

## **The Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Senior high school in Agam Cendekia**

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the initial implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMA Negeri Agam Cendekia, Agam Regency, West Sumatra, with a focus on teachers' perceptions of changes in administrative practices and instructional implementation. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with an English teacher and analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The findings indicate that the school has begun implementing the Merdeka Curriculum through adjustments in instructional planning documents, including the transition from lesson plans (RPP) to teaching modules (Ajar Module) and from syllabi to Learning Objective Flow (Learning Objective Flow (ATP)). Conceptually, the teacher perceived that the Merdeka Curriculum does not differ significantly from the previous curriculum. The use of technology in learning has started to be integrated; however, it is still constrained by limited supporting facilities and unstable internet access. In addition, the impact of the curriculum on students' independence, creativity, and engagement has not been perceived as significant. Nevertheless, initial training provided for teachers serves as a supporting factor in the adaptation process. Overall, this study concludes that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum remains at an adjustment stage and requires improved facilities and continuous mentoring to achieve optimal implementation.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Merdeka Curriculum is a national curriculum reform policy developed to respond to post-pandemic learning challenges while strengthening the quality of education oriented toward the development of students' competencies. The theoretical foundation of the Merdeka Curriculum aligns with the principles of student-centered learning, which emphasize learning flexibility, character development, and the cultivation of students' potential in accordance with their talents and interests (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). This curriculum is designed not only to address the phenomenon of learning loss, but also to provide broader autonomy for educational institutions and educators in designing contextual and meaningful learning experiences. Within the structure of the Merdeka Curriculum, several fundamental changes distinguish it from previous curricula. These changes include the use of Teaching Modules (Ajar Module) as a replacement for Lesson Plans (RPP), the simplification of learning planning structures through Learning Objectives Flow (( Learning Objective Flow / ATP), the strengthening of project-based learning through the Project for Strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile (P5), and an emphasis on formative assessment as a means of providing continuous feedback in the learning process (Faiz et al., 2022). These changes require

teachers not only to understand curriculum documents conceptually, but also to be capable of implementing them consistently in daily instructional practices.

Although conceptually the Merdeka Curriculum offers a more adaptive and progressive approach, the success of its implementation is highly dependent on the readiness of educational units at the micro level. Factors such as teachers' understanding of curriculum policies, their ability to adjust instructional tools, the availability of facilities and infrastructure, and support from school stakeholders are key determinants of successful implementation (Fullan, 2007). Experiences from previous curriculum implementations, such as the 2013 Curriculum, indicate that challenges during curriculum transitions often arise from issues related to teacher preparedness and limitations in supporting learning facilities (Sisdiana et al., 2022). In this context, the early-stage implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum needs to be examined empirically to understand the dynamics occurring at the school level. Examining teachers' perceptions is essential because teachers are the primary actors in translating curriculum policies into classroom practices. Teachers' perceptions of curriculum changes influence their attitudes, readiness, and strategies in designing and implementing learning activities.

Based on this background, this study aims to describe and analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMA Negeri Agam Cendekia. The focus of the research is directed toward teachers' perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum, changes in learning planning and implementation, and challenges encountered during the initial stage of its implementation. The findings of this study are expected to provide an empirical overview of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the senior high school level, as well as to serve as reflective material and a reference for educational institutions in optimizing the implementation of the new curriculum.

#### **Article Type**

This article falls into the category of a Research Article, namely a scholarly work prepared based on the results of empirical research conducted in an educational institution. The study examines the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMA Negeri Agam Cendekia, with a particular focus on teachers' perceptions of changes in learning planning and implementation, as well as the challenges encountered during the initial stage of its application. The research data were obtained directly from the field through systematic data collection techniques. As a Research Article, this paper presents the stages of the research process, including problem formulation, data collection, analysis of findings, and the drawing of conclusions based on empirical evidence.

The research adopts a descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of Merdeka Curriculum implementation at the school level. The findings are presented objectively and analyzed by linking field data with relevant theoretical concepts and scholarly studies. This article is neither a conceptual paper nor a literature review; rather, it focuses on empirical facts obtained through interviews and analysis of curriculum implementation in the school context. Therefore, it fulfills the main characteristics of a Research Article, namely producing data-based findings that can serve as academic references, materials for educational policy evaluation, and guidance for educational institutions in developing more effective strategies for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

## **2. METHODE, DATA AND ANALYSIS**

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. The qualitative approach was selected because the research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the process of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum within a specific educational context, particularly from the perspective of teachers as the primary implementers of curriculum policy in the classroom. The case study design is used to describe the phenomenon of curriculum implementation in a contextual and holistic manner within a single school, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics, challenges, and responses that emerge during the initial stage of Merdeka Curriculum implementation. The data source in this study consists of one key informant, Drs. Rizman, M.Pd., who is an English teacher at SMA Negeri Agam Cendekia. The informant was selected purposively based on the consideration that he is directly involved in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and has experience in learning planning and instructional practices. In addition, the informant is considered to have sufficient understanding of changes in curriculum administration, enabling him to provide relevant and in-depth information in accordance with the focus of the study.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. This interview technique was chosen to allow flexibility for the researcher to explore information in depth while maintaining alignment with the research objectives. The interview was conducted as part of coursework for the subject of Educational Administration and Supervision, with particular emphasis on curriculum administration. The interview questions addressed teachers' perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum, changes in learning planning and implementation, the use of instructional tools, the integration of technology, and challenges encountered during the early stages of curriculum implementation. The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The analysis process began with reading and reviewing the interview data comprehensively to gain a general understanding. Subsequently, the researcher conducted coding of key statements related to the research focus. These codes were then grouped into main themes representing patterns of teachers' perceptions, implementation practices, and challenges faced in applying the Merdeka Curriculum.

To ensure data credibility, the researcher conducted cross-checking of interpretations by comparing findings across different parts of the interview and ensuring consistency between the data and the research context. Data analysis was carried out in a descriptive-interpretative manner by linking field findings with relevant theoretical foundations and previous research. Through this approach, the study is expected to provide a comprehensive empirical depiction of the early-stage implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMA Negeri Agam Cendekia.

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### Result

Tabel 1. Ringkasan Data Hasil Wawancara Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka

Findings Theme	Data Description
Understanding Curriculum	The teacher looked at Independent Curriculum does not Far different with 2013 Curriculum and still needs - oriented student
Socialization Curriculum	School has carry out training beginning with present source person from outside
Device Learning	Happen change from RPP to Teaching Module, syllabus to ATP, as well as indicator to CP
Practice Learning	Learning more flexible , utilizing IT, and students allowed using a cell phone
Learning Differentiation	Done through Work The same with the guidance counselor for understand characteristics student
Assessment Formative	Implemented based on activity students and exams daily
Assessment Summative	Own weight about 70% of overall evaluation
Involvement Student	Rated No Far different compared to curriculum previously
Facility Technology	Availability facility around 50%
Constraint	Main obstacles in the form of problem technical like projector and internet
The Role of the Principal	Head school play a role as manager in direct education
Perception Effectiveness	Curriculum assessed Not yet more Good from curriculum previously

The research findings were obtained based on a semi-structured interview with an English teacher at SMA Negeri Agam Cendekia. Thematic analysis of the interview data produced a comprehensive overview of the teacher's understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum, changes in instructional tools, teaching and assessment practices, student engagement, facility support, and perceptions of curriculum effectiveness during the initial stage of implementation. From the perspective of initial understanding, the informant viewed the Merdeka Curriculum as conceptually not significantly different from the 2013 Curriculum. The main differences were perceived to lie primarily in changes in terminology and instructional administrative formats, while the fundamental principles remain oriented toward students' needs. This

perception indicates that the teacher regards the Merdeka Curriculum as a continuation of previous instructional practices rather than a revolutionary change.

With regard to socialization and training, the school conducted initial preparations prior to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Teacher training sessions were organized by inviting external resource persons. These activities aimed to provide preliminary understanding of the new curriculum policy and changes in instructional administration and implementation. However, the training was considered introductory in nature and had not yet fully equipped teachers with in-depth technical skills.

Significant changes occurred in instructional planning tools. The informant explained the transition from Lesson Plans (RPP) to Teaching Modules (Modul Ajar), from competency achievement indicators to Learning Outcomes (Capaian Pembelajaran/CP), and from syllabi to the Learning Objectives Flow (Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran/ATP). The development of the ATP was carried out by analyzing the CP and then breaking it down into more specific and sequential Learning Objectives (Tujuan Pembelajaran/TP), adjusted to students' characteristics. This process requires teachers to develop a deeper understanding of curriculum structure and the systematic progression of students' learning outcomes. In instructional practice, teachers have begun to utilize information technology as a learning resource. Students are allowed to use mobile phones to search for information relevant to learning materials. The teacher perceived this approach as providing greater flexibility and encouraging students to become more active and creative in independently seeking information. In addition, differentiated learning efforts were implemented through collaboration with guidance and counseling (BK) teachers to understand students' characteristics and learning styles, enabling instructional planning to be adjusted to individual needs.

In terms of assessment, formative assessment was conducted based on students' activeness during the learning process as well as through daily tests. Meanwhile, summative assessment still carries a relatively large weight, accounting for approximately 70% of the overall evaluation, although assessment techniques may vary among teachers. This indicates that assessment practices continue to maintain evaluation patterns similar to those of the previous curriculum. Regarding student engagement and behavior, the informant stated that the level of student participation in learning and assessment processes did not show significant differences compared to the period of the 2013 Curriculum. Likewise, students' independence, creativity, learning interest, and academic ability were perceived to remain relatively similar and had not yet undergone meaningful changes since the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

From the perspective of technological support and facilities, most teachers were considered to possess basic competencies in using educational technology. However, the availability of supporting facilities and infrastructure remains limited, with an estimated availability level of around 50%. The most commonly used devices in instruction are laptops and projectors. The main challenges encountered are technical in nature, such as frequent projector malfunctions, unstable internet connections, and other hardware issues that hinder optimal use of technology.

In the managerial context, the school principal plays a role as a manager who directs the educational process and supports curriculum implementation at the school. However, regarding perceptions of curriculum effectiveness, the informant argued that the Merdeka Curriculum has not yet demonstrated significant advantages over the previous curriculum. The main criticism was directed at the elimination of the final examination for Grade XII students, which was perceived to reduce the availability of a comprehensive evaluation tool for measuring students' mastery of learning content.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study provide a critical and multi-dimensional overview of the early stage of Merdeka Curriculum implementation at SMA Negeri Agam Cendikia. In general, the results indicate that curriculum implementation remains in an initial adaptation phase, in which changes are more evident in administrative and structural aspects, while transformations in pedagogical practices and classroom learning outcomes have not yet appeared significantly. This condition is consistent with the research objective, which seeks to analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum from teachers' perspectives, particularly in relation to their understanding, planning, implementation, and the challenges encountered.

First, there is a clear gap between the philosophical foundation of the Merdeka Curriculum and teachers' practical understanding in the field. The Merdeka Curriculum theoretically emphasizes student-centered learning, differentiated instruction, and the application of project-based learning that provides greater space for students' exploration, creativity, and independence (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). However, the interview findings reveal that teachers perceive the Merdeka Curriculum as being "almost the same as the 2013 Curriculum," with the main differences lying in terminology and instructional tools. This perception indicates a surface-level understanding, in which curriculum change is viewed more as an administrative and nomenclatural adjustment rather than as a fundamental shift in pedagogical paradigm. According to Fullan (2007), failure to grasp the essence of curriculum change may lead to superficial implementation and hinder the achievement of substantive educational reform goals.

Second, the implementation of instructional planning tools within the Merdeka Curriculum at this school tends to remain mechanistic. Teachers are able to explain the transition from lesson plans (RPP) to teaching modules (Modul Ajar) and from syllabi to the Learning Objectives Flow (ATP), including the stages of analyzing Learning Outcomes (CP) and formulating Learning Objectives (TP). However, the finding that students' engagement, interest, and creativity have not shown meaningful changes suggests that these instructional tools have not yet been fully translated into innovative and emancipatory learning strategies. Teaching modules and ATPs risk functioning merely as administrative documents rather than as pedagogical guides that drive tangible changes in classroom practice. This reinforces the view that curriculum changes at the planning level do not automatically translate into improvements in instructional quality unless accompanied by changes in teaching approaches and teachers' perspectives on student learning.

Third, infrastructure challenges emerge as a major inhibiting factor in the integration of educational technology. The Merdeka Curriculum positions the use of technology as one of its key pillars to support flexible and contextual learning. However, the findings show that the availability of technological support facilities at the school is only around 50%. Technical problems, such as malfunctioning projectors and unstable internet connections, directly hinder the use of digital learning resources and technology-based instruction. This finding aligns with the study by Sisdiana et al. (2022), which emphasizes that limitations in facilities and infrastructure constitute a primary obstacle to the implementation of new curricula in Indonesia. When teachers are repeatedly confronted with technical issues, their motivation to innovate through technology tends to decline, preventing the full potential of the Merdeka Curriculum from being realized.

Fourth, the absence of significant impacts on students' independence, creativity, and engagement represents one of the most critical findings of this study. The Merdeka Curriculum was designed as a response to learning loss and aims to enhance students' active participation in learning (Faiz et al., 2022). However, teachers' perceptions that students' conditions remain "largely the same" as during the 2013 Curriculum era indicate that these objectives have not yet been achieved. Several factors may explain this situation, including the relatively short implementation period, which means that curriculum impacts may not yet be fully visible; assessment instruments that are not sufficiently sensitive to capture developments in students' non-cognitive aspects; and classroom learning practices that have not undergone fundamental change. Without significant shifts in instructional methods, it is difficult to expect changes in students' learning behaviors and attitudes.

Fifth, the findings related to assessment reveal a tension between competing paradigms. Teachers' criticism of the elimination of the national final examination reflects the persistence of a traditional paradigm that positions standardized tests as the primary indicator of student learning success. This suggests that teachers have not yet fully understood or trusted a more holistic, process-oriented assessment system, as promoted by the Merdeka Curriculum. In contrast, the curriculum emphasizes continuous and classroom-based formative assessment. This condition indicates that the training required by teachers should not be merely technical in nature but also philosophical, particularly in relation to redefining the meaning and function of assessment in the learning process.

Overall, the findings indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMA Negeri Agam Cendikia remains at the stage of mechanical implementation. The changes observed are predominantly first-order changes, involving documents, terminology, and instructional tools, while second-order changes—encompassing shifts in teachers' beliefs, pedagogical approaches, and teaching culture—have

not yet been fully realized. The future success of the Merdeka Curriculum will depend heavily on systematic efforts to strengthen teachers' conceptual understanding, provide adequate supporting infrastructure, and continuously support teachers in transitioning toward new paradigms of teaching and assessment. With sustained support, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has the potential to move beyond administrative change toward more meaningful and impactful learning transformation for students.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Based on the interview results with an English teacher at SMA Negeri Agam Cendikia, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the school is still in a transitional and early adaptation stage. Conceptually, the teacher perceives the Merdeka Curriculum as not significantly different from the 2013 Curriculum, resulting in the core philosophy of the curriculum—which emphasizes differentiated learning, student autonomy, and character development—not yet being fully internalized. This condition causes curriculum change to be understood more as an administrative adjustment rather than as a transformation of the learning paradigm.

Although the school has undertaken several initial efforts, such as organizing teacher training and implementing new instructional tools in the form of Teaching Modules (Modul Ajar) and the Learning Objectives Flow (ATP), the impact of curriculum implementation has not yet been clearly reflected in classroom practices. The teacher indicated that students' levels of independence, creativity, interest, and engagement in learning remain relatively similar to those observed under the previous curriculum. This finding suggests that changes at the level of planning and instructional documents have not been fully accompanied by substantive changes in pedagogical strategies.

The main challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at SMA Negeri Agam Cendikia stem from limitations in supporting facilities and infrastructure, particularly in educational technology. The limited availability of projectors, stable internet access, and other supporting devices often hinders the integration of technology into the learning process. In addition, the teacher expressed doubts regarding the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum assessment system, especially concerning the elimination of the national final examination for Grade XII students, which is perceived as reducing the availability of a standardized instrument for comprehensively evaluating students' learning outcomes.

Overall, this study concludes that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMA Negeri Agam Cendikia remains superficial, operating primarily at the level of changes in documents and instructional tools, without being accompanied by significant shifts in teachers' beliefs, pedagogical practices, and classroom learning culture. Therefore, more systematic and sustained efforts are required, both in improving the quality and equity of supporting facilities and in deepening teachers' philosophical understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum. Intensive mentoring for teachers is essential so that the concept of Merdeka Belajar is not only understood conceptually but can also be translated into meaningful learning practices that produce tangible impacts on students.

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