

New Paradigm of *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in Schools

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ABSTRACT

Responding to changing times and evaluating the 2013 Curriculum, the Government implemented the Merdeka Belajar to improve human resources and the quality of education. This study aims to describe the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum at school. The research method used is Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with metal synthetic data analysis techniques. This study concludes that the change from the 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum was caused by several factors, including the quality of human resources, changing times, and the evaluation results of the 2013 Curriculum. Furthermore, the framework for designing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is one of the four curriculum options that can be adopted by educational units in the context of learning recovery. The need for implementing this curriculum is due to several advantages, including being simpler and more in-depth, more independent; and more relevant and interactive. However, in implementation, several obstacles were encountered, namely, the teacher's understanding of the curriculum and teacher competence in using technology.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The education curriculum in Indonesia has changed twelve times, from before independence to the present. The curriculum changes began in 1947, 1952, 1964, 1968, 1975, 1984, 1994, 2004, 2006, and 2013. Changes that occur are based on the results of analysis, evaluation, predictions, and the challenges faced are constantly changing. Curriculum change policies are dynamic, contextual, and relative. Dynamic because it develops according to the needs of the times and is open to criticism. Contextual because it is needed and based on the context of the era, and relative because the resulting curriculum policies are seen

as good or perfect in their time and will become irrelevant in the following periods. Therefore the basic principles in curriculum policy are change and continuity, namely changes that are made continuously (Machali, 2014; Machali & Hidayat, 2016). And in 2022, the Government will implement a new education curriculum, namely the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum (Kemendikbudristek, 2022c). This change has fulfilled the dynamic, contextual, and relative aspects.

A *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum is a curriculum with various intracurricular learning where the content will be more optimal so that students have enough time to explore concepts and strengthen competence. Teachers can choose multiple teaching tools so that learning can be adapted to students' learning needs and interests (Kemendikbudristek, 2022b). This curriculum promotes the flexibility of learning to meet students' learning needs and interests.

The *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum as a learning recovery option proclaimed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) issued a policy regarding the development of a *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. The policy option for developing the *Merdeka Belajar* is given to educational units as an additional effort to carry out learning crisis recovery during 2022-2024 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ministry of Education and Culture's policy regarding the National Curriculum will be reviewed in 2024 based on evaluations during the learning recovery period, referring to conditions where the COVID-19 pandemic caused significant obstacles and impacts on the learning process in education units (Ariga, 2022; Nugraha, 2022). In the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the application of the prototype curriculum (*Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum) is one of the means to achieve the educational rights of Indonesian citizens, especially students. Implementation of a prototype curriculum is not an easy and simple thing to do, but a complex thing and also requires careful preparation, especially for teachers. This is because the curriculum is designed with the health and safety of students in mind (Bahri, 2022).

The *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum paradigm for teachers is something new. The transition from the 2013 curriculum to the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum is a very new thing. The *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum is the implementation of the curriculum after the pandemic and will be fully implemented in limited educational institutions in several schools. Teacher preparation for this *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum is by preparing insights and information about this *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum by participating in several pieces of training and workshops held by educational and private institutions. The teacher gave an enthusiastic response in implementing this curriculum due to one of the principles of flexibility which provides space for the teacher to provide learning according to the conditions of the students and in favour of the students (Fitriyah & Wardani, 2022).

Various national and international studies show Indonesia has experienced a long-standing learning crisis. These studies show that many Indonesian children cannot understand simple reading or apply basic math concepts. The findings also show Indonesia's steep educational gap between regions and social groups. This situation then got worse due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. To overcome these crises and various challenges, we need systemic changes, one of which is through the curriculum. The curriculum determines the material taught in class. The curriculum also influences teachers' pace and teaching methods to meet students' needs.

For this reason, the Ministry of Education and Culture has developed the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum as an essential part of efforts to recover lessons from the crisis we have experienced for a long time (Kemendikbudristek, 2022a). This is one reason for the need for the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum to be implemented in schools. In addition, other learning crises that underlie the need for a *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum include in a global context, learning outcomes at the primary and secondary education levels are still not encouraging with low PISA scores, the Covid-19 Pandemic, learning loss, and the results of the 2013 Curriculum evaluation.

Several studies that are relevant to this research include Manalu (2022) about device development, Rahayu (2022) about the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, Jojo (2022) about the policy of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, Marisa (2021) about the innovation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, dan Indarta (2022) about the relevance of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. The difference with previous research is to

analyze the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum from the factors that cause change, design, advantages, and obstacles. Thus, this research is to answer four questions, namely 1) what are the factors that cause changes in the curriculum from Curriculum 13 to the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum; 2) how to design the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum; 3) what are the advantages of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, and 4) what are the teacher's obstacles in implementing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. This research is important to do to provide a general description of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, so that teachers can understand the importance and purpose of this curriculum.

2. METHODS

This research uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) research type. The systematic literature review in this study was carried out by compiling articles on the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum that were published starting in 2022-2023. The number of initial articles obtained was 14,300 articles, proceedings, and books with the keyword Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. Then the articles were reduced according to the criteria according to the research focus, namely the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, to answer 4 research questions, then, the journals analyzed were 16 national journals.

The systematic literature review research procedure with a qualitative approach was carried out by following the steps according to Francis & Baldesari, namely 1) formulating the review question; 2) conducting a systematic literature search; 3) screening and selecting appropriate research articles; 4) analyzing and synthesizing qualitative; 5) maintaining quality control; and 6) presenting findings. The data analysis process in this study uses the meta-synthesis method with the aim of answering research questions by summarizing various research results.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study consisted of 16 books and articles collected and reduced from the last 2 years, namely in 2022-2023, because the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum began to be implemented in 2022. Based on the collection and analysis of books and articles on the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum as shown in table 1:

No	Authors	Year	Findings	Research Question
1	Anggraena et al.	(2022)	Emergency curriculum interventions have had a significant effect on learning recovery efforts due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But on the other hand, it can be said that this intervention is a bumper policy to address potential learning losses and learning gaps during a pandemic. It is necessary to develop a curriculum that is comprehensively capable of dealing with the learning crisis, which is an acute problem in Indonesia.	RQ 1, RQ 2
2	Anggraena et al.	(2022)	Learning and assessment are units that should not be separated. Educators and students need to understand the intended competencies so that the whole learning process is sought to achieve these competencies.	RQ 1, RQ 2
3	Bahri	(2022)	In the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the application of the prototype curriculum (Merdeka Belajar Curriculum) is one of the means to achieve the educational rights of Indonesian citizens, especially students. Implementation of a prototype curriculum is not an easy and simple thing to do, but a complex thing and also requires careful preparation, especially for teachers. This	RQ 1, RQ 3

			is because the curriculum is designed with the health and safety of students in mind.	
4	Indarta et al.	(2022)	The 21st century learning model also emphasizes students to build their skills independently. Teachers can use the 21st century learning model in implementing the Merdeka Belajar curriculum in schools. Education in this era also demands knowledge and technology in the development of students who will become human resources in the future. So students are expected to have 4C skills which consist of critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity, to be able to adapt in any circumstance.	RQ 3
5	Rahayu et al.	(2022)	Implementation of the curriculum in driving schools has been carried out optimally and is ongoing, although in practice there are still many shortcomings and obstacles. The key to success in implementing the curriculum in driving schools is that the principal and teachers must have the will to make changes.	RQ 3
5	Alfath et al.	(2022)	In order to welcome the Merdeka Belajar program, improving the quality of education continues to be pursued by developing the competencies that must be possessed by a teacher, namely pedagogic competence, personal competence, social competence, and professional competence.	RQ 1
6	Nelisma	(2022)	Merdeka Belajar returns educational literacy to its core as a strategic momentum to realize the goals of National Education so that religious spirituality literacy, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and students' skills in restoring education.	RQ 1
7	Susilowati	(2022)	The implementation of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum in schools has been running, but there are several obstacles faced by teachers in implementing it, including not understanding the essence of 'free learning', still dominating the lecture method, making teaching modules and the incompatibility of the learning platform with what is in it. Finally, at the evaluation stage, the teacher had difficulty in making an assessment or assessment.	RQ 2, RQ 4
8	Fitriyah	(2022)	Teacher preparation for this Merdeka Belajar curriculum is by participating in several pieces of training and workshops held by educational institutions. Elementary school teachers gave an enthusiastic response to implementing this curriculum because one of the principles of flexibility is that it provides space for teachers to provide learning according to conditions and in favour of students.	RQ 1
9	Ariga	(2022)	The curriculum is very important so that students can achieve educational goals in a structured and sustainable manner. So, the curriculum cannot be separated from education, because the curriculum is a reference in the teaching and learning process. It should be acknowledged that the Covid-19 pandemic has greatly affected the world	RQ 1, RQ 3

			of education, and this has all the wisdom, to restore the world of education. A Merdeka Belajar curriculum was born, because the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum has its advantages, which are simpler and deeper, more independent, more relevant and interactive. so it is very suitable to be applied after Covid-19.	
10	Zulaiha et al.	(2022)	Teacher problems faced by teachers in implementing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, namely in planning implementation, and learning assessment.	RQ 4
11	Supriani et al	(2022)	The concept of Merdeka Belajar is an effort to achieve independence in thinking. The existence of this policy provides great hope for educational institutions to explore and develop the quality of education in their institutions.	RQ 3
12	Sunarni	(2023)	The teacher's perception is positive, and appreciates the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in elementary schools despite facing several obstacles.	RQ 3, RQ 4
13	Mulyono	(2022)	The creation of a Merdeka Belajar curriculum is due to the fading orientation of education in Indonesia, so the birth of a Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is expected to be able to increase courage and thinking independently, enthusiasm for learning, be confident and optimistic, have the freedom to think broadly and be able to accept successes and mistakes.	RQ 3
14	Putri et al.	(2022)	The problems experienced by prospective educators in developing learning tools in the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum include: not being able to read CP properly, not being able to compile TP (learning objectives from existing CP (learning outcomes), not being able to compile ATP (learning goal flow) from TP, difficulties in developing teaching modules, and an Merdeka Belajar curriculum allows for thematic forms	RQ 4
15	Ardianti et al.	(2022)	The implementation of a Merdeka Belajar curriculum requires the readiness of school principals and teachers to learn new things. In the planning process, teachers still rely on teaching modules provided by the centre. There are new things that must be considered in the Merdeka Belajar curriculum with the project to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students.	RQ 4
16	Nugraha	(2022)	One of the implementations of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum aims to recover from the learning crisis after the COVID-19 pandemic. The learning crisis that occurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in education units needing to evaluate the implementation of the Emergency Curriculum that had been implemented during the pandemic as input for the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum later.	RQ 1

3.1. Changes to the 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum

Curriculum change policies are dynamic, contextual, and relative. Dynamic because it develops according to the needs of the times and is open to criticism. Several factors cause the change in

curriculum from Curriculum 13 to Curriculum Merdeka. These factors include a) pre-pandemic; b) pandemic; c) the Government's response to the pandemic: the three curriculum policies that have been implemented; d) the results of the emergency curriculum are good; e) learning loss in various countries; f) K13 evaluation; and g) an alternative curriculum is needed (Anggraena, Felicia, et al., 2022). The explanation is as follows:

a) Pre-pandemic

First, in a global context, primary and secondary education learning outcomes are still low and even stagnate, and there are no big jumps. This data is based on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) test from 2000-2018 where Indonesia is ranked 72 out of 77 countries with 70% of students below minimum competency. Second, non-academic results in the field of attitudes and actions need improvement. This data is reinforced by a survey by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) that 41% of Indonesian students reported experiencing bullying several times a month. This figure is higher than the average OECD country figure of 23%. Third, in the national context, the Indonesian Student Competency Assessment (AKSI) test results show low basic competence and high inequality. Indonesia has significantly increased access (enrollment rates), especially at the basic education level. However, data from various national and international surveys and trends in National Examination scores indicate that learning outcomes have not increased in the last 15-20 years. And fourth, in the context of vocational education, indicators of a learning crisis can be shown by the lack of absorption of SMK graduates in work. The Open Unemployment Rate (TPT) for SMK graduates is still the highest, with a percentage of 8.49% which shows results that are not following the objectives of establishing SMKs, namely prioritizing preparing students to enter the workforce and developing professional attitudes (Anggraena, Felicia, et al., 2022).

Pre-pandemic, the condition of Indonesian education had not made significant progress with the above indicators. Education in Indonesia has only increased from the aspect of quantity, not quality (Afidah et al., 2022; Safitri et al., 2022). Other indicators include low physical facilities, low teacher quality, low teacher welfare, low student achievement, low opportunities for educational equity, low relevance of education to needs, and high cost of education (Hidayati et al., 2022).

b) The Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 virus entered Indonesia in early 2020 (Retaduari, 2022) and was first discovered in Wuhan, China (Ariyanti, 2020). The presence of this virus is a disaster for the whole world, which has an impact on every aspect of life, including economic, social and education. According to Siahaan (2020), teaching and learning activities are carried out from home, and even work carried out from the home to reduce the transmission of Covid-19. During the 2 years of the COVID-19 Pandemic, there has been a significant increase in learning loss (loss of learning) in terms of achievement of students' literacy and numeracy competencies. Research shows that before the COVID-19 pandemic, learning progress for 1 year (1st grade) was 129 points for literacy and 78 points for numeracy.

Meanwhile, during the COVID-19 Pandemic, learning progress during grade 1 was significantly reduced. For literacy, a student's learning loss is equivalent to 6 months of learning. As for numeration, student learning loss equals 5 months of study (Anggraena, Felicia, et al., 2022).

c) The government's response to the pandemic: the three curriculum policies that have been implemented

This policy is outlined in the Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 719/P/2020, which essentially gives freedom to educational units to fully implement the 2013 curriculum, use the emergency curriculum, which is a simplification of the 2013 curriculum developed by the government, or the educational units to simplify the 2013 curriculum

independently. Based on a learning survey during the pandemic for primary and secondary education conducted by BSKAP in July 2021, 59.2% of educational units continued to use the 2013 curriculum in full, 31.5% of educational units used the emergency curriculum, and 8.9% of educational units education simplifies the 2013 curriculum independently. Around 0.4% of educational units use another curriculum (Anggraena, Felicia, et al., 2022). This policy aims to restore learning during the Covid-19 pandemic to reduce the impact of learning loss on students (Kemendikbud, 2021). This policy is an option so that education recovery can be realized quickly, bearing in mind that the negative impact is starting to be felt.

d) The result of the emergency curriculum was good

Based on the implementation of the curriculum during the COVID-19 Pandemic, it was found that students who used the emergency curriculum had better learning outcomes than students who used the 2013 Curriculum in full, regardless of their socio-economic background. The survey, which was conducted on 18,370 students in grades 1-3 of an elementary school in 612 schools in 20 districts/cities from 8 provinces during the April-May 2021 period, showed significant differences in learning outcomes between the 2013 Curriculum and the emergency curriculum. The difference in literacy and numeracy scores is equivalent to 4 months of study. On the numeracy score, students using the 2013 Curriculum obtained a score of 482 compared to students using the emergency curriculum with a score of 517. Meanwhile, students using the 2013 Curriculum scored a literacy score of 532 compared to students using the emergency curriculum with a score of 570 (Anggraena, Felicia, et al., 2022). This curriculum has a good impact following the objectives of its implementation.

Implementing a prototype curriculum is not easy and simple to do, but something that is complex and also requires careful preparation, especially for teachers. This is because the curriculum is designed with the health and safety of students in mind. The difference between the prototype and national curricula lies in reducing the material in each subject. This process shows that the prototype curriculum simplifies the national curriculum, a simplification seen from various angles. By using a prototype curriculum instead of trying to meet the goals of the national curriculum, teachers can effectively pay attention to students in capturing lessons at school. Furthermore, parents of students are required to be able to evaluate their child's ability to capture learning at school. So, if all parties agree to implement the prototype curriculum, it can be said that it fulfils the Indonesian people's educational rights (Bahri, 2022).

e) Learning loss in various countries

The phenomenon of learning loss does not only occur in Indonesia. Almost all countries worldwide suffer from the closure of schools due to the pandemic (Engzell et al., 2021). To catch up, each country has made policies to respond to the Covid-19 crisis. Of course, each country can adjust its policies. However, the policies taken must be based on data and needs, because if the government takes the wrong policy, education disaster due to Covid-19 will become a real threat (UNESCO, 2021). Various studies, including Cerelia (2021), Budi (2021), Rajib (2022), Andriani (2021) who found that Covid-19 has the potential to create learning loss.

f) K13 evaluation

From the evaluation results carried out by the Ministry of Culture and Culture in several regions in Indonesia, it was found that the learning load that students had to bear was too much (Puskurbuk, 2019). Furthermore, the results of the presentation of the evaluation of the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum found that there was a misunderstanding of the teacher's understanding of the concept of mastery learning. Most teachers still think mastery learning is completing all learning material, so they even override student understanding; what is expected in the 2013 Curriculum is the completeness of students' understanding (Kemendikbud, 2019). As a result, students and parents complained about the heavy learning

load. Especially during exams, elementary school students must understand social studies, science, and mathematics for just one exam (Maharani, 2014).

g) An alternative curriculum is needed

Regarding the curriculum, the Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Education and Culture, provided options for using the curriculum: K-13 Curriculum as a whole, Emergency Curriculum; and the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum (Kemdikbudristek, 2021).

3.2. *Merdeka Belajar Curriculum Design*

3.2.1. Merdeka Belajar Curriculum Design Principles

The principles of designing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum are, first, simple, easy to understand, and implement. This refers to continuing the policies and good practices that have been set before; logical and clear design; and various support and assistance to implement the curriculum. Second, focus on the competence and character of all students. What is being done is reducing curriculum material or content; learner-centred learning essentially begins with curriculum design, not just a pedagogy designed by the teacher after the curriculum is established; all learners need to achieve a minimum competency; and strengthening literacy and numeracy, especially at the basic education level, is one of the concerns in designing a competency-focused curriculum. Third, flexibility. Flexibility is also a principle in curriculum implementation. Recognizing the diversity of education units in Indonesia, curriculum implementation will not be forced and will apply equally to all schools. Educational units' readiness level to implement the curriculum is different, and each requires support and different times to prepare itself to use this curriculum. Therefore implementation is designed as a learning stage. Fourth is harmony. Alignment is related to three things, namely 1) alignment between curriculum, learning process (pedagogy), and assessment; 2) alignment between the curriculum and governance systems and teacher competencies; and 3) alignment with policies related to individual learning from an early age up to university. These three things make it necessary to view the curriculum design systemically and involve cross-units in the government bureaucratic system in its work process (Anggraena, Felicia et al., 2022).

Fifth, work together. The principle of mutual cooperation is mainly related to the curriculum design and development process. The Merdeka Belajar Curriculum and its teaching tools were designed by involving dozens of institutions including the Ministry of Religion, universities, schools and other educational institutions. The experts involved in designing this curriculum are a combination of academics and practitioners, including teachers. Sixth, pay attention to the results of the study and feedback. One of the important commitments in curriculum design is the consistency and validity of decisions made in various aspects. This means that the curriculum needs to be designed based on valid data so that its quality can be accounted for. Recent research results in various global contexts provide inspiration for policies and practices that can be adapted to the Indonesian context (Anggraena, Felicia, et al., 2022).

3.2.2. Curriculum Framework

The Central Government determines (1) the profile of Pancasila students, (2) Learning Outcomes, (3) curriculum structure, and (4) learning principles and assessment as a curriculum that is expected to be implemented in educational units and in the classroom. Pancasila student profiles as a synthesis of national education goals, the vision of education and the development of Indonesian human resources contained in the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution, Pancasila, and the views of the nation's founders. While the other three components are derivatives of a larger policy, namely the National Education Goals which have been stipulated in Law Number 20 of 2003 and translated as Pancasila student profiles, and are also derivatives of the National Education Standards, particularly Graduate Competency Standards, Content Standards, Process Standards, and Assessment Standards. This framework is used as a reference in designing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, including strengthening the alignment between the basic framework of the curriculum and the operational curriculum developed in educational units (Anggraena, Felicia, et al., 2022).

3.2.3. Learning Outcomes

Learning achievement (CP) is the minimum competency that students must achieve for each subject. In CP, the strategy that is increasingly strengthened to achieve this goal is to reduce the scope of the material and change the procedure for preparing outcomes that emphasize flexibility in learning. To achieve competency, what is done is 1) content reduction; 2) learning constructively; 3) use of phases; 4) formulation of learning outcomes; 5) learning flexibility; and 6) improving the quality of learning outcomes (Anggraena, Felicia, et al., 2022).

3.2.4. Curriculum Structure

The main characteristics that are emphasized in the design of this curriculum structure are first, there is a change in the status of subjects such as English starting to be taught from the elementary school level, Natural and Social Sciences (IPAS) at the elementary school level, Informatics subject at the junior high school level becomes mandatory, and local content can be developed in a more diverse form (Anggraena, Felicia, et al., 2022). Changes in the status of this subject as an effort to strengthen the development of competencies that are important for every student to have in the present and in the future. In line with these objectives, this change was also made as an effort to improve the alignment of learning between one level and the next. Second, educational units have the authority to develop operational curricula. The Merdeka Curriculum sets a target of accumulated study hours in one year. This is done to provide flexibility to educational units to arrange a more flexible schedule of learning activities.

Third, learning is divided into two, namely intracurricular and co-curricular in the form of projects to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students. The curriculum structure in the Merdeka Curriculum is divided into two main activities: 1) intra-curricular learning activities which are routine and scheduled activities based on structured lesson content, and 2) learning activities through projects to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students. The novelty in the division of these two activities refers to the principle of focusing on the competence and character of students. Fourth, some choices can be determined by students. In the Merdeka Curriculum, SMA/MA students choose subjects in four discipline groups: MIPA, Social Sciences, Languages, and Crafts & Vocational Studies. And fifth, changes to the curriculum structure according to level and type of education (Anggraena, Felicia, et al., 2022). The following is a summary of changes to the specific curriculum structure for each level and type of education as shown in table 1.

Table 1. Changes in the structure of the curriculum according to the level and type of education

No.	Level	Change
1	PAUD	strengthening learning through play activities and strengthening the foundations of literacy, especially to build interest and a passion for reading
2	SD	strengthening the foundations of literacy and numeracy as well as the ability to think in an inquiry manner by integrating natural sciences and social sciences into one subject, called IPAS (Natural and Social Sciences). English is increasingly recommended to be taught at the elementary level
3	SMP	strengthening digital technology competencies, including systems thinking and computational skills through the required Informatics subjects
4	SMA	specialization is not in the form of a partition program or a tracking system, but the selection of subjects starting from class XI

5	SMK	a simpler curriculum structure with two subject groups, namely General and Vocational. Fieldwork practice is a compulsory subject for at least 1 semester. Students can choose subjects outside their program of expertise
6	SLB	reinforcement of learning that is adapted to the characteristics of students to strengthen life skills and independence
7	PKBM	learning units use a competency credit unit system (SKK). The structure of the equality education curriculum consists of general group subjects and empowerment groups and skills based on Pancasila student profiles

3.2.5. Principles of Learning and Assessment

Principles of Learning and Assessment are part of the curriculum framework which primarily refers to the Process Standards and Assessment Standards of the National Education Standards. The Principles of Learning and Assessment are formulated to serve as a reference for all stakeholders related to learning and assessment, especially teachers, school leaders, and also curriculum and teaching tool developers. In educational units, the Principles of Learning and Assessment need to be the basis for designing policies and practices of classroom learning and assessment. The Principles of Learning and Assessment are designed with the consideration that determining Learning Outcomes alone is not enough to be able to achieve the character and competencies that need to be developed in every Pancasila student. Character is also effectively built through learning experiences, classroom management strategies, classroom management strategies, interactions between teachers and students, and rules and habits (routines) (Anggraena, Felicia et al., 2022).

The five learning principles and things that need to be considered in their implementation are; first, learning is designed taking into account the stage of development and current level of achievement of students, according to learning needs, and reflecting the characteristics and development of various students so that learning becomes meaningful and fun; second, Learning is designed and implemented to build capacity to become lifelong learners; third, the learning process supports the development of competence and character of students holistically; fourth, relevant learning, namely learning that is designed according to the context, environment, and culture of students, and involves parents and the community as partners; and fifth, sustainable future-oriented learning (Anggraena, Ginanto, et al., 2022). Thus there are five learning principles in the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum: the condition of students; lifelong learners; holistic; relevant; and sustainable.

The five principles of assessment and things that need to be considered in their implementation are first, Assessment is an integrated part of the learning process, learning facilitation, and providing holistic information, as feedback for educators, students, and parents/guardians so they can guide them in determine the next learning strategy; second, the assessment is designed and carried out in accordance with the function of the assessment, with the flexibility to determine the technique and time of implementation of the assessment so that it is effective in achieving learning objectives; third, the assessment is designed and carried out in accordance with the function of the assessment, with the flexibility to determine the technique and time of implementation of the assessment so that it is effective in achieving learning objectives; fourth, reports on student learning progress and achievements are simple and informative, providing useful information about the characters and competencies achieved, as well as follow-up strategies; and fifth, the results of the assessment are used by students, educators, education staff, and parents/guardians as material for reflection to improve the quality of learning (Anggraena, Ginanto, et al., 2022). Thus there are five assessment principles in the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum: integrated; functional; fair, proportional, valid, reliable; simple and informative; and reflection.

3.2.6. Teaching Toolkit

Teaching tools are various sources and teaching materials used by teachers and other educators to achieve a Pancasila student profile and Learning Outcomes. The teaching tools include textbooks, teaching modules, learning videos, and other forms. The goal is to help educators who need references or inspiration in teaching. Three teaching tools have just been developed in the Merdeka Curriculum: examples of teaching modules, learning objectives flow, and a project to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students. The teaching module is the development of a learning implementation plan (RPP) which is equipped with more detailed guidelines, including student activity sheets and assessments to measure the achievement of learning objectives. Called a module because this device can be used in a modular way. With this teaching module, teachers can use a more varied set of tools, not just textbooks with the same lessons throughout the year. The flow of learning objectives (ATP) or learning sequence is a component for compiling a syllabus. ATP is expected to be able to help educational units and educators develop learning steps or flow based on predetermined Learning Outcomes.

3.3. Excellence of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum

The advantages of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum are 1) simpler and more in-depth. Focus on essential material and develop students' competencies in their phases. Learning becomes deeper, meaningful, less rushed, and fun; 2) more independent. Teachers can teach according to the stage of achievement and development of students. Schools have the authority to develop and manage curriculum and learning following the characteristics of educational units and students; and 3) more relevant and interactive. Learning through project activities provides wider opportunities for students to actively explore the environmental, health, and other issues to support character development and competencies (Pancasila Student Profile) (Kemendikbudristek, 2022a).

Another advantage is the use of various teaching tools and learning materials that are contextual, the use of digital technology such as the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (Caesaria, 2022), students are free to express, students are not required to have the same abilities, a little less burden on teachers by simplifying the Learning Implementation Plan (RPP) (Nelisma, 2022), application of zoning to New Student Admissions (PPDB), national assessment (Supriani et al., 2022; Tohir, 2019), increase courage and think independently, enthusiasm for learning, self-confidence and optimism, having the freedom to think broadly and being able to accept successes and mistakes (Mulyono, 2022), teachers are more flexible to be creative in teaching as much as possible, and know more about the interests, talents, needs and abilities of students (Rahayu et al., 2022), and the Merdeka Belajar curriculum is present as an answer to the occurrence of a comprehensive transformation in all aspects, especially the demands of human resources who are able to compete and adapt by having 4C skills consisting of critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity (Indarta et al., 2022).

3.4. Obstacles to the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum

The implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in schools encounters several obstacles, including 1) some teachers still do not fully understand what Merdeka Belajar is, so in implementing learning they still use the old model of learning style, namely the lecture method, and students listen; 2) some teachers are constrained by the Merdeka Belajar platform which should be a learning partner for the teacher to get convenience in doing modules, it turns out that the Merdeka Mengajar platform is still not in accordance with what is needed by the teacher; 3) there are still teachers who do not use the Merdeka Mengajar platform because they do not fully understand; 5) in the assessment process, the teacher still gives values based on true and false, in the form of numbers. Not based on the learning achievements of each student (Susilowati, 2022).

Other obstacles, 1) the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum program seems forced; 2) not all teachers welcomed the socialization of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum; 3) lack of competence of human resources in schools. This is because the teachers who have participated in socialization and training only use the Merdeka Mengajar platform. The teachers just install the application without any follow-up (Sunarni & Karyono, 2023); 4) analyzing Learning Outcomes (CP) into Learning Objectives (TP),

compiling the Learning Objectives Flow (ATP) and making it in the form of Teaching Modules (Rindayati et al., 2022) ; 5) difficulties in determining appropriate learning methods and strategies; 6) the teacher's ability to use technology is still minimal; 7) difficulties in determining projects and lack of time allocation for project-based learning; 8) determine the form of assessment in accordance with the learning objectives to be achieved, and determine the form of assessment during project-based learning (Zulaiha et al., 2022); and 9) in the planning process, teachers still rely on teaching modules provided by the centre (Ardianti & Amalia, 2022).

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the change from the 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum was caused by several factors including the quality of human resources, changing times, and the evaluation results of the 2013 Curriculum. Furthermore, the framework for designing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is one of the four curriculum options that can be adopted by educational units in the context of learning recovery. The need for implementing this curriculum is due to several advantages, including being simpler and more in-depth, more independent; and more relevant and interactive. However, in implementation, several obstacles were encountered, namely, the teacher's understanding of the curriculum and teacher competence in using technology. The limitation in this study is not specifically at the level of education. Thus it is suggested that further research to examine the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum at a certain level so that it can present clear information.

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