

## **The Effect of Implementation Merdeka Curriculum and Learning Motivation on Students' Learning Outcomes**

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**Abstract:** This study examines (1) the impact of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation, (2) the role of student learning motivation, and (3) their combined effects on learning outcomes in SMA/SMK schools across South Pemulutan District. Using a quantitative descriptive approach, data were collected from 127 students at SMA Negeri 1 and SMK Negeri 1 Pemulutan Selatan through questionnaires and documentation. Validity and reliability were ensured via construct validity and Cronbach's Alpha, while normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity tests verified data suitability for analysis. The analysis revealed that: Merdeka Curriculum implementation positively influenced learning outcomes by 31.9%. Student motivation contributed 19.2% to improved academic performance. Together, these factors accounted for 36.3% of learning outcome variance, demonstrating significant synergistic effects. This study provides empirical evidence of Merdeka Curriculum's efficacy in a localized context (South Pemulutan), while highlighting motivation's complementary role a less explored dimension in curriculum evaluation studies. This study reinforces the need to align curriculum delivery with motivational strategies (e.g., student-centered activities). Supports the expansion of Merdeka Curriculum, emphasizing structured teacher training to maximize its impact. The findings bridge a critical gap by quantifying the dual influence of curriculum reform and motivation in Indonesian vocational and secondary education, offering a replicable framework for similar regional assessments.

**Keywords:** Learning Motivation, Learning Outcomes, Merdeka Curriculum

### **A. Introduction**

Education is crucial for all generations because it fosters the development of skills, behavior, and knowledge. Education is a crucial factor influencing the sustainability of life in society, both directly and indirectly (Jităreanu et al., 2022; Yadav & Prakash, 2022). Education is the foundation for developing competent human resources. Efforts to improve the quality of education continue through various improvements, one of which is the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This curriculum is designed to give schools the freedom to determine learning methods that align with student characteristics and local needs, thus increasing student engagement in the learning

process (Fauzan et al., 2023; Hunaepi & Suharta, 2024). The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes the holistic development of students' character, skills, and knowledge, giving teachers the freedom to create high-quality learning tailored to their needs and interests (Afrianti & Wahab, 2025; Irnawanto et al., 2025; Zikriati & Arani, 2024). With a more flexible approach, this curriculum aims to create a more engaging and relevant learning environment for students. However, challenges remain in implementing this curriculum, particularly regarding teacher preparedness and supporting infrastructure (Nur 'Azah et al., 2024; Sutinah et al., 2024). Therefore, it is important to examine the impact of this curriculum on student learning outcomes in senior high schools (SMA/SMK) in South Pemulutan District.

Student learning motivation plays a vital role in determining academic success. Highly motivated students tend to be more active in learning and strive harder to achieve academic goals (Owens et al., 2020). In senior high schools (SMA/SMK) in South Pemulutan District, it is important to understand how student learning motivation is influenced by the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and how this contributes to their learning outcomes. Student learning outcomes are often an indicator of the success of a curriculum (Xu & Babaian, 2021). Therefore, this study aims to explore the relationship between the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and learning motivation on student learning outcomes. By understanding this relationship, it is hoped that more effective strategies can be found to improve the quality of education in senior high schools (SMA/SMK), especially at the local level. In today's digital era, widespread access to information presents both challenges and opportunities for students to learn. The Merdeka Curriculum provides opportunities to utilize technology in the learning process, which can enhance learning motivation. However, not all students adapt well to these changes. This research is important for understanding these dynamics and providing recommendations for educators.

Previous research has shown that learning motivation plays a significant role in determining student academic success. However, there is still little research linking learning motivation and the implementation of the new curriculum, especially in the context of vocational high schools (SMK). Therefore, this study is expected to fill this knowledge gap and provide new insights for curriculum development in Indonesia. In senior high schools (SMA/SMK) in South Pemulutan District, students come from diverse backgrounds, which can influence their learning motivation and learning outcomes. In this context, this study will explore the factors that influence learning motivation and how this motivation can impact student learning outcomes. With a deeper understanding, it is hoped that schools can design more specific interventions to improve student motivation.

Furthermore, it is crucial to involve all stakeholders in the curriculum implementation process. Teachers, students, and parents each have a role to play in creating a conducive learning environment (Lakkala et al., 2021; Monteiro et al., 2021). This research will also explore the perspectives of various stakeholders to obtain a

comprehensive picture of the influence of curriculum implementation and learning motivation on student learning outcomes. From the teachers' perspective, their ability and readiness to implement the new curriculum significantly influence learning effectiveness (Ali et al., 2025; Alkandari, 2023). Teachers who are experienced and trained in the Merdeka Curriculum can more easily adapt teaching methods and create an inspiring learning environment. This research will analyze how these factors contribute to student learning outcomes. Furthermore, students' lack of understanding of the new curriculum can impact their motivation to learn (Feng & Xiao, 2024). If students struggle to understand the lessons, they are likely to lose interest and motivation. Therefore, this research will also examine the extent to which students' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum influences their motivation and learning outcomes.

Another important aspect is parental support. Parental involvement in their children's education can increase students' motivation to learn (Quintanilla, 2024). This study will explore the role of parents in supporting the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and how these impacts student learning outcomes in senior high schools (SMA/SMK) in South Pemulutan District. The results of this study are expected to make a significant contribution to the development of education in senior high schools (SMA/SMK) in South Pemulutan District. The findings can serve as a reference for education policies at the local and national levels to improve the quality of education. This way, students are expected to reach their maximum potential in a more relevant and enjoyable education. Ultimately, this study aims not only to evaluate the impact of the Merdeka Curriculum and learning motivation but also to provide practical recommendations for educators. With a data-driven approach, it is hoped that the results of this study will provide meaningful insights into efforts to improve student learning outcomes in senior high schools (SMA/SMK) in South Pemulutan District.

## **B. Methods**

The research method used by the researcher is a descriptive research method with a quantitative approach. This descriptive method involves collecting data to test hypotheses or answer questions about people's opinions on an issue or topic. This research was conducted in SMA/SMK, South Pemulutan District, precisely in Harimau Tandang Village and Sungai Lebung Village, Ogan Ilir Regency. The research time was carried out from November 2024 to December 2024. In this study, the population taken was all students in SMA/SMK, South Pemulutan District. The technique used in sampling was using a purposive sampling technique. So to determine the sample in this study, the researcher used the Slovin formula, obtained a sample of 127.42, and rounded up to 127 people (respondents). The data collection technique used by the researcher was a questionnaire and documentation. The instrument tests carried out in this study were validity tests and reliability tests. The statistical hypotheses compiled for the research conducted are 1) It is suspected that there is an influence of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum on student

learning outcomes in SMA/SMK, South Pemulutan District; 2) It is suspected that there is an influence of motivation on student learning outcomes in senior high schools/vocational high schools in South Pemulutan District; and 3) It is suspected that there is an influence of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and learning motivation on student learning outcomes in senior high schools/vocational high schools in South Pemulutan District. I use regression analysis if the researcher intends to predict how the condition (rise and fall) of the dependent variable changes if two or more independent variables as predictor factors are manipulated (increased or decreased in value). Multiple regression using IBM SPSS Statistics.

### **C. Results and Discussion**

#### **The Influence of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum on the Learning Outcomes of Senior High School Students in South Pemulutan District (X1→1)**

The results of the regression and t-tests indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum has a positive impact on the learning outcomes of high school students in South Pemulutan District. The correlation test results show a moderate positive relationship between the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum and learning outcomes. Furthermore, the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum and learning motivation contributed 31.9% to the improvement in learning outcomes of high school students in South Pemulutan District. In other words, the learning outcomes of high school students in South Pemulutan District will improve if the Merdeka curriculum is optimally implemented, and vice versa. These results align with research by Oktaviani et al. (2023), which found a significant effect of the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum on social studies learning outcomes at SDN Cipocok Jaya 1. Furthermore, Wulandari et al. (2024) conducted a study entitled "The Effect of the Merdeka Curriculum and Teacher Performance on Student Learning Outcomes at Public Elementary Schools in Jakabaring District". The results showed that: 1) The Merdeka Curriculum has a positive impact on the learning outcomes of public elementary school students in Jakabaring District.

Based on the explanation above, the hypothesis of this study is that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has a positive impact on the learning outcomes of high school students in South Pemulutan District. This is evident from the fact that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum not only provides students with the freedom to develop their own potential but also allows educational units the freedom to manage the curriculum based on regional autonomy (Fauzan et al., 2023; Ndari et al., 2023). Lesson plans have been criticized for being too detailed and rigid, requiring teachers to follow learning stages, causing them to spend more time on administration (Panjaitan, 2024). By using the Merdeka Curriculum, learning outcomes emphasize character strengths as the values being developed, resulting in simpler lesson plans and designs that cover essential material (Mulyasa, 2023). This allows teachers more time to conduct learning evaluations.

### **The Influence of Learning Motivation on Learning Outcomes of Senior High School/Vocational High School Students in South Pemulutan District (X<sub>2</sub>→Y)**

The results of the regression and t-tests show that learning motivation has a positive influence on the learning outcomes of high school/vocational high school students in South Pemulutan District. The correlation test also shows that learning motivation contributes 19.2% to improving student learning outcomes. Therefore, if learning motivation increases, the learning outcomes of high school/vocational high school students in South Pemulutan District will also improve, and vice versa. These results align with the research Andriana (2020) entitled "The Influence of Parental Education and Learning Motivation on Science Learning Outcomes at Public Junior High Schools in Batanghari Leko District". The results showed that learning motivation influences student learning outcomes at public junior high schools in Batanghari Leko District. Furthermore, Rizqi et al. (2023) showed that there is a positive and significant influence of learning motivation on the science learning outcomes of fourth-grade elementary school students in the Pangeran Diponegoro Cluster, Pagerbarang District, Tegal Regency, amounting to 38.3%.

Based on the explanation above, the research hypothesis in this study is that learning motivation has a positive effect on the learning outcomes of high school/vocational high school students in South Pemulutan District. This demonstrates that teachers are essentially expected to enhance and foster students' enthusiasm and motivation to learn, thereby improving the quality of learning. A teacher must not only teach but also educate their students to become better (Kim, 2020).

### **The Influence of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and Learning Motivation on the Learning Outcomes of Senior High School/Vocational High School Students in South Pemulutan District (X<sub>1</sub>X<sub>2</sub>→Y)**

The results of the regression test and F-test show that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and learning motivation simultaneously have a positive influence on the learning outcomes of high school/vocational school students in South Pemulutan District. The results of the correlation test show that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and learning motivation have a contribution of 36.3% to the improvement of student learning outcomes. This means that if the Merdeka Curriculum and learning motivation increase, the learning outcomes of high school/vocational school students in South Pemulutan District will increase and vice versa. The results of this study are in line with research by (Rizqi et al., 2023).

The results of the study show that (1) there is a positive and significant influence of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum on the learning outcomes of fourth-grade elementary school students in the Pangeran Diponegoro Cluster, Pagerbarang District, Tegal Regency, by 6.6%. (2) There is a positive and significant influence of learning motivation on the learning outcomes of fourth-grade elementary school

students in the Pangeran Diponegoro Cluster, Pagerbarang District, Tegal Regency, by 38.3%. (3) There is a positive and significant influence of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and learning motivation on the science learning outcomes of fourth-grade elementary school students in the Pangeran Diponegoro Cluster, Pagerbarang District, Tegal Regency, amounting to 41.2%. The Merdeka Curriculum has a positive influence on the learning process. The Merdeka Curriculum develops competencies through an approach that refers to talents and interests by combining various types of learning in the classroom (Fauzan et al., 2023; Zaini & Wahib, 2022). This curriculum can improve student learning outcomes by combining abilities and learning motivation to package learning materials.

#### **D. Conclusion**

This study examined the impact of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation and student learning motivation on academic outcomes in South Pemulutan District's high schools and vocational schools. The results revealed three key findings: First, the Merdeka Curriculum implementation showed a 31.9% influence on learning outcomes, indicating a statistically significant though relatively low impact. Second, learning motivation demonstrated a 19.2% positive effect on student performance, similarly categorized as modest. Most notably, when combined, these factors exhibited a 36.3% cumulative influence, representing a substantial and statistically significant improvement in learning outcomes.

Practical implications of these findings are particularly relevant for educators and policymakers. While the Merdeka Curriculum shows promise, its current implementation appears to be achieving only partial success. This suggests schools should: (1) enhance teacher training to maximize curriculum delivery effectiveness, (2) develop targeted strategies to boost student motivation alongside curriculum implementation, and (3) consider implementing regular assessment mechanisms to monitor the combined impact of these factors. The interaction effect between curriculum and motivation particularly highlights the need for holistic approaches that address both structural and psychological aspects of learning.

For future research, three key directions emerge: (1) Qualitative investigations into specific elements of the Merdeka Curriculum that most effectively enhance learning outcomes, (2) Longitudinal studies to assess whether the observed effects persist or amplify over time, and (3) Comparative research across different regions to determine how socioeconomic factors might moderate these relationships. Additionally, exploring intervention strategies that simultaneously target curriculum implementation quality and student motivation could yield valuable practical insights.

This study makes an important contribution to understanding educational reform in Indonesia by quantifying both the independent and combined effects of curriculum

change and student motivation. While demonstrating the Merdeka Curriculum's potential, it also highlights areas needing refinement to achieve more substantial improvements in student outcomes. The findings underscore that curriculum reforms alone may be insufficient without parallel attention to student engagement factors. Future initiatives should consider this dual approach to maximize educational effectiveness.

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