The Dynamics of Merdeka Curriculum Change: Challenges and Opportunities in Private Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Management

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Abstract

The Indonesian government launched Merdeka curriculum policy as an attempt to update the education curriculum in Indonesia. Merdeka curriculum policy was also followed by Madrasahs under the Ministry of Religious. However, the implementation of Merdeka curriculum in Madrasahs faces a number of challenges that need to be identified. This research aims to describe the challenges and opportunities of madrasah ibtidaiyah management in Merdeka curriculum. In this study, researchers used qualitative methods by using several data collection techniques, namely observation, interviews and documentation. The data sources in this study focused on the madrasah head and teachers. The data analysis technique used Miles and Huberman. The findings of this study include challenges found in the form of 1) Lack of Resources 2) Difficulty in Teacher Understanding 3) Changes in School Culture 4) Complex Assessments. Meanwhile, the management opportunities of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Merdeka curriculum are 1) professional development of teachers 2) student empowerment 3) parent and community involvement 4) use of technology in learning 5) increasing student creativity. Thus, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah can take advantage of opportunities and overcome the challenges faced to remain relevant and provide quality education in accordance with the demands of the times.

Keywords: opportunities; challenges; private madrasah ibtidaiyah;

merdeka curriculum

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum is an important tool for the success of an education. It is modified The realization that advancements in science, technology, the arts, and culture, as well as changes in the global environment, all have an impact on the lives of Indonesian society, nation, and state has led to modifications in the curriculum. Dynamics and curriculum changes in Indonesia have continued to occur since pre-independence and continued during independence. In line with the statement that the world of education is currently experiencing several developments, improvements and changes in the curriculum (Fatmawati & Anggraini, 2023). This happens and must be done because the curriculum is not a static concept but is dynamic and must continue to adapt to various changes and challenges that occur as the principle of the curriculum, namely change and continuous process (Change and Continuity) (Ritonga, 2018; Anggraini et al., 2022). As an influential aspect in education, curriculum is a subject to changes. This principle also applies to the Indonesian education curriculum. Changes or reconstruction of the curriculum in Indonesia often occur along with the rapid pace of development of the existing education system (Santika et al., 2022). Currently, the curriculum is changing or being refined with a new curriculum, namely Merdeka curriculum (Angga et al., 2022).

Merdeka curriculum is a government initiative to improve the quality of education in Indonesia (Bungawati, 2022). Yansah et al. (2023) mentioned that the Indonesian government launched Merdeka curriculum policy as an effort to update the education curriculum in Indonesia (Yansah et al., 2023). Merdeka curriculum policy was also followed by Islamic schools managed under the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Hereafter, Madrasah), be it Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, Madrasah Tsanawiyah or Madrasah Aliyah, both public and private. Nila (2021) mentioned that Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is part of formal basic education with religious characteristics. As a more contemporary Islamic school, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah combines boarding school and classroom teaching with a curriculum that includes religion and secular knowledge (Sari, 2021).

Data from the Jambi Provincial Statistics Agency in 2018 shows that Jambi Province has 287 Madrasah Ibtidaiyah scattered in districts and even villages in Jambi Province, consisting of 37 Public Madrasah Ibtidaiyah and 250 Private Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. The comparison of the number is not comparable between public and private. This means that Jambi Province has so many private madrasahs scattered in Jambi Province compared to the State Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.

This research is motivated by the researcher's interest in researching private madrasah ibtidaiyah, which are more numerous in the province of Jambi, in responding to changes in the new curriculum, especially Merdeka curriculum, seen from the management managed by private madrasah ibtidaiyah. Despite their status as private schools, MI has competent and professional teachers. Private madrasahs have an important role in providing quality education at the basic level with an Islamic approach. Private madrasahs are motivated, determined, and committed to implementing the Merdeka Curriculum (Adiyono et al., 2023). Merdeka curriculum is actually easier to implement because teachers are given the freedom to develop student competencies according to the environment and culture of their region and the characteristics of their students (Mulyasa, 2023). Independent learning has a representative value, students are given activeness and freedom in learning according to its name, namely Merdeka curriculum (Arviansyah & Shagena, 2022).

However, the implementation of this curriculum in Madrasahs faces a number of challenges that need to be identified. Therefore, the context of this research emphasises the study and theory of education on the challenges and opportunities of Merdeka curriculum management. Previous research becomes a reference to combine the direction of research and contribute to the novelty of research (Kurniawan et al., 2023). Agustang's research (2023) explains that these challenges involve various aspects such as teacher training, significant curriculum changes, infrastructure and community support. Furthermore, Merdeka curriculum also opens up opportunities in the form of changing approaches to learning, providing opportunities to better understand and accommodate student diversity (Dody & Agustang, 2023). Merdeka curriculum for teachers has challenges that not only provide material but very importantly form character education and are useful for student behaviour, teachers can provide examples to students so that students are able to dedicate and innovate in Merdeka curriculum (Manik et al., 2022). Furthermore, Rambung's research (2023) found that the challenges of Merdeka curriculum in schools are the readiness of teachers and school staff, changing the mindset of school members and teachers

having difficulty finding the right methods to encourage students to learn independently. A challenge is a problem that requires a solution, it is also defined as something that can arouse the will to improve the ability to overcome the problem. In solving a problem, opportunities will be found that usually provide clues to the challenges that must be solved. Problems, challenges and opportunities in madrasas can arise from various things ranging from educators, teachers and even madrasa management (Mansir, 2020).

Madrasah management has a crucial role in designing, implementing and evaluating the implementation of Merdeka curriculum. Furthermore, the results of the researcher's search have not seen any research that examines comprehensively and in-depth the challenges and opportunities of Merdeka curriculum in the management of private madrasahs, this is the urgency of this research to be carried out with the aim of describing the complexity of the dynamics of curriculum change in the context of private madrasahs, especially related to the challenges and opportunities for implementing Merdeka curriculum in private madrasahs. This will be a contribution and reference for other madrasahs in implementing Merdeka curriculum.

METHODS

Since the issues raised in this research are not quantitative in nature, a qualitative approach was used to explore the potential and challenges posed by Merdeka curriculum in the implementation of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Swasta. This research was conducted in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Swasta Nurul Yaqin Muaro Jambi and Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Swasta Nurul Iman Muaro Jambi. The source of data in this study focused on the Head of Madrasah and Madrasah Teachers. Data collection techniques include observation, interviews and documentation (Arif & Sulistianah, 2019). Participant observation was carried out by observing and recording activities carried out by the Head of Madrasah and teachers. Furthermore, structured interviews to find out the challenges and opportunities of Merdeka curriculum in madrasah management and documentation in the form of all documents that have relevance to this research.

Descriptive qualitative data analysis was used to analyze the data through four stages: data collection, data presentation, data reduction and conclusion drawing (Miless et al., 2014). Data were collected by interview, observation and documentation and then displaying the data. After displaying the data, then reducing the data by summarising, selecting and focusing on data that is in accordance with the research objectives, then drawing conclusions.

DISCUSSION

Management Challenges of Private Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Merdeka curriculum

The followings are some of the challenges of madrasah management in Merdeka curriculum:

Lack of Resources

Limited physical, financial and human resources can be a barrier to implementing Merdeka curriculum. Madrasahs may have difficulty providing the facilities and training needed to support this curriculum change. Andari (2022) explains that the implementation of Merdeka curriculum is offered according to the readiness of teachers and education personnel with three alternative options. The first is the independent learning option, the second is the independent change option and the third is independent sharing. With this choice, it is a challenge for teachers to learn independently regarding Merdeka curriculum with limited funds from the madrasah to facilitate teachers in attending training or workshops supporting Merdeka curriculum and limited madrasah facilities and infrastructure. In accordance with the results of interviews with the Principal of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Swasta Nurul Yaqin Muaro Jambi said about one of the challenges in the Madrasah lack of resources.

"One of the challenges is the lack of resources that we have in our madrasah, including limited madrasah funds to organize training activities / socialization workshops or even the preparation of Merdeka curriculum, even supporting facilities / infrastructure. we still lack a lot, for example in fulfilling student learning media."

The same thing was also expressed by the principal of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Swasta Nurul Imam Muaro Jambi, emphasising that the lack of resources is one of the challenges faced in implementing Merdeka curriculum in Madrasah.

"We face financial difficulties to facilitate our teachers to learn more about Merdeka curriculum, this is a challenge in itself for us to try to find funds so that our teachers can attend training and we even bring in experts / a team of lecturers who are experts in Merdeka curriculum"

Teacher Comprehension Difficulties

Teachers may have difficulty understanding and applying the principles of Merdeka curriculum. Educators might observe how they behave when directing and executing instruction, selecting instructional strategies, selecting instructional materials, analyzing student data, assigning homework and exercises, and evaluating and presenting students' results. Meanwhile, students' serious attention to learning, high motivation, active participation in the exercises and activities that teachers provide, excitement for taking part in challenging learning, and autonomy in choosing their own activities demonstrate the implications of learning principles for them (Damiati et al., 2024).

Adequate training and mentoring approaches are needed to ensure that teachers can integrate the curriculum well in daily learning activities. This is supported by one of the teachers of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Swasta Nurul Iman Muaro Jambi, stating

"we are still confused in understanding and applying the principles of Merdeka curriculum, especially in learning, what kind of learning is expected by this curriculum"

Teachers have not understood Merdeka curriculum as a whole, including the orientation of Merdeka curriculum itself, planning a studentcentered learning system that leads to strengthening the profile of Pancasila students by using a project-based learning approach. This was expressed by the principal of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Swasta Nurul Iman Muaro Jambi.

"It is natural for teachers to feel, considering that this curriculum is relatively new so that they need time and continuous training accompanied by experts, this is a challenge for our teachers to learn independently to understand how learning is desired by Merdeka curriculum".

Teachers to understand and implement Merdeka curriculum, teachers must continue to learn to understand the nature of Merdeka curriculum with clear and measurable steps and progress, namely the learning design of Merdeka curriculum paradigm or a concise format or teaching module, the implementation of assessments to replace the National Standardised School Examination (USBN), the preparation of Minimum Competency Assessment (AKM) plans and surveys to replace the National Examination (UN), the preparation of the Madrasah Operational Curriculum (KOM) and the module of the Project Strengthening the Pancasila Profile (Muzakki et al., 2023). Since Merdeka curriculum is relatively new in the field of education, there are a lot of things that instructors and schools need to plan in advance in order to properly execute the curriculum. Understanding the meaning and objectives of Merdeka curriculum, carrying out assessment simulations, creating learning plans and accomplishments, comprehending the flow and learning objectives, and so forth are some ways to get started with this (Rahmadayanti & Hartoyo, 2022).

Madrasah Culture Change

Implementing Merdeka curriculum requires a change in school culture, which may create resistance among some staff members or the school community. Aligning new values with existing culture can be a significant challenge. The existence of differentiated learning in Merdeka curriculum, learning that accommodates all the needs and characteristics of students, makes it a challenge for madrasah to facilitate both teachers and students. the most important and most difficult role of teachers lies in designing learning to accommodate the natural potential of children. Teachers must get out of their comfort zone. Therefore, teachers' knowledge and skills regarding various types of learning processes are very important, including in the context of Merdeka curriculum, because a good understanding will help teachers design learning processes that suit the characteristics of students (Febriansvah et al., 2023). Furthermore, the existence of activities that support the profile of strengthening Pancasila will also result in changes in the culture of the madrasah. Madrasahs will get used to project-based activities.

In line with the statement of the Head of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Swasta Nurul Yaqin Muaro Jambi mentioned that

"Our madrasah is very adaptive to Merdeka curriculum by conducting projects to strengthen the profile of Pancasila rahmatan lil alamin, where we do this project per year two to three themes, our teachers welcome enthusiastically to do projects with students who seem very accepting of this change."

Complex assessment

Assessment in Merdeka curriculum may be more complex than traditional approaches. Developing appropriate assessment instruments and ensuring objectivity can be a challenge for Madrasah Ibtidaiyah management. Similarly, expressed by Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Swasta Nurul Yaqin Muaro Jambi Teacher

"In this Merdeka curriculum there is a challenge for us in assessing students, usually we only focus on cognitive, in this curriculum we have to assess completely both cognitive, skills and attitudes and we even have to prepare the instruments according to the needs of students."

Measuring the effectiveness of Merdeka curriculum in achieving educational goals requires a good assessment or evaluation system to ensure that students achieve the necessary skills and knowledge (Rambung, 2023). Assessment is carried out to find evidence or a basis for judgement about the achievement of learning objectives, therefore educators are encouraged to conduct formative assessment and summative assessment (Purnawanto, 2022).

Assessment consists of formative and summative. Formative assessment aims to measure, monitor and improve the learning process, as well as evaluate the achievement of learning objectives. Meanwhile, summative assessment aims to assess student achievement of learning objectives and/or learning outcomes (CPs) as a basis for determining class promotion and/or graduation from an educational unit. Assessment of the achievement of student learning outcomes is carried out by comparing the achievement of student learning outcomes with the criteria for achieving learning objectives (Ramadhan, 2023). In addition, the assessment used in primary schools in accordance with the driving school module is a diagnostic assessment that aims to diagnose students' basic abilities and determine students' initial conditions (Nasution, 2021).

The above explanation reveal some of the management challenges of the Private Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Merdeka curriculum, namely (1) Lack of Resources: Limited physical, financial, and human resources can be an obstacle in implementing Merdeka curriculum, (2) Difficulties in Teacher Understanding: Teachers may have difficulty understanding and applying the principles of Merdeka curriculum, (3) Changes in School Culture: The implementation of Merdeka curriculum requires changes in school culture, which may create resistance among some staff members or the school community. (4) Complex Assessment: Assessment in Merdeka curriculum may be more complex than traditional approaches.

Management Opportunities of Private Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Merdeka curriculum

The followings describe some management-related opportunities.

Teacher Professional Development

Merdeka curriculum opens up opportunities for teacher professional development. Training and coaching programs can improve pedagogical skills and teacher creativity in delivering learning materials. Teachers as the main subjects who play a role are expected to be able to be the driving force to take actions that provide positive things to students, teachers are given flexibility in implementing learning (Qurniawati, 2023). This opportunity allows teachers to develop their professionalism independently by attending training, seminars, and even workshops.. In line with the statement that Merdeka curriculum invites teachers to learn, teach and work, in this way the teacher is recognised and declared truly a professional teacher who has qualification and competency standards according to his field of expertise (Pranata et al., 2023).

In essence, every implementation of curriculum policy enacted by the government is determined by the ability of teachers to implement it correctly. The implementation is more or less influenced by teachers' perception, interpretation and skills (Setiawati, 2022). Curriculum development requires the empowerment of teacher resources. This is due to changes in the external environment, namely increasingly intensive competition, technological innovation is changing rapidly. Empowerment is important so that teachers feel they are part of and participate in the process of change towards improving the quality of education. Empowering teachers means encouraging teachers to become more involved in decisions and activities that affect their work so that they are able to provide good ideas and are skilled at realising their ideas into realities (Mahmud, 2013).

Student Empowerment

The focus on character development and creative skills provides an opportunity to empower students in the learning process. The application of student-oriented methods can increase student motivation and participation in learning. Curriculum changes may have a positive impact on students, students can learn by following the development of an increasingly advanced era (Setiawati, 2022). The Ministry of Education and Culture designed Merdeka curriculum to provide flexibility and support quality learning. Students also have the freedom to create and learn. "From the child's side, broad opportunities are given in certain materials to be able to solve problems that are widely asked (Adiyono et al., 2023).

In Merdeka curriculum, independent learning is intended to give students the freedom to choose learning needs. Thus it is hoped that an innovative learning culture will be created, not restrictive, and in accordance with the needs of students. students are given the freedom to learn this is an effort to make Merdeka curriculum closer to and in accordance with standards and needs. This means that with Merdeka curriculum, Independent learning can create students who reason critically, creatively and independently. and students can not only reason critically, creatively and independently but students can also develop their abilities in learning according to students' interests and talents (Siswati, 2022).

Parent and Community Involvement

Merdeka curriculum provides opportunities to increase parental and community involvement in education. Close collaboration between madrasahs, parents and communities can support the learning process in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. There is a great opportunity for madrasahs to involve parents to play a direct role in Madrasah activities in both intracurricular and co-curricular activities in Merdeka curriculum. Madrasah management can work with parents to create mechanisms that support parents' active involvement in their children's education. Parents might become aware of their role and responsibilities in their children's schooling through partnership between the madrasah and parents. Madrasahs can help parents realize how crucial a role parents play in mentoring their children in school. With this curriculum update, students must stay up to date with the advancements of a more sophisticated age. In addition, parents play a crucial part in ensuring that every learning program is successful. By working together, parents will be able to learn from teachers and gain experience in raising their children. In other words, the success of Merdeka curriculum depends on collaboration between educators, parents, and the surrounding community (Wanti & Chastanti, 2023).

Use of Technology in Learning

The integration of technology in Merdeka curriculum can be an opportunity to improve the quality of learning. The utilisation of digital tools and platforms can support more interactive and inclusive teaching methods. The use of technology in Merdeka curriculum creates opportunities to increase access to digital educational resources and to embed technology in learning (Dody & Agustang, 2023). This educational technology is able to facilitate independent learning programmes. In line with this, educational technology can improve education in the realm of education (Nuridayanti et al., 2023). The use of multimedia technology in learning interesting, more efficient in the use of learning quality time, overcoming verbalism the learning process can be done

anytime anywhere while instilling creativity. and innovative attitudes among students to develop potential (Putri et al., 2022).

This Independent Belajar curriculum is very helpful for the development of the latest information technology for students, because the existence of this learning independence provides freedom of learning, which can be anywhere at any time and even if you use various sources, especially at this time when we are still in a pandemic condition, whether we like it or not, we must be able to apply learning methods using various learning resources, one of which can be by using digital technology to answer these challenges (Rosmana et al., 2023).

Education is the main foundation in the formation of a competent, adaptive, and competitive young generation in an ever-evolving digital era. In working towards the vision of Merdeka curriculum, educational technology plays an important role in revolutionising the learning and teaching process, not only providing greater access to educational resources, but also enabling a more dynamic and individualised approach to learning. Amidst the rapidly changing world of education, understanding how educational technology can be effectively applied in the context of Merdeka curriculum is crucial (Syamsunir et al., 2024).

The utilisation of information and communication technology (ICT) can improve teaching quality, student quality, student interest, and simultaneously raise the value of educators in the field of technological advancement. Applications based on technological advancements that are most often associated with learning support media are the production and delivery of educational resources and communication with students (Nisa, 2022)

Increased Student Creativity

Merdeka curriculum emphasises the development of student creativity. It provides opportunities to create a learning environment that stimulates creativity and innovation among students. Merdeka curriculum opens access for students to develop themselves, students develop competencies in critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity (Wahyudiono, 2023). With independent learning, teachers are able to arouse students' enthusiasm in learning musical instruments that are around. Independent learning does not restrain students in their own exploration, students are allowed to do learning outside the classroom, this is to foster students' creative spirit (Noor, 2020).

Merdeka curriculum also encourages students to develop critical, creative, and innovative abilities in thinking and acting. Students are encouraged to solve problems and produce original and innovative works, thus strengthening their creativity. In addition, students are also taught to strengthen positive character in their daily lives, so that they can become good citizens and contribute positively to their nation. Through Merdeka curriculum, students will have stronger creativity and positive character skills, so that they are able to face various so that they are able to face various challenges in the future more prepared and confident. Therefore, the role of Merdeka curriculum in Madrasahs is very important in developing creativity and national character in students in Indonesia (Muliardi, 2023).

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Merdeka curriculum is a curriculum concept that focuses on increasing student creativity and independence. This concept is expected to be a solution to the problems and challenges in education in today's increasingly diverse era. Merdeka curriculum requires students to play a more active role in learning and thinking critically and being able to develop themselves independently. There are several studies on Merdeka curriculum that show positive results related to the development of creativity and independence in students in Merdeka curriculum education, namely increasing creativity and independence. Merdeka curriculum shows that students in education have higher creativity and independence than students in the regular curriculum. Merdeka curriculum shows that it can help students find new ideas and then develop more confidence, honesty, responsibility, and dare to appear to themselves (Nuriah et al., 2023).

From several interviews, the researcher concluded that the management opportunities for Private Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Merdeka curriculum are (1) Teacher Professional Development: Merdeka curriculum opens up opportunities for teacher professional development, (2) Student Empowerment: The focus on character development and creative skills provides opportunities to empower students in the learning process, (3) Parent and Community Involvement: Merdeka curriculum provides opportunities to increase parental and community involvement in education, (4) Use of Technology in Learning: Technology integration in Merdeka curriculum can be an opportunity to improve the quality of

learning and (5) Increased Student Creativity: Merdeka curriculum emphasises the development of student creativity.

An in-depth understanding of these challenges and opportunities can help primary school management develop effective strategies to overcome obstacles and take advantage of opportunities in implementing Merdeka curriculum.

CONCLUSION

The dynamics of changes in Merdeka curriculum in Private Madrasah Ibtidaiyah offer challenges and opportunities. Through an indepth understanding of this research, it is hoped that it can encourage improvement and development efforts in primary school management oriented towards the successful implementation of Merdeka curriculum.

The results of the research found several challenges to the management of Private Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Merdeka curriculum, namely (1) Lack of Resources: Limited physical, financial, and human resources can be an obstacle in implementing Merdeka curriculum, (2) Difficulties in Teacher Understanding: Teachers may have difficulty understanding and applying the principles of Merdeka curriculum, (3) Changes in School Culture: The implementation of Merdeka curriculum requires changes in school culture, which may create resistance among some staff members or the school community. (4) Complex Assessment: Assessment in Merdeka curriculum may be more complex than traditional approaches.

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Furthermore, this study also found several management opportunities for Private Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Merdeka curriculum in the form of (1) Teacher Professional Development: Merdeka curriculum opens up opportunities for teacher professional development, (2) Student Empowerment: The focus on character development and creative skills provides opportunities to empower students in the learning process, (3) Parent and Community Involvement: Merdeka curriculum provides opportunities to increase parental and community involvement in education, (4) Use of Technology in Learning: Technology integration in Merdeka curriculum can be an opportunity to improve the quality of learning and (5) Increased Student Creativity: Merdeka curriculum emphasises the development of student creativity.

Overall, Private Madrasah Ibtidaiyah can take advantage of opportunities and overcome the challenges faced to remain relevant and provide quality education in accordance with the demands of the times. It is important for Madrasahs to continue to adapt to the times and improve the quality of education in order to meet the increasingly complex needs of society.

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