

Enhancing Student Participation in Extracurricular Activities Through the Merdeka Curriculum: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract: This study aims to evaluate the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in enhancing student participation in extracurricular activities at SDN 15 Banyuasin III. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation to assess the curriculum's impact on program design, participation factors, implementation challenges, and strategic solutions. The results demonstrate that the Merdeka Curriculum effectively optimizes extracurricular programs, including Traditional Dance, Marching Band, and Scouting, boosting student motivation, character development, and discipline. Key challenges such as limited facilities and scheduling conflicts were addressed through improved coordination, mentor training, and resource allocation. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the Merdeka Curriculum's role in extracurricular engagement, offering fresh insights into holistic student development. Practical implications include recommendations for schools to strengthen infrastructure and stakeholder collaboration. This research contributes to the discourse on curriculum innovation by highlighting the importance of extracurricular integration in fostering active, well-rounded learners under the Merdeka Curriculum framework. This study provides a model for integrating extracurricular activities in curriculum frameworks.

Keywords: Extracurricular Activities, Merdeka Curriculum, Primary Education, Students' Participations

A. Introduction

In the dynamics of education, the curriculum functions as a strategic tool that continues to be adjusted to respond to social developments (AlDaajeh et al., 2022). This renewal process is directly directed at students, society, and teaching materials as the main objects. Therefore, curriculum development is not just an option but a necessity so that the substance of the curriculum remains relevant and adaptive to the needs of the times and the demands of society that are constantly changing (Kumar & Rewari, 2022; Vreuls et al., 2022). Before a curriculum is implemented in educational practice, its designers and developers must first conduct periodic evaluations of progress in various fields of science. This evaluation aims to ensure that the learning

materials and teaching methods formulated are relevant and in accordance with the needs of the times. Therefore, they must analyze educational needs in depth, determine the right learning approach, design an effective instructional model, and integrate it systematically into the teaching and learning process in the classroom (Ikhsan & Hadi, 2018).

The Indonesian government, through Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, emphasizes that education must be able to form quality individuals as the next generation of the nation. The aim is to boost students' personal capacity and ensure Indonesia's long-term development. Among the various components that support the education system, the curriculum has a crucial role in optimally directing the development of students' potential (Chiu & Chai, 2020; Kim et al., 2022). Therefore, the development of a competency-based curriculum is an important strategy to produce graduates who (1) have quality and competitiveness in facing global dynamics, (2) are faithful, pious, have good morals, are healthy, knowledgeable, skilled, creative, and independent, and (3) play an active role as democratic and responsible citizens. Referring to Article 1, Paragraph (19) of Law No. 20 of 2003, the curriculum is defined as a set of plans and organizations regarding objectives, materials, and learning methods used as guidelines in the education process. In this context, the development of the 2013 Curriculum is a continuation of the Competency-Based Curriculum (KBK) approach, which began in 2004, and the School Unit Level Curriculum (KTSP) in 2006. The curriculum was designed to integrate mastery of attitudes, knowledge, and skills as a whole as a response to internal and external challenges facing the world of education today (Leifler & Dahlin, 2020; Yoto et al., 2024).

The most fundamental challenge in national education development lies in efforts to improve the quality and equity of education (Ainscow, 2020). The Indonesian government has actively pursued various educational transformation strategies, such as modernizing learning infrastructure, providing adequate supporting facilities, and increasing the competence and quantity of educators. In addition, the allocation of education funds has increased substantially, as reflected in the optimization of the School Operational Assistance (BOS) program. This program enables primary and secondary education institutions to organize a more effective learning process through the availability of teaching materials and consumables that were previously difficult to reach due to limited non-personnel budgets. Likewise, teacher welfare has been improved by providing professional allowances in the amount of basic salary. Professional teacher allowances are also provided to private school teachers to support welfare in the hope that their performance will improve (Emynorane et al., 2024). Schools play a strategic role in shaping the character of students through various educational approaches (Gamage et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2023). As a formal institution, schools complement the role of families and communities in instilling moral and ethical values. To realize this, schools actively develop and implement character-building programs through learning activities integrated into the

curriculum and self-development activities outside the classroom (Murcahyanto & Mohzana, 2023). Student involvement in extracurricular activities is a proven effective means of internalizing positive attitudes, building discipline, and strengthening social values that support holistic character formation.

This study covers several important aspects. First, the study will examine the influence of the Merdeka Curriculum on extracurricular design. The researcher will explore in depth the various factors that influence student involvement in extracurricular activities. In addition, this study will describe the various obstacles that arise in the process of integrating the Merdeka Curriculum into non-formal activities at SDN 15 Banyuasin III. As a constructive effort, this study is also directed at formulating alternative solutions that are applicable to optimize the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the school environment. This study will explore several key questions related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN 15 Banyuasin III. First, it will examine how the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum affects increasing student participation in extracurricular activities. Furthermore, this study will identify the factors that influence students' extracurricular participation after the implementation of the curriculum. In addition, the obstacles faced in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum to increasing student participation will also be analyzed. Finally, this study aims to formulate solutions that can be applied to increase student participation in extracurricular activities after the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the school.

The purpose of this study is to analyze various aspects related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN 15 Banyuasin III. First, this study aims to analyze how the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum can increase student participation in extracurricular activities. Furthermore, this study will identify factors that influence student participation in extracurricular activities after the implementation of the curriculum. In addition, this study also aims to analyze the obstacles that arise in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum towards student participation. Finally, this study is expected to find effective solutions to support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN 15 Banyuasin III. This study has a number of benefits both theoretically and practically related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and increasing student participation in extracurricular activities. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the development of educational theory, especially regarding the Merdeka Curriculum and its implementation in the context of extracurricular activities. The results of the study are expected to enrich the existing literature on curriculum and student participation, as well as provide new insights for other researchers in the field of education. In addition, this research can produce a model or framework that is useful for other schools in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

Practically, this study aims to provide an effective strategy in increasing student participation at SDN 15 Banyuasin III. The results of the study can be used by schools

to design and develop extracurricular activities that are more interesting and in accordance with students' interests. In addition, this study can also be a guideline for teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, encouraging students to be more active and creative. With increased student participation, it is hoped that the quality of education at SDN 15 Banyuasin III will also increase, both in academic and non-academic aspects, as well as provide policy recommendations for decision makers in the field of education to support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum more effectively. For researchers, this study allows for an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary level and its impact on the learning process. This study also provides an opportunity to analyze the factors that influence student participation in extracurricular activities and how the curriculum can support or hinder such participation. The results of the study are expected to contribute to the development of educational theory and practice, as well as develop the analytical skills, data collection, and academic writing of researchers that are useful for future research. In addition, this thesis can help raise awareness regarding the importance of extracurricular activities in developing students' character and social skills.

The object of this research focuses on several aspects that are interrelated with the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN 15 Banyuasin III. The research began by analyzing how the Merdeka Curriculum was implemented in the school, including the processes, strategies, and methods used in its implementation. Contributions to the development of students' self-development are made by extracurricular activities. As a place for students who have an interest in these activities, it can be accessed through this activity. With guidance and training from teachers, extracurricular activities have the potential to form positive attitudes towards the activities followed by students (Bodolica et al., 2021; King et al., 2021). Therefore, research is needed to identify and analyze the relationship between the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and student participation in extracurricular activities. Through this research, it is hoped that a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities that exist can be obtained, as well as recommendations that can be used to improve the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and student participation in extracurricular activities at SDN 15 Banyuasin III. This research is also expected to contribute to the development of better education policies in the future. At SDN 15 Banyuasin III, the implementation of extracurricular activities still faces several obstacles, including the lack of adequate facilities and infrastructure, lack of support from parents, limited funding problems, and the limited number of teachers who can guide these activities.

This study was conducted for several important reasons. First, there is a need to understand the impact of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum on student participation in extracurricular activities, which is a crucial component in the holistic development of students. With increased participation, it is expected that students can develop better social skills, creativity, and character. Second, this study aims to

identify factors that influence student participation after the implementation of the curriculum. This is important for formulating effective strategies to increase student involvement in extracurricular activities. Third, it is important to analyze the obstacles that may arise in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. By understanding these challenges, appropriate solutions can be proposed to optimize the learning process and extracurricular activities. Finally, this study is expected to provide useful recommendations for policymakers and educators in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum more effectively so that it can improve the quality of education at SDN 15 Banyuasin III and other schools in the surrounding area.

In this study, there are two main variables that need to be considered, namely the independent variable and the dependent variable. The independent variable is the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which covers various aspects related to the implementation of the curriculum at SDN 15 Banyuasin III, including strategies, teaching methods, and types of activities offered to students. Meanwhile, the dependent variable is student participation in extracurricular activities, which includes the level of student involvement in various activities after the implementation of the curriculum. This participation can be measured through the number of students involved, the types of activities followed, and the frequency of participation in extracurricular activities. Thus, this study aims to observe how the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum as an independent variable can affect student participation in extracurricular activities as a dependent variable at SDN 15 Banyuasin III.

B. Methods

This research was conducted at SD Negeri 15 Banyuasin III, located in Banyuasin Regency, South Sumatra. This school was chosen because it has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum and has a variety of extracurricular activity programs. The research is planned to last for 6 months, starting from October 2024 to March 2025. The object of research in this study is the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SD Negeri 15 Banyuasin III and its impact on student participation in extracurricular activities. Research informants consist of various parties relevant to the focus of the research, namely teachers, students, parents, and principals. This study uses a qualitative approach. Data collection techniques consist of interviews, observations, and documentation. Several techniques that will be used to ensure the validity of the data in this study are triangulation, member checking, and audit trail.

C. Results and Discussion

Introduction to Extracurricular Activities

Educational units, or elementary schools, are free to determine the extracurricular options that will be held for students. However, extracurricular activities carried out

are expected to remain in accordance with the regulations of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. This is because extracurricular activities are important in facilitating each student's talents and interests and developing student character. Extracurricular activities do not only focus on training but also on social and self-recognition in order to find out the character and potential of students (Lewis et al., 2021; Saylor et al., 1981; Simms & Shanahan, 2024). Many studies have shown that extracurricular activities have a positive influence on the formation of student character so that extracurricular activities are one of the strategic steps to strengthen character.

Extracurricular activities in schools can also be integrated to support the achievement of the Pancasila Student Profile, which strengthens the six dimensions of Indonesian student character, namely faith, devotion to God Almighty, noble character, global diversity, mutual cooperation, creativity, critical thinking, and independence. These activities are centered on students and are carried out outside of intracurricular and co-curricular study hours, under the guidance and supervision of educational units. Extracurricular activities provide students with the flexibility of time and freedom to determine the type of activity according to their interests and talents without disrupting the mandatory lesson schedule (Jasiah et al., 2024; Zilli et al., 2020). To increase students' enthusiasm for participating in extracurricular activities, schools are expected to facilitate students' participation in inter-school competitions and provide appreciation to students who excel in certain extracurricular areas. In developing extracurricular activities, schools need to collaborate and work together with external parties, both communities and professionals who can provide additional information and skills to students.

The Merdeka Curriculum has been developed as a more flexible curriculum framework while focusing on essential materials and character development and student competencies to support the national education vision and as part of efforts to restore learning that has declined due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The learning principles in the Merdeka Curriculum include three types of learning activities. Intracurricular learning is carried out in a differentiated manner so that students have enough time to explore concepts and strengthen competencies. The Merdeka Curriculum provides educators with the flexibility to create quality learning that is in accordance with the needs and learning environment of students. The subjects given during the teaching and learning process of intracurricular activities are mandatory for all students.

Most intracurricular activities are carried out in class and are the core activities of activities at school as a basic education institution. Intracurricular activities are carried out in class by providing learning for subjects that have been set and scheduled. Co-curricular learning in the form of a project to strengthen the Pancasila Student Profile, based on the principle of interdisciplinary learning that is oriented towards character development and general competencies. The Pancasila student profile aims to

demonstrate the character and competencies expected to be achieved and strengthen the noble values of Pancasila of students and stakeholders. Pancasila as a long-term goal of learning. It is concluded that the objectives of the project are not directly related to the content or learning outcomes of the subjects being studied. In its implementation, class teachers and subject teachers collaborate and focus on achieving the dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile in planning and facilitating the activities of this project, and students will explore understanding and find solutions to issues packaged in seven themes based on sustainable development goals. Extracurricular learning is carried out according to student interests and educational unit resources (Tursino & Fakhri, 2021). Educational units, or elementary schools, are free to determine the extracurricular options that will be held for students.

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Intracurricular and Extracurricular Activities

Intracurricular activities are all learning activities carried out in the classroom and are an integral part of the official curriculum set by the school (Rafik & Arifah, 2023). These activities cover various subjects taught, such as Indonesian, mathematics, natural sciences, and civic education. While extracurricular activities are designed to provide a structured learning experience for students, which aims to develop their knowledge, skills, and attitudes comprehensively (Halimah et al., 2025). With this approach, students not only learn theory but also get practical learning that is relevant to everyday life. The influence of extracurricular activities on student development is very significant. First, these activities contribute to students' cognitive development. Through various subjects, students are trained to think critically and analytically and be able to solve problems. The active and participatory learning process allows students to be directly involved so that they can understand the material better.

In addition, extracurricular activities also play an important role in shaping students' character. Through the education of values and morals inserted in each subject, students are taught to have an attitude of discipline, responsibility, and empathy

towards others. This is a strong foundation for them to interact in society and face various challenges in the future. Extracurricular activities also improve students' social skills. Interaction with peers in various learning activities teaches them about the importance of cooperation, good communication, and adaptability. Thus, students not only develop academically but also become individuals who are better prepared to make positive contributions in their social environment. Overall, extracurricular activities provide a strong foundation for students' academic and character development, preparing them to become a generation that is not only intelligent but also has integrity and cares about society.

Core subjects at SD Negeri 15 Banyuasin III play a crucial role in forming the foundation of students' education. These subjects include Indonesian, mathematics, natural sciences (IPA), social sciences (IPS), and Pancasila and citizenship education (PPKn). Each subject is designed to develop students' cognitive, social, and emotional skills holistically. For example, in Indonesian, students not only learn to read and write but also hone their speaking and listening skills through discussions and presentations. In mathematics, students are taught to solve problems with a logical and analytical approach, while IPA gives them the opportunity to understand natural phenomena through practical experiments. IPS invites students to explore the dynamics of society and history, while PPKn instills essential national and citizenship values. Through interactive and contextual learning methods, learning these core subjects not only equips students with academic knowledge but also builds character and social skills needed to face challenges in the global era. Thus, this learning makes a significant contribution to the development of students as intelligent and integrated individuals.

Overall, this third extracurricular activity contributes significantly to the self-development of students at SDN 15 Banyuasin III. By integrating art education, music, and outdoor activities, the school creates an environment that supports the growth of students' character and social skills. Through the experiences gained from these various activities, students are expected to grow into individuals who are not only academically intelligent but also have strong interpersonal skills and care about the environment and society. Thus, SDN 15 Banyuasin III not only prepares its students for academic success but also equips them with the skills needed to become responsible citizens and make positive contributions to society. The school's commitment to the development of students' character and skills through this extracurricular activity is an important step in creating a better generation in the future.

Challenges and Solutions for Implementing Merdeka Curriculum in Extracurricular Activities

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in its implementation is quite new and is still in the adaptation period; it is not free from challenges, including difficulties

in compiling teaching modules, facilities and infrastructure that are not yet supportive, teacher human resources that need to be improved in the use of technology, difficulties in evaluating learning, and inequality in government policies. The conclusion of this study is that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is faced with various educational challenges. Solutions to face these challenges include; a) difficulties in compiling teaching modules can be overcome by attending various seminars, technical guidance, training in compiling teaching modules; b) in terms of facilities and infrastructure, this can be overcome by using government funding assistance and working together with parents; c) teacher human resources that need to be improved in terms of using technology through sharing and collaborating activities in learning communities; d) difficulties in evaluating learning are still carried out through training and coaching activities by the principal; and e) obstacles related to government policies can be overcome by making their own policies in their educational units (Sucipto et al., 2024).

D. Conclusion

Extracurricular activities are educational activities outside of class hours that are intended to help the development of students, according to their needs, potential, talents, and interests, through activities that are specifically organized by students and/or competent and authorized education personnel. Extracurricular activities are also considered as a forum for the formation of students' character to be better and can provide a positive impact. Educational units have an obligation to organize and provide a forum that facilitates students in developing their interests and talents. Extracurricular activities are a means to develop students' interests and talents according to their fields of interest, for example, scouting extracurricular activities. Scouting activities can provide valuable provisions for creating students who are tough and have good discipline. Discipline plays an important role in educating students, because discipline functions to create student behavior that is obedient or compliant with regulations, rules, and norms that apply in society. The conclusion of this study shows that the implementation and optimization of the Merdeka Curriculum in each of these extracurricular activities have made a significant contribution to increasing students' interest and motivation to actively participate.

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