

Analysis of Independent Curriculum Development at Elementary School Level: A Descriptive Qualitative Approach at SDN 02 Tanjungjaya Banjarwangi Garut

Zaki Bahrul Ulum

Syekh Yusuf Islamic University Tangerang, Indonesia

Email: zakibahrululum0201@gmail.com

Muhammad Nasir

STIQ Amuntai, Indonesia

Email: nasirmuning@gmail.com

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Abstract

The evolution of the Merdeka Curriculum within primary education has emerged as a pivotal topic in the effort to cultivate a more adaptable, contextualized, and student-centric educational environment. This inquiry intends to examine the progression of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN 02 Tanjungjaya Banjarwangi Garut, focusing specifically on curriculum design, pedagogical execution, evaluation methods, the integration of the Pancasila Student Profile, and the institutional obstacles encountered throughout its adoption. Utilizing a descriptive qualitative design, data gathered for this study were compiled via semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and archival reviews involving the school headmaster, teaching staff, and official institutional documents. The outcomes demonstrate that curriculum advancement at SDN 02 Tanjungjaya was realized by modifying the school's operational curriculum, constructing lesson plans aligned with targeted learning outcomes, introducing versatile instructional methods, and organizing project-based activities for the Pancasila Student Profile tailored to the local environment. Nonetheless, several bottlenecks persist, such as disparate teacher comprehension, inadequate educational resources, unreadiness for formative assessments, and a deficiency in sustainable mentoring. This paper deduces that optimizing the Merdeka Curriculum in primary schools necessitates responsive institutional leadership, robust peer collaboration among educators, active parental engagement, and continuous professional development for teachers to ensure the curriculum positively reshapes educational quality.

Keywords: Merdeka Curriculum, primary education, curriculum design, differentiated instruction, Pancasila Student Profile.

Introduction

The curriculum serves as the backbone of any educational framework, acting as a foundational blueprint for instructional delivery, student competency cultivation, and the fulfillment of nationwide educational milestones. Within the realm of primary education, its function transcends mere bureaucratic paperwork; it operates as a strategic pedagogical compass that dictates how young learners acquire meaningful and impactful educational experiences (Alimuiddin, 2023).

National educational objectives place a strong emphasis on nurturing student potential to foster individuals who are principled, ethically upright, competent, imaginative, self-reliant,

civic-minded, and accountable (Republik Indonesia, 2003). Concurrently, shifting societal dynamics, rapid technological progress, modern literacy demands, and the core requisites of 21st-century schooling compel academic institutions to reformulate their curricula to be more versatile and aligned with student realities. Consequently, curriculum design at the primary school level demands meticulous execution, given that this developmental stage establishes the baseline for character building, foundational literacy, numeracy, social capabilities, and independent study habits (Educational Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency, 2024a).

The Merdeka (Independent) Curriculum was introduced as a strategic intervention to address the pressing need for systemic educational reform across Indonesia. This specific framework prioritizes instructional adaptability, the distillation of core learning materials, differentiated teaching methodologies, formative tracking, and holistic character enrichment via the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (Educational Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency, 2024a). By implementing this paradigm, academic institutions and educators are granted broader autonomy to tailor learning experiences to student profiles, institutional capacities, and surrounding socio-cultural factors. Academic evaluations concerning the Merdeka Curriculum reinforce that it is structured to bolster applicable, contextualized, and competency-oriented learning (Educational Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency, 2024b). Accordingly, transitioning to the Merdeka Curriculum requires more than a simple revision of formal paperwork; it demands a fundamental shift in how educators conceptualize, execute, and appraise the learning process.

At the elementary school tier, translating the Merdeka Curriculum into practice introduces a distinct set of operational hurdles. Educators are tasked not only with mastering learning outcomes, instructional targets, teaching modules, and evaluation tools, but also with orchestrating classrooms that accommodate highly diverse student needs. Alimuddin (2023) highlights that the successful execution of this curriculum in primary environments is heavily dependent on the pedagogical readiness of teachers, their command over the instructional content, and the institution's agility in altering methods to match student profiles. Furthermore, primary institutions located in rural sectors frequently contend with structural deficits, including restricted resources, suboptimal facilities, inadequate access to professional training, and poor technological infrastructure. This reality indicates that analyzing the progress of the Merdeka Curriculum cannot rely solely on macro-level national policies; it must be scrutinized through actual grassroots school operations, specifically regarding how principals and teachers operationalize these directives daily (Masrurah et al., 2024).

SDN 02 Tanjungjaya Banjarwangi Garut offers a highly relevant case study, as rural primary schools inherently possess distinct social, cultural, and resource-related dynamics compared to their urban counterparts. The integration of the Merdeka Curriculum at this site must be analyzed as an ongoing adaptive process shaped by administrative leadership, teacher efficacy, structural resource availability, student demographics, parental backing, and community dynamics. A study by Putri and Aliyyah (2024) indicates that while the Merdeka Curriculum empowers primary schools to be more flexible in aligning lessons with student and community expectations, various operational barriers remain pervasive. Therefore, empirical research is vital to uncover how the formulation, execution, assessment, and sustainable preservation of the Merdeka Curriculum take shape at the primary education level.

Driven by these considerations, this academic endeavor concentrates on evaluating the development and rollout of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN 02 Tanjungjaya Banjarwangi Garut. In particular, this study seeks to articulate the nuances of curriculum planning, pedagogical implementation, assessment strategies, the orchestration of the Pancasila Student Profile projects, as well as the driving and restraining elements at play. The insights gained from this investigation are anticipated to offer theoretical enrichment to the discourse on primary school curriculum design and provide actionable recommendations for administrators,

teachers, and educational policymakers striving to elevate the standard of curriculum implementation (Putri & Aliyyah, 2024).

Literature Review

Curriculum design constitutes a structured mechanism that encompasses the planning, execution, assessment, and continuous refinement of educational experiences to align with predetermined academic goals. Within contemporary pedagogical discourses, a curriculum is no longer viewed merely as a static catalog of subjects; rather, it is conceptualized as the comprehensive matrix of learning opportunities provided by an institution to cultivate student competencies, ethical character, and lifelong readiness. The Merdeka (Independent) Curriculum positions academic units and educators as pivotal agents empowered to tailor pedagogical delivery to student profiles and specific institutional landscapes (Educational Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency, 2024b). Consequently, the engineering of a curriculum must meticulously integrate institutional goals, learner prerequisites, advancements in science and technology, and the prevailing socio-cultural dynamics of the community.

The core tenets of the Merdeka Curriculum revolve around operational flexibility, student-centric instruction, and the fortification of foundational competencies. In practical application, educators are expected to formulate lessons based on standardized learning outcomes, chart specific instructional objectives, construct comprehensive teaching modules, and deploy evaluations that actively reinforce student progress (Educational Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency, 2024a). This curricular framework offers teachers the autonomy to implement differentiated instruction that accommodates the varying readiness levels, personal interests, and unique learning profiles of individual students. Such an approach is vital at the primary school tier, where learners exhibit highly diverse developmental trajectories across cognitive, social, emotional, and linguistic domains. Alimuddin (2023) highlights that this instructional versatility serves as a defining hallmark of the Merdeka Curriculum's execution in elementary education (Republic of Indonesia, 2003).

Beyond standard classroom instruction, the Merdeka Curriculum places significant emphasis on the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project. This initiative is structured to solidify student character through experiential, real-world activities. Core virtues including faith and devotion to God Almighty, global diversity, mutual cooperation, independence, critical thinking, and creativity serve as the primary benchmarks for student character building (Educational Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency, 2024b). In elementary schools, these projects can be operationalized through themes directly relevant to the students' immediate surroundings, such as the school ecosystem, local cultural heritage, environmental sanitation, healthy dietary habits, communal voluntary work, and basic entrepreneurial ventures.

Prior scholarly works indicate that adopting the Merdeka Curriculum in primary schools introduces a dual reality of strategic opportunities and operational challenges. The opportunities manifest as increased professional autonomy for teachers to innovate in lesson design, enhanced character development for students, and broader avenues for schools to contextualize their curricula according to local wisdom (Putri & Aliyyah, 2024).

Regarding literacy development, Masrurah et al. (2024) observed that the Merdeka Curriculum can effectively accelerate students' literacy skills, provided it is reinforced by appropriate instructional strategies. Conversely, persistent bottlenecks frequently emerge, particularly concerning teachers' conceptual grasp of the curriculum, the design of contextual teaching materials, infrastructure deficits, technology integration, the execution of formative assessments, and the lack of systematic mentoring. Therefore, the successful evolution of the Merdeka Curriculum relies heavily on adaptive principal leadership, robust teacher collaboration, resource availability, and a supportive institutional environment (Almarisi, 2023).

Research Method

Research Design

This inquiry adopted a descriptive qualitative design. This method was selected to provide an exhaustive, nuanced portrayal of how the Merdeka Curriculum is developed and negotiated at SDN 02 Tanjungjaya Banjarwangi Garut, drawing directly from the lived experiences, perceptions, and daily practices of the school community. A qualitative framework enables researchers to capture a contextualized understanding of how macro-level curriculum policies are operationalized into micro-level classroom practices within primary schools. Furthermore, this mode of inquiry is highly appropriate for investigating educational phenomena tied to the subjective meanings, interpretations, and social routines of school stakeholders (Angga et al., 2022).

The research subjects included the school principal, classroom teachers, subject-specific educators, and other key personnel involved in curriculum design. Informants were chosen through a purposive sampling strategy, ensuring that selected participants possessed direct insight and practical experience regarding the planning, execution, and review phases of the Merdeka Curriculum. Within this framework, the school principal functioned as the key informant due to their structural authority over curriculum policy and administrative management, whereas the teaching staff served as primary informants given their direct responsibility for day-to-day instructional delivery (Sumarsih et al., 2022).

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was executed through a triad of methods: semi-structured interviews, field observations, and documentation reviews. Semi-structured interviews were deployed to explore participants' underlying comprehension of curriculum planning, instructional material design, pedagogical execution, assessment methods, the Pancasila Student Profile projects, and implementation barriers. Field observations were carried out to witness firsthand the teaching practices and institutional routines associated with curriculum adaptation. Meanwhile, documentation techniques were utilized to critically review the school's operational curriculum files, lesson modules, instructional schedules, assessment rubrics, and project portfolios (Suryaman, 2023).

Research Instruments

The primary instruments utilized in this study comprised interview protocols, observation checklists, and documentary review matrixes. The formulation of the interview guides was anchored in the core pillars of the Merdeka Curriculum framework: curriculum mapping, differentiated instruction, evaluation models, the Pancasila Student Profile project, teacher efficacy, infrastructure readiness, and curriculum appraisal. Interview items were designed as open-ended questions to grant informants the freedom to detail their experiences and outlooks comprehensively, without being steered toward predefined responses (Wahyuni & Utami, 2026).

Data Analysis

The collected qualitative data were systematically processed through the sequential phases of data reduction, data display, and the drawing or verification of conclusions. Raw data generated from interviews, field observations, and archival records were reviewed recursively to detect recurring patterns, underlying themes, and conceptual linkages between educational phenomena (Sugiyono, 2022).

To safeguard empirical validity, data triangulation was performed across both sources and methods specifically by cross-verifying accounts from the principal and teachers with classroom observations and official school archives. Additionally, the researchers cross-

checked critical pieces of information repeatedly to guarantee that the final data interpretations remained fully aligned with the actual realities of the field (Anshori & Lestari, 2024).

Results and Discussion

Planning for Independent Curriculum Development

Empirical data reveal that the initiation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN 02 Tanjungjaya Banjarwangi Garut commenced with the calibration of the school's operational curriculum against national mandates and actual student demographics. The institution endeavored to internalize the foundational pillars of this curriculum through intensive internal dialogues, staff assemblies, and comprehensive reviews of statutory curriculum frameworks. In this context, the school principal assumed a pivotal role in mentoring educators to comprehend these structural shifts, particularly regarding learning outcomes, instructional objectives, the architecture of teaching modules, evaluation rubrics, and project-based initiatives targeted at reinforcing the Pancasila Student Profile. This strategic approach aligns closely with the core philosophy of the Merdeka Curriculum, which grants autonomy to educational settings to design learning trajectories that correspond with student realities and local institutional contexts (Education Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency, 2024a, 2024b).

During the initial design phase, teaching staff formulated instructional substances by extrapolating from the designated learning outcomes. These benchmarks were subsequently converted into actionable learning targets and classroom activities tailored to unique student demands. This proactive planning signifies that the school did not merely duplicate policy directives for bureaucratic compliance; rather, it actively sought to harmonize them with educator competencies, student profiles, and the local school ecosystem. This insight solidifies the perspective of Alimuddin (2023), who posited that the successful rollout of the Merdeka Curriculum in primary education demands a strong readiness among teachers to break down the curriculum architecture into practical instructional practices.

Nevertheless, the implementation of this planning phase has not been devoid of friction. A segment of the teaching staff still requires structured guidance to compose learning modules and diagnostic assessments that mirror the true spirit of the Merdeka Curriculum. This reality demonstrates that fundamental curriculum shifts necessitate an ongoing process of institutional learning. The evolution of a curriculum cannot be fully realized through superficial, brief socialization sessions; it demands iterative practice, critical reflection, and sustained peer collaboration among educators. This observation is congruent with findings by Putri and Aliyyah (2024), which highlighted that implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at the grassroots school level often encounters bottlenecks regarding the conceptual grasp and psychological readiness of the frontline educators.

Implementation of Learning in the Independent Curriculum

The realization of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN 02 Tanjungjaya is reflected in the educators' concerted efforts to shift toward more active, contextualized, and pupil-centered instruction. Teachers have begun incorporating a wider array of pedagogical techniques, including collaborative group discussions, interactive inquiry sessions, elementary project-based learning, instructional games, and the utilization of the immediate outdoor environment as a living laboratory for learning. This instructional pivot matches the overarching intent of the Merdeka Curriculum, which empowers teachers with the creative freedom to construct more profound and memorable educational experiences (Education Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency, 2024a).

Concurrently, differentiated instruction has begun to emerge, albeit in a rudimentary framework. Educators adjust their instructional explanations, classroom assignments, and scaffolding support to match the heterogeneous capabilities of their pupils. Students who encounter academic hurdles receive targeted interventions, whereas those who master the concepts rapidly are provided with enrichment activities. This classroom practice reflects a growing awareness among teaching staff that learners possess diverse educational needs. Within the elementary school framework, the operational flexibility of teachers to design and recalibrate lessons acts as a cornerstone for the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Alimuddin, 2023; Putri & Aliyyah, 2024).

However, optimizing differentiated instruction is still constrained by several structural variables. Factors such as high student-to-teacher ratios, rigid time allocations, a deficit in diverse teaching materials, and varying levels of teacher experience heavily influence how effectively these lessons are delivered. Furthermore, certain educators exhibit a tendency to fall back on conventional teaching habits due to long-standing familiarity with traditional methods. This phenomenon underscores that

pedagogical transformation requires incremental behavioral changes and shifting mindsets, rather than mere alterations to formal paperwork (Rahayu et al., 2022).

Implementation of Assessments in the Independent Curriculum

Evaluations within the Merdeka Curriculum framework are fundamentally designed to assist teachers in tracking student development and refining the overall instructional cycle. At SDN 02 Tanjungjaya, educators have started integrating formative assessments into their routines via verbal questioning, structured observations of student engagement, daily coursework, and process-oriented appraisals. These evaluative tools are deployed not merely to calculate summary grades, but rather to diagnose specific learning barriers faced by students. This methodology strictly follows national learning and assessment blueprints, which dictate that evaluation should function as an organic component of the teaching process—specifically to offer constructive feedback and recalibrate instructional methods (Educational Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency, 2024a).

Despite these advancements, there remains a critical need to strengthen teachers' conceptual mastery of formative assessment. A number of educators continue to treat assessment primarily as a summative endgame, thereby failing to fully exploit evaluation data as a catalyst for reshaping their daily teaching strategies. Additionally, the creation of diversified assessment tools continues to pose a challenge, particularly when trying to measure qualitative parameters such as student attitudes, psychomotor skills, and character growth (Asri & Maryani, 2025).

These diagnostics indicate that the advancement of the Merdeka Curriculum must be accompanied by a systematic enrichment of teachers' assessment literacy. Educators must recognize that evaluation is a continuous thread woven into the fabric of learning, not an isolated administrative chore. By utilizing precise and well-targeted assessments, teachers can accurately map out the learning needs of their pupils and deliver more impactful educational interventions (Astuti & Wardani, 2023).

Discussion (Continued)

Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project

The execution of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) at SDN 02 Tanjungjaya was operationalized through experiential initiatives deeply rooted in the students' daily realities. The operational themes selected centered primarily on environmental sanitation, collective volunteerism (*gotong royong*), personal autonomy, and the preservation of local cultural identity. These project-based activities offered substantial avenues for pupils to acquire knowledge via direct engagement, cooperate with their peers, and internalize core character virtues within their daily social routines. Conceptually, the P5 initiative serves as an indispensable pillar of the Merdeka Curriculum framework, as its primary objective is to solidify student character traits and core competencies through deeply contextualized learning paradigms (Education Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency, 2024b).

This project acts as a vital mechanism for ethical and moral cultivation, given that learning extends beyond traditional classroom walls into practical, real-world activities within the school precinct. Through these tasks, students cultivate accountability, team-building skills, environmental care, and respect for their community. Consequently, the project does not merely function as an auxiliary or extracurricular routine; rather, it represents an intentional institutional strategy designed to bridge the gap between abstract curriculum concepts and tangible life experiences. This finding resonates with the research by Masrurah et al. (2024), which confirmed that the rollout of the Merdeka Curriculum successfully enriches students' literacy profiles and holistic learning experiences when anchored in meaningful, goal-oriented activities (Rahayu et al., 2022).

Nonetheless, several bottlenecks were identified during the project's execution, notably the teachers' constraints in formulating systematic project designs, tight scheduling, and a lack of infrastructural resources. A portion of the current project activities remains rudimentary and lacks rigorous administrative documentation. Accordingly, the institution needs to fortify its overarching mechanisms for project design, implementation, archival documentation, and

evaluation to ensure that these activities optimally drive the achievement of the designated Pancasila student attributes (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

The advancement and adaptation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN 02 Tanjungjaya are positively reinforced by the unwavering commitment of the school principal, the educators' proactive willingness to embrace new paradigms, and robust peer synergy among the teaching staff in designing instructional materials. External environmental support and active parental involvement also serve as pillars that strengthen the curriculum's field implementation, particularly during project-based tasks and character-building exercises. This collective dynamic underscores that the evolution of the Merdeka Curriculum cannot be achieved in isolation; it demands highly integrated, collaborative efforts bridging school administrators, teaching staff, students, and guardians (Fadhil & Hidayat, 2024).

Conversely, several persistent limitations warrant critical strategic attention. These inhibiting variables encompass the disparate conceptual understanding among teachers, suboptimal learning infrastructure, restricted access to advanced technological tools, escalating administrative workloads for educators, and a lack of sustainable professional training. These operational barriers signal that developing and sustaining the Merdeka Curriculum requires systemic, multi-tiered support from the school management, government authorities, and the broader community. Prior investigations similarly validate that implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary tier frequently grapples with issues concerning teacher psychological readiness, structural resource deficits, and the absence of ongoing professional mentoring (Alimuddin, 2023; Putri & Aliyyah, 2024).

Conclusion

The evolution of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN 02 Tanjungjaya, Banjarwangi, Garut, highlights the institution's systematic efforts to calibrate its educational framework against student profiles, national policy mandates, and the unique characteristics of the local school environment. Curriculum mapping was realized through targeted adjustments to the school's operational curriculum, the independent design of teaching materials, and the enrichment of teachers' conceptual grasp of national learning outcomes. Concurrently, classroom teaching practices have begun to progressively transition toward a more active, contextualized, and child-centered instructional paradigm.

In terms of academic evaluation, the school has begun integrating formative assessment techniques, although structural improvements are still required regarding instrument design and the strategic utilization of diagnostic data to refine daily teaching methods. Furthermore, the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project has been successfully institutionalized through practical exercises linked to the students' immediate lives, including environmental preservation, communal cooperation, and local cultural awareness.

In the final analysis, the development of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN 02 Tanjungjaya is sustained by responsive principal leadership, high teacher dedication, and cohesive cooperation across the school community. However, its long-term optimization is still hindered by structural challenges, such as inadequate facilities, uneven teacher readiness, limited assessment literacy, and a deficiency in systematic mentoring. Therefore, it is highly recommended that the school prioritizes the enrichment of professional teacher workshops, peer-to-peer teacher collaboration, the optimization of localized learning resources, and periodic curriculum appraisals to ensure that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum remains highly effective, transformative, and sustainable.

Suggestions

Based on the findings and discussion of the analysis of the Independent Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*) development at SDN 02 Tanjungjaya Banjarwangi Garut, several recommendations are proposed as follows:

For the School Administration and Teachers

- a. Enhance Continuous Professional Development: Teachers are encouraged to actively participate in *Kurikulum Merdeka* workshops, driving teacher platforms (*Platform Merdeka Mengajar*), and Teacher Working Groups (KKG) to deepen their understanding of diagnostic assessments and differentiated learning.
- b. Optimize Teaching Resources: The school principal should facilitate more collaborative sharing sessions among teachers (peer-coaching) to overcome challenges in designing the *Modul Ajar* (lesson plans) and implementing the *P5* (Project for Strengthening the Profile of Pancasila Students).

For the Local Education Department (Dinas Pendidikan Kabupaten Garut)

- a. Provide Equitable Facilitation and Monitoring: Given the school's location in Banjarwangi, the local education department should provide more intensive, hands-on mentoring and equitable distribution of teaching facilities or sourcebooks.
- b. Strengthen Technical Support: It is highly recommended to dispatch curriculum supervisors (*Pengawas Pembina*) regularly to give direct feedback on the implementation hurdles faced by rural elementary schools.

For Future Researchers

- a. Expand the Research Scope: Future researchers are suggested to conduct mixed-methods or longitudinal studies to measure the long-term impact of this curriculum development on student learning outcomes at the elementary level.
- b. Focus on Specific Variables: Subsequent studies could narrow the focus down to specific challenges, such as the evaluation techniques of *P5* or the readiness of infrastructure in rural areas.

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