

Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum Policy at State Senior High School 2 Padang Panjang

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum policy, particularly the interest-based class placement system, at SMAN 2 Padang Panjang. As one of the key innovations of the Merdeka Curriculum, interest-based grouping aims to provide students with learning pathways aligned with their talents, aspirations, and future career goals. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation involving teachers and students from various specialization tracks. The analysis employed the CIPP Evaluation Model (Context, Input, Process, Product) and was supported by Talcott Parsons' AGIL structural-functional theory to provide a comprehensive understanding of policy implementation. The findings indicate that while the policy enhances students' motivation and learning focus, several challenges remain, including inaccurate placement results, uneven teacher competence, limited facilities, and insufficient socialization to parents and students. The integration of administrative functions—curriculum management, student administration, facilities management, teacher development, and educational supervision—plays a crucial role in determining the success of policy implementation. The study concludes that although the policy has significant potential to support personalized learning, improvements in administrative management and resource readiness are essential to optimize its effectiveness.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesian education continues to adapt to global social, technological, and economic developments. The Merdeka Curriculum was introduced as a response to the need for a more flexible, relevant, and competency-oriented education system. One of the key characteristics of this policy is interest-based class placement, which allows students to choose specialization pathways according to their talents and aspirations, such as health sciences, technology, humanities, and public service. Selecting a specialization at the secondary education level is expected to provide clearer direction for students' academic and career trajectories.

SMAN 2 Padang Panjang is one of the senior high schools in West Sumatra that has implemented this policy. Its implementation is not only related to instructional aspects but is also closely connected to the education administration system, including curriculum management, student administration, facilities and infrastructure management, personnel administration, and educational supervision. The success of interest-based placement is largely determined by how the school manages information flow, allocates resources,

conducts systematic interest and aptitude assessments, and coordinates among teachers, parents, and school management.

However, the implementation of this policy has not always proceeded smoothly. Challenges arise in the form of mismatches between students' interests and class placement, limited parental understanding, inadequate facilities, and a shortage of teachers with expertise in certain specialization areas. These conditions indicate that policy success depends not only on curriculum quality but also on the school's administrative capacity to ensure that all components function effectively and support one another. This study aims to analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum policy at SMAN 2 Padang Panjang based on interview results and analysis using the CIPP evaluation model linked to Talcott Parsons' AGIL theory.

2. METHODS, DATA, ANALYSIS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum policy, particularly the interest-based class placement system, at SMAN 2 Padang Panjang within its specific institutional context. The case study method allows for a comprehensive exploration of a single phenomenon bounded by place and time, namely the administrative and instructional implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the school level. The focus of the study includes curriculum policy implementation, administrative management processes, and coordination among school stakeholders in managing interest-based learning pathways. Research subjects were selected using purposive sampling. The participants included the school principal, vice principal for curriculum affairs, guidance and counseling teachers, subject teachers from several specialization tracks, administrative staff, and selected students representing different interest groups.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants, direct observation of learning and administrative processes, and document analysis, including curriculum documents, specialization data, class schedules, and school administrative Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). The data analysis technique applied in this study followed the qualitative data analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. This systematic process enabled the researcher to identify patterns, relationships, and key findings related to the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum policy implementation at SMAN 2 Padang Panjang.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings at SMAN 2 Padang Panjang indicate that the school leadership has made efforts to implement the Merdeka Curriculum by restructuring class groupings based on students' interests and strengthening curriculum planning mechanisms. The principal and curriculum management team have facilitated policy implementation through internal coordination, teacher meetings, and the development of curriculum guidelines aligned with national regulations. However, challenges remain in translating policy concepts into consistent classroom practices. In terms of administrative readiness and digitalization, SMAN 2 Padang Panjang has utilized basic digital tools for student data management, scheduling, and learning administration.

Nevertheless, the school has not fully implemented an integrated administrative system to support the complexity of interest-based learning. As a result, administrative tasks related to student placement, schedule adjustments, and learning documentation are still carried out semi-manually, increasing the workload of teachers and administrative staff. From the perspective of teachers, the interest-based class placement policy has helped students become more focused and motivated. However, uneven teacher competence across specialization tracks and limited facilities—particularly laboratories and practical learning equipment—have constrained effective implementation. Students also reported mixed experiences: while some felt their interests were well accommodated, others experienced mismatches between their assigned specialization and their actual learning preferences, with limited opportunities to transfer tracks.

The findings demonstrate a close relationship between administrative management and the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum policy. The implementation process reflects the school's ongoing adaptation to policy demands, as described in the CIPP evaluation framework. Contextually, the policy aligns with national education goals emphasizing student-centered learning. However, in terms of input, limitations in teacher readiness and infrastructure indicate that resource adaptation has not been fully

optimized. From the perspective of Talcott Parsons' AGIL theory, the Adaptation function is evident in the school's efforts to adjust curriculum structures and administrative procedures, although these adjustments remain constrained by resource limitations. Goal Attainment is partially achieved, as the policy has improved student motivation and learning direction. However, the Integration function faces challenges due to insufficient coordination among teachers, guidance counselors, parents, and administrative units. Meanwhile, the Latency function—related to sustaining values of flexibility and equity—has not been fully realized, as disparities among specialization tracks persist. Overall, the results suggest that policy modernization must be accompanied by strengthened administrative systems, continuous teacher development, and improved communication with parents and students to ensure consistent understanding of the specialization concept.

4. CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum policy at SMAN 2 Padang Panjang demonstrates positive progress in promoting interest-based learning and providing clearer academic direction for students. However, the policy has not yet been implemented optimally due to challenges related to student placement accuracy, uneven teacher competence, limited facilities, and insufficient administrative integration. The main conclusion of this study is that the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum policy depends not only on curriculum design but also on the school's capacity to manage administrative systems, human resources, and learning infrastructure in an integrated manner.

Strengthening curriculum administration, enhancing digital-based administrative systems, and improving coordination among stakeholders are essential to achieving sustainable and equitable policy outcomes. As a recommendation, SMAN 2 Padang Panjang is encouraged to develop a more integrated administrative management system to support interest-based learning, provide continuous professional development for teachers, and enhance flexibility mechanisms for students wishing to change specialization tracks. For future researchers, it is recommended to conduct quantitative or mixed-method studies to measure the impact of interest-based class placement on student achievement, motivation, and satisfaction across different school contexts.

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