

## **The Implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SMA Negeri 1 Semendawai Suku III, East OKU Regency**

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**Abstract:** This research aims to determine how the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented at SMA Negeri 1 Semendawai Suku III OKU Timur, what obstacles are encountered, and what solutions are taken to overcome these obstacles. This research uses a qualitative research method using a phenomenological approach. Data analysis was carried out by describing the results of the interview through sentences structured with scientific explanations and also carrying out analysis using a Likert scale on the data obtained from the research instrument. Based on the results of interviews with the perpetrators of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, in this case, the principal, teachers, and students, show that the Merdeka Curriculum has been implemented thoroughly at SMA Negeri 1 Semendawai Suku III OKU Timur. The results of the Likert scale analysis of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology's intervention in Sekolah Penggerak also show that the Merdeka Curriculum has been implemented very well in schools. The obstacles found during the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum were that online training had not become a habit for teachers so it felt difficult, limited modules, changes in curriculum structure, limited digital-based learning facilities, and the existence of a project to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students, which is a new science. Then the solution taken to overcome these obstacles is to carry out online training results for all teachers, through learning communities together with teachers creating teaching modules and dissecting curriculum structures, providing digital-based learning facilities using cellphones in learning, and implementing projects with several strategies, reflect and evaluate to improve the quality of implementation.

**Keywords:** Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, Phenomenology, Obstacles, Solutions

### **A. Introduction**

The Merdeka Curriculum has diverse intra-curricular learning where the content will be more optimal so that students have enough time to explore concepts and

strengthen competencies. To adapt instruction to students' needs and interests, teachers are allowed to select from a variety of instructional aids (Jannah et al., 2022). The project to strengthen the achievement of the Pancasila student profile is developed based on a specific theme set by the government. The project is not linked to the subject matter because it is not intended to meet any particular learning attainment target. The format of the Merdeka curriculum structure The curriculum includes extracurricular activities, projects that build Pancasila student profiles, and extracurricular activities (Anggara et al., 2023). The allocation of teaching hours in the curriculum structure is written in total in one year and is equipped with suggestions for the allocation of teaching hours if delivered regularly/weekly. In addition, there are adjustments in the arrangement of subjects which are explained in detail in the Q&A list per level. The curriculum consists of intracurricular activities, Co-curricular in the form of Pancasila student profile strengthening projects, and extracurricular activities (KemdikbudRistek. 2021. Pocket Book of Questions and Answers for the Merdeka Curriculum).

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has been realized since 2021, with the launch of the Sekolah Penggerak program as the seventh episode of the major Merdeka Belajar program from the Ministry of Education and Culture, Research and Technology. Sekolah Penggerak is a pilot project for the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. With the primary objective of teaching the nation's citizens, schools serve as official educational establishments that are meant to develop individuals with personalities and character (Sakdiah et al., 2023). One educational innovation that has significantly changed the educational landscape is the School Mover Program (Ritonga et al., 2022). The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is considered very important in the context of recovering learning after the COVID-19 pandemic, where one of the interventions is student-centered learning.

Innovation in learning is necessary to boost student engagement and learning results during the shift from online to restricted face-to-face instruction (Aprima & Sari, 2022). In the presentation material for the principal's mentoring on the policy of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum on February 17, 2022, delivered by Dr. Muhsana Elchintami Lanos, it was conveyed that since the 2021/2022 Academic Year, the Merdeka Curriculum has been implemented in almost 2,500 schools participating in the School Mover Program and 901 Center of Excellence Vocational Schools as part of learning with a new paradigm.

This curriculum is implemented starting from Kindergarten-B, Elementary School & Elementary School Special Grades I and IV, Junior High School & Junior High School Special Grades VII, Senior High School & Senior High School Special Grades and Vocational School Special Grades X. Starting from the 2022/2023 Academic Year, educational units can choose to implement the curriculum based on their

respective readiness starting from TKB, grades I, IV, VII and X. The government has prepared a questionnaire to help educational units assess their level of readiness to use the Merdeka Curriculum. Three options that educational units can decide on regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the 2022/2023 Academic Year are:

1. Independent Learning: schools implement several parts and principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, without changing the curriculum of the educational unit that is being implemented.
2. Independent change: implementing the Merdeka Curriculum using teaching tools that have been provided in PAUD educational units, grades 1, 4, 7, and 10.
3. Independent sharing: Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum by developing various teaching tools in PAUD educational units, grades 1, 4, 7, and 10.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology reported that there are already around 142,000 schools in Indonesia that are willing to use the Merdeka Curriculum in the 2022/2023 academic year. It is recorded that 2,500 schools are participating in the school mover program and 901 schools are participating in the Center of Excellence Vocational Schools. It has been increased, adding 300 (schools included in the SMK PK program) and around 7,000 (schools) are participating in the school Mover program. So, this year (already) 10,000 (schools) have gone through the program and approximately 140,000 (schools) have gone through the independent route. The Merdeka Curriculum itself is planned to be implemented nationally in the 2nd academic year.

SMA Negeri 1 Semendawai Suku III which is later known as is 1 of 4 high schools in East OKU Regency that passed the first stage of the selection for the School Mover Program Batch 1 2021. As the organizer of the 1st batch of the school mover program, SMA Negeri 1 Semendawai Suku III in East OKU Regency is included in the category of schools that adopted the School Mover Program the fastest in its batch, this is proven by achieving level 3 in the school performance assessment by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in 2022.

With the achievement of level 3 in the school performance assessment, the mentoring pattern of the Sekolah Penggerak program at SMA Negeri 1 Semendawai Suku III, East OKU Regency, which in the first year took place every month, then in the second year changed to mentoring every 3 months. This difference in mentoring illustrates that this school has been able to independently implement the Merdeka Curriculum, so that gradually the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology has also determined a mentoring pattern every 3 months.

The success of SMA Negeri 1 Semendawai Suku III, East OKU Regency in implementing the Sekolah Penggerak program is certainly not without reason. SMA Negeri 1 Semendawai Suku III, East OKU Regency is led by a female principal named Mrs. Hj. Suliyah, S.Pd., M.Pd. She is a leader who is not only capable as a leader but also agile and responsive to developments and changes in the environment. The principal of the Sekolah Penggerak promotes several new, distinctive, and participative programs. Promoting collaboration among educators who assist their bosses in implementing Sekolah Penggerak (Sumarsih et al., 2022). In addition, of course, it is also supported by professional educators and education personnel so that this school can reach the highest level in its environment. However, this does not mean that there are no more obstacles to implementing the Merdeka curriculum at the school. This is because several new teachers did not participate in the process from the beginning of the Merdeka curriculum implementation in schools so they are currently still in the learning process. In addition, there are still several teachers who have not been able to carry out technology-based learning because they have not mastered technology due to age factors.

In this study, the author deliberately chose SMA Negeri 1 Semendawai Suku III, East OKU Regency as the research destination because the author wanted to get the most complete information regarding the success of this school in implementing the Merdeka curriculum, the school mover program, including the obstacles that are still faced and the solutions taken with the hope that its success can be a reference or reference for other schools in implementing the Merdeka curriculum which until now has not been fully and evenly implemented in all schools in Indonesia. Meanwhile, the obstacles faced can be found a solution or way out so that this school will be able to implement the curriculum more perfectly, according to the expectations of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Research and Technology.

## **B. Methods**

This research was conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Semendawai Suku III, East OKU Regency, South Sumatra. This research uses a qualitative method. The method strategy in interactive qualitative research uses Phenomenological Study. According to Moleong (2011), qualitative research is research that intends to understand the phenomenon of what is experienced by research subjects such as behavior, perception, motivation, actions, and others holistically and using description in the form of words and language, in a specific natural context by utilizing various natural methods. Data Collection Techniques by conducting observations, interviews, and documentation

## **C. Results and Discussion**

### **1. Implementation of the Independent Curriculum**

Based on the results of the study through interviews, observations, and instruments that the author conducted on teachers about how the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented at SMA Negeri 1 Semendawai Suku III, it shows that teachers are very familiar with the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in schools and the Merdeka Curriculum has been implemented well in schools. This can be seen from the results of research on teachers which states that the implementation of learning is by the provisions for implementing learning in the Merdeka Curriculum, namely student-centered learning known as differentiated learning. Each student has individual diversity so they have different learning needs. To ensure that learning proceeds smoothly, teachers must make accommodations for the requirements of their students. One way to address these various learning demands is through differentiated instruction (Widyawati, 2023).

This learning begins with the stages of conducting assessments, compiling teaching tools, implementing differentiated learning, and conducting reflection and evaluation at the end of learning, and then ending with the implementation of assessments. The Merdeka Curriculum uses three different kinds of evaluations: formative, summative, and diagnostic assessments at the start of the learning process (Budiono & Hatip, 2023). The provision of adequate and comprehensive documentation on the application of student-centered learning further supports this. The autonomous curriculum's differentiated learning model seeks to give students the chance to study well and show their comprehension of the method that most suits them (Astria & Kusuma, 2023). The results of the researcher's observations in the field, the researcher also saw the implementation of the activity. Both in the implementation of student-centered learning and in the implementation of the Pancasila student profile strengthening project.

The results of the researcher's interview with teachers about the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum also stated that the special characteristic of the Merdeka Curriculum in its learning process is centered on students, which is called differentiated learning. According to Sutrisno (2023) Based on five indicators – focus, cooperation, expressing thoughts or ideas, problem-solving, and discipline – differentiated learning that takes learning styles into account can boost student engagement. A simpler and more comprehensive autonomous curriculum, more flexible learning, and more relevant and participatory learning are some of its benefits. Teachers can better identify students' potential in the Merdeka Curriculum, which helps them create more relevant instruction, according to other educators. Teachers have more time, which explains this. Three aspects of the benefits of the Merdeka Curriculum, according to his research, are as follows: 1) a driving teacher

program that drives the education ecosystem to improve teacher quality equality; 2) a Sekolah Penggerak program that implements the curriculum functionally according to student's learning needs; and 3) raising the profile of Pancasila students to meet the challenges of global developments (Firdaus & Permana, 2024). The project to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students in the Merdeka Curriculum also makes students more active, creative, and innovative in learning. Then the attitude of cooperation and empathy of students also increases. Teachers also stated that the independent learning curriculum provides more freedom and flexibility to students in participating in learning. In addition, the advantages of the Merdeka Curriculum are simpler and deeper, more independent, more relevant, interactive, and communicative (Yenti et al., 2024).

Curriculum 2013 (K-13) is a curriculum that has been used in Indonesia since 2013 (Aisyah & Astuti, 2021). The results of the study on students also showed that students understand the differences in learning in the Merdeka Curriculum when compared to learning in the previous curriculum (curriculum 2013). The basic differences that students understand include more varied learning, there is a project to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students, teachers accommodate students' learning styles, learning is more meaningful and in-depth, learning resources are more varied and students are allowed to think critically and creatively by finding other learning resources independently apart from the learning resources provided by the teacher, the teacher plays a greater role as a facilitator, not as the main learning resource. As a learning facilitator, the instructor promotes students' active participation and teamwork (Afriani et al., 2024). Learning is not only in the classroom but also outside the classroom. The most dominant learning activities felt by students are discussions and presentations of discussion results. In this activity, students feel they get a lot of experience and learning.

The results of the researcher's interview with several students about the Merdeka Curriculum, some students answered that the independent learning curriculum used more presentations. Some said that learning with the Merdeka Curriculum, students were very free in learning, very much by the students' wishes, and students were required to find their materials. Additionally, teachers are free to select the teaching resources they will employ, with the aim that instruction will be tailored to the individual learning preferences and characteristics of their students (Priantini et al., 2022). Other students also mentioned that the Merdeka Curriculum encourages students to be more creative, students are more creative in finding learning materials, not only depending on teachers so they train students to be more independent and responsible. Students feel happier when learning with the Merdeka Curriculum because the learning is more varied. On the other hand, a small number of students find it difficult to change this way of learning because they are not used to it. However, most students feel happy because the learning is varied and challenging. This learning stage is in line with the implementation cycle of the

Merdeka Curriculum by teachers as reported on the Kemdikbud.go.id page which includes: diagnostic assessment, learning planning and implementation of student-centered learning, reflection, and evaluation. Curriculum 13 and the Merdeka Curriculum are being implemented in several ways, such as the basic framework, the competencies to be attained, the curriculum structure, learning, and assessment (Anwar & Jannah, 2023).

The results of interviews with school principals regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in schools show that the principal has carried out his function as a learning leader. The principal carries out self-development practices based on personal awareness and will which be manifested by participating in all school movement program activities both online and offline. To create competitive advantages for schools by developing the resources owned by the school, creating effective schools with excellent service based on the capabilities of the resources owned by the school, and empowering school residents by taking into consideration their input to face the needs and demands of the times, the principal plays a role in offering professional development guidance for teachers, guidance on developing students' interests and talents, and strategic thinking (Kamaludin, 2023).

Developing the competence of school residents to improve the quality of learning by mobilizing teachers to take part in training organized by schools, ministries, or independently through teacher learning communities and the Independent Teaching platform. The creation of collaborative learning content, learning communities, and other initiatives can help the Independent Teaching platform achieve its primary goal of fostering a collaborative ecosystem that will improve educational efficacy and foster a positive work environment (Setiariny, 2023). Because educators are also learning designers, implementers, and evaluators, their skills have a significant impact on the quality of learning (Septaria et al., 2022). Actively participate in networks and organizations relevant to school leadership to develop careers such as principal's work meeting, Sekolah Penggerak Program groups, and others. Demonstrate spiritual, moral, and emotional maturity to behave according to the code of ethics shown through exemplary behavior in carrying out activities including coming to school early to greet teachers, welcoming students, planning religious activities, discussing with colleagues in solving problems related to their duties as leaders, deliberations in planning activities at school and others. This is in line with the material on the principal competency model as presented in the school driving program workshop organized by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology.

In the first and second years of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, SMA Negeri 1 Semendawai Suku III implemented the curriculum by adopting teaching tools that had been provided by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology through the independent teaching platform known as the term independent change.

As stated in the Decree of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology No. 56 of 2022 concerning Guidelines for the Implementation of the Curriculum in the Context of Learning Recovery, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum can be implemented through 3 stages, namely: independent learning, independent change, and independent sharing. Furthermore, in this third year, SMA Negeri 1 Semendawai Suku III has implemented the curriculum independently and shared. Where the school has fully implemented the Merdeka Curriculum, has compiled or modified teaching modules that are adjusted to the needs of students and school support, implemented differentiated learning, and has also started sharing good practices with several other schools in East OKU Regency that will implement the Merdeka Curriculum, as a resource person for sharing good practices. In this third year, teachers have also become more skilled in compiling teaching modules and project modules. In addition, teachers are also increasingly skilled in implementing student-centered learning and implementation. This is in line with the mentoring program for Sekolah Penggerak which has been programmed for 3 consecutive years.

The achievement of SMA Negeri 1 Semendawai Suku III OKU Timur in implementing this Merdeka Curriculum was certainly not achieved immediately, but was also supported by strong leadership by a leader figure who in this case is the principal. The principal as a learning leader has a very strong character to progress with good examples and a high work ethic. The principal is the driving force behind the execution of the school's numerous programs. He is in charge of overseeing a school to ensure that it consistently adheres to the established programs (Adha & Fadhila, 2023). This indirectly provides an example and spirit for all teachers and stakeholders in the school in implementing the curriculum itself. In addition, of course, it is also supported by teachers who have the will to progress, learn, and adapt to change, so that the movement of change can run faster and more precisely. According to Ramadina (2021) the principal must support teachers and other educational staff in raising the standard of instruction in classrooms. The principal has a responsibility to guide the student-centered learning process and give teachers and other education staff members autonomy when executing the independent learning curriculum.

The results of this study are in line with research conducted by (Fauzi, 2022), "Implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum in Sekolah Penggerak. The study's findings indicate that, despite a number of issues and challenges, the curriculum's implementation in Sekolah Penggerak has gone smoothly. The principal's and teachers' strong determination to make changes is crucial to successfully implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in schools that are leading the way. According to Yansah et al (2023) Since administrators and teachers have a significant influence on the direction and execution of educational programs, their support is essential to the success of the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation in

schools. Other research by Sumarsih et al (2022) named "Analysis of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the SDN 12 Padanglua Sekolah Penggerak, Banuhampu District, Agam Regency." According to the study's findings, the principal of a Sekolah Penggerak can help create original and creative participatory programs and foster collaboration with educators to make Sekolah Penggerak a reality. Additionally, schools require training on how to implement the autonomous curriculum, and offline instruction can help students gain a thorough understanding of the curriculum and develop classroom management techniques that align with it (Alimuddin, 2023).

The study reveals that SMA Negeri I Semendawai Suku III has successfully implemented an Merdeka Curriculum. A Likert scale analysis showed an average of 4.8 for teacher understanding, indicating that teachers are well-versed in the implementation process. The success of the Merdeka Curriculum is attributed to the principal and teachers, aligning with the Indonesian Minister of Education's Decree on curriculum implementation in the context of learning recovery. The principal's democratic leadership style, which fosters positive interpersonal relationships, makes leaders more task-oriented, and subordinates will influence their subordinates' implementation, which will affect how well the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented (Saputra & Ramadan, 2023).

SMA Negeri 1 Semendawai Suku III implemented the School Mover Program batch 1, receiving five interventions from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology. A qualitative analysis of the Likert scale showed an average of 4.5, indicating the Merdeka Curriculum has been implemented very well. The principal's role as a learning leader, involving school supervisors and expert trainers, is strengthened through mentoring, supervision, and evaluation activities, providing positive energy to teachers and school components towards measurable achievement targets. The results of this study are in line with the results of the assessment of the Implementation of the School Mover Program implemented by the Ministry of Education and Culture in the second year of the School Mover Program. SMA Negeri 1 Semendawai Suku III received a predicate of rising 2 levels from the previous year. So in the third year, this school is at level 3. So, it follows level three mentoring which is carried out every three months. While in the previous year, mentoring was carried out every month.

Based on the Regulation of the Director General of Teachers and Education Personnel Number 6565 / B / GT / 2020 concerning the competency model in the development of the teacher profession, it is stated that there are 3 Teacher competency models, namely:

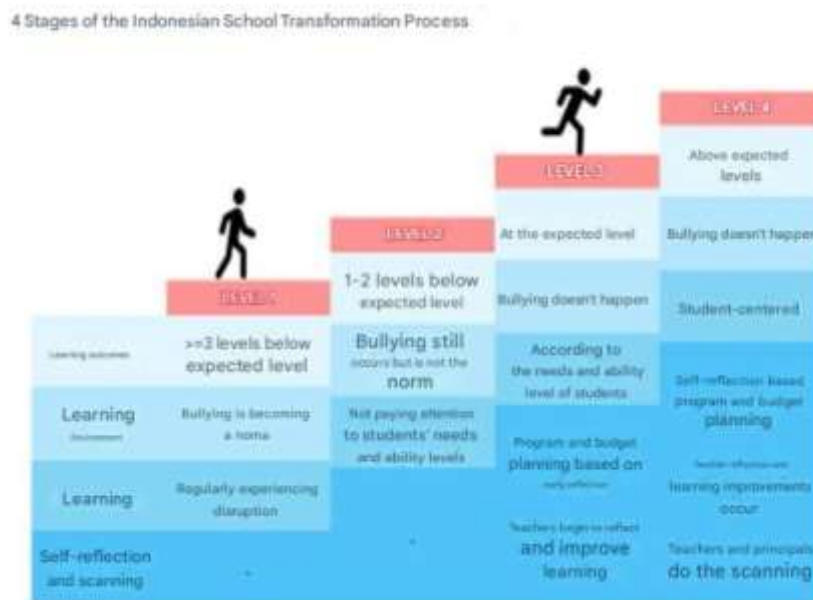
1. Professional knowledge competency.
2. Professional learning practice competency.
3. Professional development competencies

Based on the material of the workshop on strengthening the driving principles delivered by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, the 5 interventions above are described in the following scheme:



**Figure 1. The School Mover Program Consists of Five Interventions**

Then the level of determining school achievement is described in the following scheme:



**Figure 2. Four Stages of the Indonesian School Transformation Process**

After seeing the achievements of SMA Negeri I Semendawai Suku III OKU Timur, then referring to the intervention training material of the Sekolah Penggerak program and the stages of the school transformation process in Indonesia, it further strengthens the research results which state that the 5 interventions of the Ministry

of Education and Culture on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Sekolah Penggerak, especially in SMA Negeri I Semendawai Suku III OKU Timur, have been implemented very well. This is also proven by the stages of the school transformation achievement process at level 3.

#### **D. Conclusion**

Based on research data, research data analysis, and discussion. The implementation of a Merdeka Curriculum at SMA Negeri 1 Semendawai Suku III, East OKU Regency, has been successful due to the familiarity of teachers, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology's intervention, and the principal's leadership. Students have also understood the difference between the independent and previous curriculum, and the Pancasila student profile strengthening project has increased student character competencies. The number of students in schools has also increased over the past three years. Schools face challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum due to limited facilities and infrastructure, difficulty reducing learning outcomes to learning objectives, and new online mentoring.

Teachers must prepare their teaching modules and develop special skills for reducing learning outcomes to learning objectives. The implementation of Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project, a new cross-subject material, requires a strategy and good practices, as there are no references or examples of good practices. This is particularly challenging for the first school in East OKU Regency. Schools are addressing obstacles to technology-based learning by allowing students to bring cell phones to school, preparing lockers for cellphone storage outside school hours, forming learning communities for teachers to share best practices, addressing the limited understanding of online mentoring materials through workshops, creating teaching modules through the learning community, and collaborating cross-subject teachers to compile project implementation scenarios.

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