

## **Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in MAN Gunungsitoli City**

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**Abstract:** This study aims to describe the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at MAN Gunungsitoli City, including the challenges faced and the efforts made to overcome them. The Independent Curriculum is an educational innovation that emphasizes project-based learning, differentiation, and strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method with a case study approach. Data collection was carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation involving the principal, vice principal for curriculum, teachers, and students. The results of the study indicate that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at MAN Gunungsitoli City has gone quite well, although there are still some challenges. The most prominent achievement is the implementation of differentiated learning and project-based activities that strengthen the Pancasila Student Profile, which has increased student engagement and creativity. In addition, teachers have begun to integrate local wisdom values into project-based learning. The unequal understanding of the core principles of the Independent Curriculum is also a significant challenge. Efforts to overcome these problems are by conducting collaborative internal training, forming teacher learning communities, and strengthening curriculum management at the school level. The consistency of the principal's involvement in providing supervision and motivation is also a major supporting factor in curriculum implementation. The results of the study concluded that, although the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has not been fully optimal, MAN Gunungsitoli City has shown a strong commitment to adapting to this new learning paradigm. Recommendations are addressed to the school and the Ministry of Religion to strengthen support in terms of facilities, teacher training, and regular monitoring and evaluation in order to achieve more holistic and contextual educational goals.

**Keywords:** MAN Gunungsitoli City, Merdeka Curriculum, New Learning Paradigm

### **A. Introduction**

Education is an important pillar in the formation of competent and competitive human resources. In order to realize an education system that is adaptable and meets the requirements of the times, the Indonesian government has introduced the

Merdeka Curriculum as a form of educational reform. The implementation of curricula is a crucial component in the implementation of education. A curriculum that is effectively designed and implemented is a solid foundation for learners to develop relevant knowledge and skills (Martinez, 2022). In Indonesia, the curriculum that is currently being implemented is the Merdeka curriculum, which aims to develop the potential of students holistically. This curriculum is designed to provide teachers and students with the flexibility to adapt their learning strategies to their individual needs and local contexts to create more meaningful and holistic learning (Jasiah et al., 2024; Kusumawati & Umam, 2025). Although the idea of the Merdeka Curriculum is interesting and has great potential, its implementation faces various challenges that are quite complex in this field (Ndari et al., 2023).

One of the biggest challenges in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is the willingness of teachers to play their role as facilitators and learning facilitators, not just as teachers who provide material in one direction (Reza et al., 2023). According to Fütterer et al. (2022), the role of teachers as facilitators requires broader skills in terms of learning differentiation, continuous assessment, and material adaptation to meet the characteristics of each student. In this context, teachers need intensive training and mentoring to master these skills, which are often not optimal in reality. In line with the dynamics of curriculum development in Indonesia, there is a need for diversity and renewal of learning methods. One of the efforts being made to meet these needs is the introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum. This curriculum, also known as the 2022 curriculum, is a refinement of the 2013 curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum is one of the important policies of the Minister of Education and Culture, Nadiem Makarim. The concept of curriculum planning is a fundamental learning innovation to achieve a better quality of learning (Southworth et al., 2023). In Islam, education is an important process for forming people who have faith, knowledge, and noble character (Uswatun Khasanah, 2024). Islamic educational values emphasize the importance of learning, which is relevant to the development of time and the social conditions in which a child grows up (Anwar et al., 2024).

In accordance with this spirit, there is an expression of wisdom that is often attributed in the context of Islamic education:

أَرْبُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ لِزَمَانِهِمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ مَخْلُوقُونَ لِزَمَانٍ غَيْرِ زَمَانِكُمْ

*"Train up your children according to their time, for they do not live in your time."*

Although this phrase is not included in the authentic hadith of the Prophet peace be upon him, as it is not found in authoritative hadith books such as Sahih Bukhari or Saheeh Muslim, its meaning is in line with the principles of Islamic education (Aulia et al., 2024). This expression reflects the awareness of the importance of an adaptive and contextual approach to education that adapts to the needs of the times. In this context, the Merdeka Curriculum exists as an attempt to reform education that emphasizes not only knowledge but also character development, creativity, and the

relevance of learning to students' real lives (Hunaepi & Suharta, 2024). This curriculum was introduced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia through the decree of the Minister of Education and Culture in 2022. The Merdeka Curriculum is a learning approach that provides educational units and educators with the flexibility to design and adapt the curriculum according to the needs and characteristics of students in each school (Okta & Putra, 2025). Etymologically, the word "curriculum" has a root of the Greek word, namely "curir", which means "runner", and "curare", which means "racecourse". Therefore, the term "curriculum" comes from the world of sports in ancient Roman times in Greece, which refers to the distance a runner must travel from the starting line to the finish line.

The curriculum is a fundamental element of the education system that serves as a guide in the teaching and learning process. Etymologically, the term "curriculum" comes from the Latin *currere*, which means "way" or "way to take" (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013). In an educational context, a curriculum can be interpreted as a learning path or plan designed to achieve a specific educational goal. In general, the curriculum is defined as a set of plans and arrangements in terms of the objectives, content and content, as well as the way in which they are taught, which serve as guidelines for the operation of learning in schools (Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, Article 1(19)). The curriculum covers various aspects, including competency standards, teaching methods, and evaluation systems that aim to improve the quality of education.

The curriculum is one of the core components in the world of education that determines the direction and goals of the learning process (Ayuningsih et al., 2020). According to Serafini et al. (2022) the curriculum includes all learning experiences that are systematically designed by educational institutions to help students achieve the goals set. This means that the curriculum is not limited to a list of subjects, but also includes a range of direct and indirect experiences capable of shaping students' attitudes, values, skills, and knowledge. This opinion is consistent with Tyler (1949), who noted that the curriculum encompasses all learning planned and directed by the school, whether individually or in groups, inside and outside the classroom. This shows that the curriculum also reflects the process of socialization of the values and norms that apply in society through educational activities. Tyler explained that the curriculum is a design of learning experiences that are systematically planned to achieve educational goals. According to Rintala & Nokelainen (2020), the curriculum encompasses the entire learning experience offered to students under the responsibility of the school. This definition emphasizes that the curriculum is not limited to the material taught, but also to learning methods, strategies and evaluations.

In addition, Saylor et al. (1981) found that the curriculum is a comprehensive learning plan that includes educational objectives, lesson content, instructional

strategies, and the assessment of learning outcomes. In this way, the curriculum becomes a comprehensive guide in the educational process, starting from the planning phase to implementation and evaluation. In the context of madrasa education, the curriculum has a strategic function that not only shapes the academic competence of the students but also integrates Islamic values into every aspect of learning. The madrasa's curriculum is designed to balance general education with religious education, so that graduates of the madrasa are expected to have a balance between science and noble morality.

The legal basis for the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is indicated in Permendikbudristek Number 5 of 2022. This regulation regulates the Graduate Competency Standards (SKL) for early childhood education, basic education and secondary education. The SKL serves as a minimum benchmark that reflects the integration of attitudes, skills, and knowledge that students must have after completing an educational level. Both the 2013 Curriculum, the Emergency Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum use SKL as a reference. The city of Gunungsitoli, which is part of the territory of Indonesia, also faces various challenges in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the secondary school level. Some of the problems that arise in this context are: One of the problems that arises from this is the inconsistency in the implementation of the curriculum in different schools. This inequality can be caused by a different understanding of the concept and objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum, limited training of educators, and a lack of resources that support the effectiveness of the implementation of the curriculum as a whole. Due to various existing challenges and potentials, this research is very important to identify the factors influencing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in schools, especially in MAN Gunungsitoli City. So far, there has been no previous research that deals specifically with the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN Gunungsitoli City, both in terms of teacher readiness and learning methods and assessment strategies.

## **B. Methods**

This study uses descriptive qualitative methods with a case study approach. The qualitative method was chosen because it allows researchers to explore and understand in depth complex social reality, specifically related to the process of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum from the perspective of educational actors in MAN Gunungsitoli City. In qualitative research, the main focus is on subjective meaning, interpretation, and experience of individuals involved in a phenomenon (Moleong, 2016). Descriptive methods are used to describe systematically, factually, and accurately regarding the facts and characteristics of a particular population or area, without manipulating the variables studied (Sugiyono, 2019). Qualitative descriptive focuses on answering research questions related to who, what, where, and how an event or experience occurs. This method aims to provide an accurate and detailed description of the phenomena as it is, without in-depth interpretation

as in the phenomenological approach or grounded theory. Furthermore, the event observed was analyzed in depth to identify patterns, categories, or themes that emerged from data (Neergaard et al., 2009). This research is expected to be able to analyze the planning, implementation and evaluation of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in MAN Gunungsitoli City. Data collection in this study was carried out through three main techniques, namely in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation. This technique was chosen to obtain rich, in depth, and contextual data regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in MAN Gunungsitoli City.

### **C. Result and Discussion**

The results of the study indicate that MAN Gunungsitoli City has carried out the planning process for the Merdeka Curriculum in a collaborative and systematic manner. This process involves the formation of a Curriculum Development Team comprising various stakeholders from the madrasah, such as the madrasah principal, curriculum vice principal, subject teachers, guidance counselors, student affairs vice principal, and educational staff. This aligns with the core principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasize the importance of involving all stakeholders in the educational institution in developing its operational curriculum. The formation of the curriculum development team reflects a bottom-up approach to educational decision-making, which aims to give schools/madrasahs autonomy to be more contextual and flexible in implementing the curriculum.

As emphasized by Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology Number 5 of 2022, the operational curriculum of educational units must be developed based on the characteristics of students, the environment, and local needs. Additionally, the process of developing Learning Outcomes (CP), Learning Objectives (TP), and Learning Objective Sequences (ATP) at MAN Gunungsitoli City demonstrates that this madrasah does not merely follow central documents formally but conducts an analysis of local needs. This aligns with the theory of contextual curriculum (contextual teaching and learning), which states that learning is more effective when connected to students' real-life experiences and their surrounding environment (Rahman & Ekkayokkaya, 2024). The planning of learning through the development of teaching modules by teachers also demonstrates the application of the principles of differentiation and professional autonomy for teachers. Teachers are given the space to design modules that align with students' needs, interests, and learning styles, as emphasized in the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. This reflects a shift in paradigm from teachers as technical implementers to teachers as learning designers.

### **Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN Gunungsitoli City**

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN Gunungsitoli City demonstrates consistent efforts to adopt the values and basic principles promoted by the Merdeka Curriculum. Research findings show that the madrasah has undergone a transformation in the development of teaching materials, learning strategies, and an approach to students that is more focused on individual potential and needs. Theoretically, the Merdeka Curriculum is based on a student-centered learning approach, which emphasizes learning as an active and meaningful process for students. This is reflected in the application of differentiated learning at MAN Gunungsitoli City, where teachers develop learning strategies based on initial assessments and student characteristics.

The implementation of the Pancasila and *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin* Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5PPRA) is also an important aspect of the curriculum's implementation. This activity provides space for students to develop social, emotional, spiritual, and national competencies. The projects carried out, such as the themes of Religious Moderation or Local Wisdom, have demonstrated the integration of interdisciplinary learning and character values, which are in line with the six dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile. In addition, the principles of flexibility and teacher autonomy are clearly reflected in the ability of teachers to develop Learning Objective Pathways (ATP) and Teaching Modules. This proves that madrasahs have provided space for professional development for teachers, in line with the Merdeka Belajar policy, which emphasizes the role of teachers as educators who design and develop contextual and relevant learning.

### **Evaluation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN Gunungsitoli City**

The evaluation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN Gunungsitoli City is conducted comprehensively and continuously. The evaluation is not only carried out to measure student learning outcomes but also covers the learning process, teacher readiness, the effectiveness of teaching tools, and student engagement. In principle, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes formative and authentic assessment. The madrasah has implemented formative assessment through student reflection, observation, and projects, enabling students to demonstrate their understanding in meaningful and contextual ways. Such assessments better reflect competency achievements compared to traditional exam-based assessments. From the perspective of educational evaluation theory, the approach used at MAN Gunungsitoli City is closer to the responsive evaluation model, which is an evaluation that adapts to the needs and developments occurring in the field.

The presence of regular supervision, reflective discussions among the curriculum development team, and ongoing training indicates that evaluation is not merely a final activity but an integral part of the continuous improvement cycle. The

involvement of teachers and students in evaluation also reflects a participatory evaluation approach, where the voices and experiences of all stakeholders are used as the basis for improvement. This reinforces the principle of inclusivity in the management of humanistic and adaptive education. Thus, both the implementation and evaluation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN Gunungsitoli City have been in line with the main principles of the Merdeka Curriculum and the policies of the Ministry of Religion. Although there are still a number of challenges, particularly in terms of digitization and the adaptation of teaching tools, improvement measures continue to be carried out in a planned and collaborative manner.

### **Implementing Differentiated Learning**

The teachers at MAN Gunungsitoli City apply a differentiated learning approach as part of the Merdeka Curriculum strategy. This strategy allows students with different abilities and learning styles to still receive learning that meets their individual needs. The deputy head of the Madrasa curriculum stated:

*"We have started to assess the learning needs of students through diagnostic assessments. Then the teacher develops various strategies for the visual, kinesthetic and auditory groups of students. It's both a challenge and a new experience."*

Mathematics teacher gave an example where in one class, one student was given a project in which the estimated cost of building a school park was calculated, while another student performed a digital calculation simulation using a spreadsheet. This shows how teachers promote differences in interests and abilities.

### **Implementation of the P5PPRA project**

One of the important components of the Merdeka Curriculum is the Pancasila and *Rahmatan lil'Alamin* Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5PPRA). At MAN Gunungsitoli City, this project is carried out three times in one school year with different topics and interdisciplinary topics. Qur'anic Hadith Teacher, explain:

*"We once addressed the issue of religious moderation. The children discussed tolerance, then visited other places of worship and reflected together. It enriches their experience."*

A student in class X, explained that the project has made learning more lively:

*"We don't just learn in the classroom, we also go directly into the community. We are also trained to work together and learn from real experiences."*

### **Obstacles to Implementation**

Although the implementation is already underway, MAN Gunungsitoli City still faces several obstacles, including: Restrictions on digital devices in some classrooms. The willingness of teachers to adopt new teaching materials is still gradual. The learning time is considered insufficient to work on thematic projects in depth. However, the madrasa continues to make improvements. In an interview, the head of the madrasah said:

*"We make evaluation a culture. We always ask teachers and students for input after a project is completed. This evaluation allows us to continue to grow."*

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN Gunungsitoli City demonstrates the consistent efforts to adopt the core values and principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. The results of the study show that madrasahs have changed in the preparation of teaching materials, learning strategies and approaches for students that are more oriented towards individual potentials and needs.

Theoretically, the Merdeka Curriculum is based on a student-centered approach to learning that emphasizes learning as an active and meaningful process for students. This is reflected in the implementation of differentiated learning at MAN Gunungsitoli City, where teachers develop learning strategies based on the results of the initial assessments and the characteristics of the students. This application is also in line with Vygotsky's conception of the proximal development zone (ZPD), which emphasizes the importance of appropriate support based on learners' abilities. The implementation of the Pancasila and *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin* Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5PPRA) is also an important aspect in the implementation of the curriculum. This activity provides space for students to develop social, emotional, spiritual, and national competencies. The projects carried out, such as the theme of religious moderation or local wisdom, have demonstrated the integration between cross-curricular learning and character value formation, which is in line with the six dimensions of the Pancasila student profile.

In addition, the principles of teacher flexibility and autonomy are clearly reflected in teachers' ability to compile learning objective flows (ATP) and instructional modules. This proves that the madrasahs have provided teachers with space for professional development, in line with the direction of the Merdeka Learning policy, which emphasizes the role of teachers as educators who design and develop contextual and relevant learning.

#### **D. Conclusions**

The curriculum is implemented according to the principles of flexibility, differentiation and meaningful learning. Teachers are given the freedom to develop learning objectives and teaching modules that are tailored to the characteristics of the students. Project-based learning and the integration of the values of the Pancasila Student Profile and *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin* through P5PPRA activities have become an important part of the cross-curricular learning activities. In addition, madrasahs also implement contextual learning that deviates from the reality of students' lives.

Based on the results of research conducted on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN Gunungsitoli City, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Planning of the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN Gunungsitoli City The planning process was carried out systematically and participatively through the

formation of a Curriculum Development Team involving the school principal, vice principal, subject teachers, guidance counselors, student affairs vice principal, and educational staff. This team was tasked with analyzing the school context, formulating the vision and mission, and developing the Madrasah Operational Curriculum (KOM). Context analysis is an important basis for designing a curriculum that suits the needs of students and the characteristics of the local environment.

2. Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN Gunungsitoli City The curriculum is implemented based on the principles of flexibility, differentiation, and meaningful learning. Teachers are given the freedom to develop Learning Objective Sequences (ATP) and Teaching Modules tailored to student characteristics. Project-based learning and the integration of the values of the Pancasila Student Profile and Rahmatan lil 'Alamin through P5PPRA activities have become an important part of cross-curricular learning activities. In addition, the madrasah also implements contextual learning based on the realities of students' lives.

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