



IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FREEDOM TO LEARN CURRICULUM IN ENHANCING STUDENTS' LEARNING CREATIVITY

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Abstract:

The aim of this research is to determine the application of the Independent Learning Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education at MTs AL Muttahidah Sentong and to determine the effectiveness of the Independent Learning Curriculum in increasing students' learning creativity in Islamic Religious Education learning at MTs AL Muttahidah Sentong. This type of research is descriptive qualitative research, namely research that provides a description of factual and systematic situations and events regarding the factors, characteristics and relationships between phenomena in order to understand only the basics. The subjects in this research were all Class IX MTs students. Al Muttahidah Sentong semester 2 of the 2023/2024 academic year, totaling 25 students. The data obtained in this research include: learning outcomes and student learning completion taken from giving test questions at the end of each meeting and students' activeness in the learning process. From this research, it can be concluded that students' learning creativity in Islamic Religious Education learning at MTs. Al Muttahidah Sentong experienced improvement after implementing learning by implementing the independent curriculum as an embodiment of the concept of independent learning.

Keywords: *Implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum and Student Learning Creativity*

INTRODUCTION

Education development in Indonesia is closely related to curriculum reform, and periodic evaluations have been conducted to assess the effectiveness of the curriculum. Many believe that curriculum changes align with shifts in policy makers. As a nation that continually innovates curriculum development, Indonesia has undergone over ten curriculum changes since gaining independence (Wiki Aji Sugiri, 2021).

The history of curriculum development in Indonesian educational institutions first utilized the 1947 curriculum, known as 'Rentjana Pelajaran Terurai.' The 1947 curriculum was influenced by the social and political context of Indonesia during the Dutch colonial period and aimed to shape national and societal awareness. Over time, this curriculum evolved into the 1952 curriculum, named 'Rentjana Pelajaran Terurai 1952,' with minimal changes in its implementation. The cycle of revisions continued, introducing the 1964 curriculum (Rentjana Pendidikan 1964), the 1968 curriculum, the 1975 curriculum, the 1984 curriculum (a perfected version of the 1975 curriculum), the 1994 curriculum and its 1999 supplement, the 2004 curriculum (competency-based), the 2006 curriculum (school-based), and the 2013 curriculum, which has undergone revisions. Each curriculum change in educational institutions is grounded in substantial reasons, with adaptations reflecting the evolving digital age. Currently, digitalization plays a crucial role in the emergence of the 'Merdeka Belajar' curriculum (M Rahmat, 2015).

Nadiem Makarim, the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, initiated changes to the 2013 curriculum, introducing the 'Merdeka Belajar' curriculum as an enhancement. This initiative was seen as crucial to revitalizing Indonesian education during the worrisome times of the COVID-19 pandemic from 2019 to 2020 (Rahmadayanti, 2022).

According to Nadiem Makarim, as quoted by GTK Kemdikbud, 'Merdeka Belajar' signifies the freedom of schools, teachers, and students to innovate and act independently in the learning process. This involves a shift away from monotonous and teacher-centered approaches towards more innovative and student-centered methods.

Nadiem Makarim, in his role as the Minister of Education and Culture, emphasized that the concept of 'Merdeka Belajar' aims to achieve freedom of thought. This policy instills great hope for educational institutions to enhance the quality of education. Notable changes introduced in the 'Merdeka Belajar' policy include: (1) Replacing the 2021 National Examination (UN) with Minimum Competency Assessments (AKM) and character surveys, (2) Replacing the 2020 National Standardized School Examination (USBN) with independent assessments conducted by schools, (3) Simplifying the format of Lesson Implementation Plans (RPP) to a one-page document containing learning objectives, activities, and assessments, (4) Implementing a more flexible zoning system for New Student Admissions (PPDB) (Muhammad Yamin, 2020).

Guidelines for the implementation of the 'Merdeka Belajar' curriculum have been provided by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology through Regulation No. 56 of 2022. This regulation outlines the guidelines and rules for implementing the 'Merdeka Belajar' curriculum in Early Childhood Education (PAUD), Elementary Schools (SD or equivalent), and Secondary Education (Junior High and Senior High Schools or equivalent).

The implementation of 'Merdeka Belajar' at MTs AL Muttahidah Sentong, beginning in the second semester of the 2023-2024 academic year, started with class agreements formulated collaboratively by teachers and students. These agreements were based on individual preferences and were not coerced, covering aspects such as attendance deadlines, duration of leave during classes, book cover colors, assignment submission deadlines, and more. However, class agreements must align with academic regulations and student disciplinary rules.

The concept of 'Merdeka Belajar' has been well-received at MTs AL Muttahidah Sentong because it allows for the exploration of students' potential. In the learning process, students have the freedom to choose their learning styles, express themselves, and be creative, while still adhering to class agreements, academic regulations, and student disciplinary rules. After receiving guidance from teachers, students are free to choose effective learning methods based on their moral and material capabilities.

The implementation of 'Merdeka Belajar' is a commendable concept in the education sector. It not only demands creativity from teachers in the learning process but also explores students' potential, making them more creative, innovative, and independent. Although there are debates about this new educational discourse, it is essential to focus on its positive aspects. 'Merdeka Belajar' has proven to unearth students' potential and address educational challenges in Indonesia."

RESEARCH METHODS

This research adopts an action research design with a qualitative approach to enable sustained and in-depth interventions in the development of teachers' time management skills (Ahmad, A., & Muslimah 2021). The subjects of the study are teachers at MTs AL Muttahidah Sentong Krejengan Probolinggo. The selection of teachers is purposive, considering the level of teaching experience and the need for time management skill development (Harahap 2020).

Data collection involves an initial questionnaire to identify the level of implementation of the 'Merdeka Belajar' curriculum in teaching at MTs AL Muttahidah. Classroom observations are conducted, observing lessons planned in accordance with

the 'Merdeka Belajar' curriculum. Interviews with teachers are conducted to delve into the Implementation of the 'Merdeka Belajar' Curriculum in Enhancing Students' Learning Creativity at MTs. Al Muttahidah Sentong Krejengan Probolinggo.

The research is designed to provide information about the Implementation of the 'Merdeka Belajar' Curriculum in Enhancing Students' Learning Creativity at MTs. Al Muttahidah Sentong Krejengan Probolinggo. Data analysis in this research, using a qualitative approach, will be analyzed inductively, identifying patterns and key findings related to the development of time management skills. Data analysis also involves triangulating results from various data sources to ensure the validity of the findings (Rukajat 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the qualitative research data on the Implementation of the 'Merdeka Belajar' Curriculum in Enhancing Students' Learning Creativity at MTs. Al Muttahidah Sentong Krejengan Probolinggo, conducted using interview, observation, and documentation techniques to collect data from the school principal and teachers. The interview with the school principal revealed that the 'Merdeka Belajar' curriculum was implemented starting the academic year 2022/2023. The implementation of the 'Merdeka Belajar' curriculum went well at MTs Al Muttahidah; teachers participated in special training or workshops on the Curriculum of the Competence-Based Curriculum (KKM) and specific school training conducted within MTs Al Muttahidah twice for the development of the 'Merdeka Belajar' curriculum. In addition to training or workshops, MTs Al Muttahidah formed a Curriculum Development Team (TPK) consisting of its own teachers. This TPK was directly determined by the school principal (only teachers who attended 'Merdeka Belajar' curriculum development training). Moreover, MTs Al Muttahidah utilized technology and platforms in the implementation of the 'Merdeka Belajar' curriculum, both in the development of the curriculum and in the classroom learning process. The technologies and platforms used include laptops, used to access 'Merdeka Belajar' curriculum literature, search for learning material sources, and create digital learning media; projectors, used as a teaching aid to make teaching easier for teachers and learning more accessible for students; and the 'Merdeka Mengajar' (PMM) platform, used to support the implementation of the 'Merdeka Belajar' curriculum by providing inspiration, references, understanding, and training related to the curriculum.

Interviews and observations of MTs Al Muttahidah teachers regarding the classroom learning process showed that most of the implementation criteria were met. Lesson plans were based on the 'Merdeka Belajar' Curriculum. In planning and preparing lessons based on the 'Merdeka Belajar' curriculum, teachers looked at learning achievements (CP), lesson objectives (TP), and created a flow of lesson objectives (ATP) that aligned with the concept of the 'Merdeka Belajar' curriculum. Learning materials based on the 'Merdeka Belajar' curriculum are no longer thematic but presented as subject gems. The learning material is tailored to the context and needs of the students, considering the students' environment, conditions, and school facilities, involving students actively, and utilizing technology, such as laptops, projectors, and the 'Merdeka Mengajar' (PMM) platform. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbudristek, 2023), the 'Merdeka Mengajar' (PMM) platform is an application that helps teachers implement the 'Merdeka Belajar' Curriculum. PMM also serves as a teacher's companion in teaching and helps teachers innovate to create lessons that meet the challenges of the times. With this, teachers at MTs Al Muttahidah ensure more engaging, innovative, and student-centric learning, supporting the continuous professional development of teachers. Teachers have also succeeded in enhancing students' social skills, cooperation, and independence.

In classroom learning activities using the 'Merdeka Belajar' curriculum, teachers at MTs Al Muttahidah still employ the same teaching methods as those used with the 2013 curriculum. However, there is an improvement in the learning process, as teachers now incorporate applications or technology applied in 'Merdeka Belajar'

curriculum-based interactive learning, known as ICT-based learning (PembaTIK). Examples of these applications or technologies include Canva (for creating digital learning media), the 'Merdeka Mengajar' (PMM) platform, and Chat GPT (as a practical source of information). However, during the researcher's observation of technology and digital learning media use (projectors, PowerPoint), teachers did not use technology and digital learning media due to various reasons, such as the limited availability of equipment (projectors) and sudden power outages.

Interviews and observations regarding students' perceptions of 'Merdeka Belajar' curriculum-based learning indicate that students show a positive response to 'Merdeka Belajar' curriculum-based learning. Group learning, technology use, and more active teaching motivate students and enhance their involvement. Students also convey that more interactive and applicable learning has improved their understanding of the material.

To optimize the implementation of the 'Merdeka Belajar' Curriculum in enhancing students' learning creativity, MTs Al Muttahidah teachers involve various aspects. They utilize and seek assistance from the Curriculum Development Team (TPK) for creating learning objectives, selecting appropriate materials, devising suitable teaching methods, and aligning the curriculum with the school context and students' characteristics. The TPK at MTs Al Muttahidah ensures that the designed concepts and strategies can be implemented in the classroom by providing support to teachers. They conduct regular meetings, training, and monitoring sessions to help teachers apply innovative learning approaches. The use of technology in creating teaching materials, such as utilizing the Canva platform to create attractive digital learning media and implementing project-based learning to reinforce the Pancasila Student Profile (P5) – for instance, creating percussion musical instruments from recycled materials – has been successful. Project-Based Learning Strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile (P5) is an approach that aims to reinforce students' understanding, appreciation, and application of Pancasila values at the primary education level. In this approach, students are engaged in real projects that integrate Pancasila values with their daily lives and surroundings. This not only benefits them in terms of Pancasila values (cooperation, mutual assistance, etc.) but also teaches them that discarded items, considered waste by humans, can be utilized and recycled. However, despite the positive aspects of the P5 activities, there are obstacles, especially related to students, as not all of them bring the required tools for the activities, such as knives, pencils, and there are students who complain to the teacher that they cannot draw. This can affect the learning time as it requires waiting for the tools to be available.

The integration of subjects at MTs Al Muttahidah, such as the combination of science and art in the topic of leaf parts, has been beneficial. Students drawing leaves by tracing, punching holes in leaves, and shading the punched part in their drawing books to visualize and understand the leaf parts have led to increased student participation in the learning process. Students are more willing to express their ideas or thoughts in front of the class, and their understanding of the learning material, attitudes, and values has improved. The integration of science and art subjects can enhance the quality of learning and motivate students to learn more enthusiastically (Prasetyawati, 2021). However, in the case of the integration of science and art subjects in the leaf parts activity, there are specific challenges, especially concerning students. Not all students brought the necessary tools for the activity, such as a cutter or knife and a pencil. Some students complained to the teacher that they couldn't draw. This could affect the learning time as students had to wait for the tools to be available.

The 'Merdeka Belajar' curriculum emphasizes collaboration, active student participation, and the development of critical and creative thinking skills. The use of technology and platforms, as well as the utilization of tools like laptops and projectors, enhances the quality of learning. Project-based learning and the integration of subjects provide a more profound and integrated learning experience. Students are encouraged to actively participate, collaborate, and take the initiative for independent learning.

Overall, the implementation of the 'Merdeka Belajar' Curriculum at MTs Al Muttahidah has yielded positive results. Teachers have successfully engaged students in learning, enhanced learning skills, and effectively integrated technology. Students have experienced improvements in engagement, understanding, and learning skills. Although some challenges remain, such as the need for parental support in project-based learning activities, this research indicates the positive benefits of the Implementation of the 'Merdeka Belajar' Curriculum in Enhancing Students' Learning Creativity at MTs. Al Muttahidah Sentong Krejengan.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research and discussions conducted, it can be concluded that the Implementation of the 'Merdeka Belajar' Curriculum in Enhancing Students' Learning Creativity at MTs. Al Muttahidah Sentong Krejengan Probolinggo has resulted in positive changes in the learning process. Teachers implemented methods and technologies in line with curriculum principles, enhancing students' skills in presentation, collaboration, and engagement. Students' understanding of the material improved due to its relevance to the real world. Challenges included resource limitations, but teacher training, parental participation, and comprehensive evaluation have helped overcome these barriers. The researchers suggest that the school principal and teachers at MTs Al Muttahidah include continuous training, collaboration among teachers, resource development, parental empowerment, more diverse student evaluations, and long-term impact measurement in students' learning creativity within the 'Merdeka' curriculum. It is hoped that these steps can integrate the 'Merdeka' Curriculum more effectively, creating a sustained positive impact on students' learning creativity, particularly in the environment of MTs. Al Muttahidah Sentong Krejengan Probolinggo.

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