materials, an effective learning system, and continuous evaluation. In SMP Negeri 24 Samarinda, the curriculum management strategy needs to reflect the transition process from the 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum, including in terms of strengthening teacher capacity, preparing teaching tools, and coaching students. Furthermore, Nasution et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of

institutional support and the role of policymakers in schools in the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The curriculum cannot run optimally without the active involvement of the principal and curriculum deputy in managing resources, strategizing teacher professional development, and building a learning ecosystem that supports the formation of the Pancasila Student Profile. In this context, the curriculum management strategy at SMP Negeri 24 Samarinda is key in determining whether the Merdeka Curriculum can be implemented by government expectations and local school needs. The various challenges that arise during the transition period, such as the readiness of teaching tools, mastery of diagnostic assessments, use of the Merdeka Mengajar platform, and strengthening character values through differentiated learning, need to be overcome with the right managerial approach. Research by Yunita et al. (2023) shows that one of the main obstacles in implementing Merdeka Curriculum is the limited understanding and training of teachers, as well as the lack of evaluative monitoring of learning practices that have been running. Therefore, curriculum management strategies should not be purely administrative, but must be able to encourage a comprehensive learning transformation. Furthermore, curriculum management strategies do not only rely on structural and institutional aspects, but also on participatory and collaborative approaches. As explained by Suryana & Ismi (2019), teacher involvement in designing and evaluating curriculum implementation determines the quality of the graduates produced. Therefore, curriculum management at SMP Negeri 24 Samarinda needs to prioritize collaboration between teachers, principals, and other policymakers in formulating learning policies that are relevant and adaptive to student conditions. The Independent Curriculum opens up space for schools to innovate and adapt according to the characteristics and needs of students. However, this autonomy still requires managerial guidelines so as not to deviate from the national policy framework. In this case, the curriculum management strategy implemented at SMP Negeri 24 Samarinda needs to be systematically reviewed and evaluated to determine its effectiveness in supporting the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Based on the description, the researcher considers it necessary to study in depth how the curriculum management strategy is in the Independent Curriculum at SMP Negeri 24 Samarinda. This study is expected to contribute to the development of educational management science, as well as become a reference for other schools in developing effective and sustainable curriculum implementation strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Formulation of the Problem

1. What curriculum management strategies are implemented at SMP Negeri 24 Samarinda in implementing the Independent Curriculum?
2. What are the challenges faced in implementing curriculum management during the transition process from the 2013 Curriculum to the Independent Curriculum at SMP Negeri 24 Samarinda?

3. What is the role of the principal and vice principal for curriculum in supporting the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SMP Negeri 24 Samarinda?
4. How effective is the curriculum management strategy in improving the quality of learning and achievement of the Pancasila Student Profile?

Research Purposes

1. To describe the curriculum management strategy applied in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SMP Negeri 24 Samarinda.
2. To identify the challenges faced in the transition process and implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the educational unit.
3. To analyze the role of the principal and vice principal for curriculum in supporting the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.
4. To evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum management strategy on the quality of learning and strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile at SMP Negeri 24 Samarinda.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive pattern, which aims to systematically describe the facts and characteristics of the object or subject of research precisely and in depth (Sugiyono, 2019). This approach was chosen because it is able to explain the situation and conditions that are currently taking place in the field naturally and contextually, especially related to the curriculum management strategy in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SMP Negeri 24 Samarinda. This research design does not aim to measure variables in the form of numbers, but rather emphasizes the narrative description of the phenomena being studied. Therefore, the data obtained are not presented in the form of statistics or numbers, but in the form of words, pictures, or behaviors that are explained in detail in the form of descriptive descriptions (Margono, 2013). The informants in this study consist of two categories, namely, Key informants, who have a deep understanding of curriculum management in schools, namely the Principal, Vice Principal for Curriculum, Coordinator of driving teachers or teachers of the Independent Curriculum, and Teachers of grades VII, VIII, and IX. Meanwhile, supporting informants are parties who are involved or related to the process of implementing the Independent Curriculum in schools, such as education personnel (TU, librarians, etc.), parents of students, school committees, student representatives, and supervisors from the Education Office.

Data Collection Technique

Data was collected using three main techniques, namely:

1. **Observation:** Researchers conduct direct observation of the learning process, curriculum implementation, and dynamics that occur in the school environment. Observations are carried out in a participatory manner by utilizing the five senses without asking direct questions to the objects being observed (Hikmat, 2011).

2. Interview: Interviews were conducted in-depth and openly with key informants and supporters to explore information related to strategies, constraints, and curriculum management practices. This technique allows researchers to obtain verbal information directly through exploratory questions (Hikmat, 2011).
3. Documentation: Researchers collect and analyze related documents such as school operational curriculum documents (KOSP), teaching materials, lesson schedules, curriculum work programs, meeting minutes, and supervision reports. Documentation can also be in the form of photos, activity recordings, or other relevant digital files (Syaodih, 2010).

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this study was carried out interactively and continuously through the process of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. Data collected from observations, interviews, and documentation were analyzed by categorizing, comparing, and interpreting to obtain deep meaning related to curriculum management strategies in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SMP Negeri 24 Samarinda is an educational transformation process that has been taking place gradually since 2022. Based on the results of observations, in-depth interviews, and analysis of school curriculum documents, a complete picture of the curriculum management strategy applied in supporting this national curriculum change was obtained. The strategy includes systematic planning, organizing, implementing, evaluating, and involving all elements of the education unit.

Curriculum Planning Strategy

Curriculum planning is a very important starting point in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Based on the results of interviews with the Deputy Principal for Curriculum, planning is carried out by referring to the policies of the Ministry of Education and Culture, as well as the results of training and socialization that have been attended since 2021. This series of activities is the basis for compiling the Operational Curriculum of Education Units (KOSP), which is then adjusted to the characteristics of the education unit. KOSP planning is carried out collaboratively by involving the principal, curriculum team, subject teachers, and school committee. This process also includes the preparation of learning objective flows (ATP), teaching modules, and integration of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5). Based on the documents obtained, the planning is adjusted to the local context and the actual needs of students, in line with the principles of flexibility and diversity of the Independent Curriculum.

Organizing Roles and Responsibilities

In the organizing stage, the curriculum management strategy is focused on a clear and synergistic division of roles between school elements. The principal acts as the policy direction determiner, while the Vice Principal for

Curriculum becomes the coordinator of technical implementation and field supervision. An internal curriculum development team is formed by involving teachers who have participated in the teacher-driven training to become internal resource persons and mentors for colleagues. One of the strategic steps taken is the formation of a Learning Community (Kombel) as a forum for mutual learning, sharing experiences, and strengthening teacher competencies in understanding and implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Kombel is a participatory space where teachers can discuss the preparation of ATP, the development of teaching modules, the use of the Freedom to Teach platform, and share best practices related to differentiated learning and formative assessment. Kombel activities are carried out periodically, facilitated by driving teachers and focused on solving real problems faced by teachers in the classroom. The formation of Kombel not only improves teacher curriculum literacy but also fosters solidarity, collaboration, and self-confidence in developing innovative and contextual learning. This strategy reflects the spirit of the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes the importance of the role of teachers as learning subjects.

Gradual Implementation of Independent Curriculum

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SMP Negeri 24 Samarinda is carried out in stages. In the 2022 academic year, implementation will begin in grade VII, while grades VIII and IX will still use the 2013 Curriculum. Furthermore, in 2023, grades VII and VIII will use the Independent Curriculum, and in 2024, all levels will have fully implemented the new curriculum. This implementation presents various challenges, especially for teachers who are not yet familiar with the differentiation approach, project-based learning, and diagnostic assessment. Based on the results of the interviews, several teachers admitted to having difficulty understanding the new structure of ATP and teaching modules, so that initially they only relied on sources from the platform without contextual adjustments. However, with Kombel and guidance from the curriculum development team, teachers are gradually able to develop more adaptive learning. In practice, learning activities begin to emphasize exploratory, reflective, and collaborative activities. The P5 projects that are being run, such as school food security activities, environmental literacy, and student entrepreneurship, are becoming applicable and enjoyable learning spaces for students.

Evaluation and Monitoring of Implementation

Evaluation of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is carried out in a formative and participatory manner. Based on documentation data and interview results, the evaluation is carried out through class supervision by the principal and curriculum representative, weekly reflection meetings, and feedback from teachers and students. The evaluation does not only focus on administrative aspects, but more on reflection on the learning process and follow-up planning. Reflection activities in Kombel are also part of the evaluation mechanism. Teachers are invited to assess the effectiveness of the teaching module, the suitability of learning strategies to student needs, and identify technical obstacles in the classroom. This approach is in accordance with the principles of the Independent Curriculum, which places teachers as the

main actors in curriculum development at the educational unit level. Evaluation is also carried out on P5 activities through teacher reflection journals and project implementation reports, which are then discussed together in the Kombel forum. This is a good practice in maintaining the consistency and quality of the implementation of character and competency-based curriculum.

Challenges in Implementation

Despite many positive achievements, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SMP Negeri 24 Samarinda is not free from several challenges. One of them is the competency gap between teachers, especially for those who have not received formal Independent Curriculum training. Some teachers still face difficulties in understanding the principles of differentiation and compiling diagnostic assessments. In addition, time constraints and administrative workloads make it difficult for teachers to focus on compiling ideal teaching tools. Some teachers said that their mastery of digital platforms such as Merdeka Mengajar is also still limited, especially for senior teachers who are less familiar with technology. Another challenge is the lack of understanding of parents regarding the learning concept in the Independent Curriculum. Some parents question the absence of printed books and unconventional forms of assignments, such as self-reflection or group projects. This requires a more intensive communication and socialization approach between schools and parents.

Impact on the Quality of Education

The curriculum management strategies implemented, including the formation of Kombel, have had a significant impact on the quality of learning. Teachers have become more open to contextual and reflective learning approaches. They have begun to develop teaching materials based on students' real needs and can conduct formative assessments to identify learning outcomes. Students showed enthusiasm in participating in P5 activities and real-life projects. They were more active in discussions, more confident in expressing their opinions, and able to work in teams. This shows that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, although still in the process of adaptation, has provided a more meaningful learning experience and is oriented towards strengthening character. The principal also showed a high commitment in supporting the sustainability of this strategy, by providing space for teachers to attend training, providing time for Kombel, and encouraging cross-subject collaboration. This strategy is in line with the principles of curriculum management put forward by Syafaruddin & Amiruddin (2017), namely thorough planning, participatory implementation, and reflective and continuous evaluation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the research and discussion that have been carried out, it can be concluded that the curriculum management strategy in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMP Negeri 24 Samarinda is carried out in stages, systematically, and collaboratively. The management process starts from the curriculum planning stage based on national policies

and local school needs, organizing clear roles between the principal, curriculum representative, and teacher team, to implementing a curriculum that prioritizes differentiated learning and character strengthening through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5). One of the strategic steps that has been successfully implemented is the formation of a Learning Community (Kombel), which is an effective forum for teachers to learn from each other, share good practices, and improve their competence in compiling and implementing teaching tools based on the Independent Curriculum. Kombel also functions as a means of joint reflection and evaluation, which strengthens the culture of collective learning in the school environment.

Although there are still a number of challenges, such as the gap in understanding between teachers, administrative workload, and lack of parental participation, the curriculum management strategy implemented has proven to be able to encourage positive changes in the quality of learning and the school's educational climate. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMP Negeri 24 Samarinda has shown a progressive direction in realizing contextual, inclusive, and student-centered learning. For this reason, strengthening community-based learning management strategies, ongoing training, and support from all stakeholders are important keys to the sustainability and success of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the future.

FURTHER STUDY

This research still has limitations, so further research is still needed on this topic.

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