

Curriculum Renewal Management in Elementary Schools: A Case Study of the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Schools

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Abstract:

This study examines curriculum renewal management from the 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools, focusing on planning, organization, implementation, and evaluation. Using a qualitative approach with a case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with principals and teachers, classroom observations, and analysis of curriculum documents and school policies. The findings indicate that curriculum planning has referred to national policies but remains largely top-down, with limited teacher involvement in decision-making. Curriculum organization is conducted through the formation of a curriculum development team; however, internal coordination among teachers has not been optimal. Implementation reflects a commitment to student-centered learning through differentiated instruction and Pancasila Student Profile projects, although challenges persist, including variations in teacher understanding, limited planning time, and inadequate learning facilities. Evaluation activities are conducted regularly but still focus mainly on academic outcomes rather than process and impact. This study concludes that effective curriculum renewal depends on strong school leadership, increased teacher participation, and continuous, comprehensive evaluation to ensure sustainable educational change.

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INTRODUCTION

Education plays a fundamental role in developing high-quality human resources who possess strong character and the ability to adapt to rapid social, technological, and



global changes (Bearman et al., 2022; Stewart, 2023). In the era of globalization and digital disruption, education systems are no longer expected to transmit knowledge merely but to cultivate critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and character formation as essential competencies for global citizenship (Lee et al., 2023; Faruqui et al., 2024). These demands require continuous innovation in educational governance, particularly in curriculum design and implementation, to ensure that learning remains relevant to society's evolving needs (Hegerius et al., 2020).

In Indonesia, curriculum reform has become a strategic response to these challenges. The transition from the 2013 Curriculum (K-13) to the Merdeka Curriculum represents a national effort to improve educational quality by granting greater autonomy to schools and teachers (Ho et al., 2023; Tokarskaya et al., 2023). According to national policy documents, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes differentiated and project-based learning, as well as strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile to accommodate diverse student characteristics and learning contexts. However, empirical evidence from many schools indicates that curriculum change often encounters practical obstacles, including limited teacher readiness, inadequate learning facilities, weak internal coordination, and managerial reliance on top-down directives (Anabarja & Safril Mubah, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2023).

Previous studies have extensively discussed curriculum reform from the perspectives of instructional implementation and teacher perceptions. Research by Wang et al (2022) highlights that curriculum change is not solely a technical process but a complex organizational transformation requiring effective leadership and participatory management. Piao & Rangra (2024) Other studies emphasize that insufficient managerial capacity at the school level often leads to superficial implementation, where curriculum change is treated as administrative compliance rather than pedagogical transformation. These findings suggest that the success of curriculum reform is strongly influenced by how change is managed within educational institutions.

Despite the growing body of literature on curriculum reform, most studies focus on learning practices or policy analysis. At the same time, limited attention is given to curriculum reform management as an integrated process encompassing planning, organization, implementation, and evaluation. Theoretically, this creates a gap in understanding how management functions operate simultaneously at the school level during curriculum transitions, particularly in elementary schools with limited resources. As a result, the relationship between management quality and the sustainability of curriculum reform remains underexplored.

Jordan et al (2024) This study addresses this gap by examining curriculum reform management at SDN Klantingsari 02, a public elementary school in Sidoarjo Regency, which is implementing the transition from the 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum. The school represents a typical Indonesian public elementary school that faces managerial and structural constraints while being required to implement national curriculum policies. By positioning the school as a learning organization rather than a passive policy implementer, this study explores how curriculum reform is managed in real-world educational settings.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on curriculum reform management as a systemic and dynamic process at the elementary school level. Unlike previous research that emphasizes instructional outcomes or teacher attitudes, this study integrates management theory with curriculum change practices to provide a comprehensive understanding of how planning, organization, implementation, and evaluation interact during reform processes. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically by offering a contextual model of curriculum reform management that supports participatory leadership, continuous evaluation, and sustainable educational change.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen to gain a deep understanding of the curriculum renewal management process from the 2013 Curriculum to the Independent Curriculum at SDN Klantingsari 02, Sidoarjo Regency, specifically in the aspects of curriculum planning, organization, implementation, and evaluation at the elementary school level. The research subjects included the principal and teachers of SDN Klantingsari 02 in Sidoarjo Regency, who were directly involved in implementing the Independent Curriculum. The selection of subjects was purposive, based on the role and involvement of informants in managing curriculum renewal at the school. The research location was chosen because SDN Klantingsari 02 is one of the public elementary schools that is implementing a curriculum transition and facing managerial challenges in its implementation.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation studies. Interviews were used to gather information regarding the planning and implementation of curriculum reform from the perspectives of principals and teachers. Observations were conducted to observe learning practices and school managerial activities directly. At the same time, documentation studies examined curriculum tools, learning planning documents, and school policies related to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

Data analysis was conducted interactively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The data obtained was selected and focused on the research objectives, then presented in narrative form for ease of understanding, before concluding based on relevant findings. Data validity was maintained through source and technical triangulation (Aitken et al., 2021; Cicha et al., 2021). Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from the principal and teachers. In contrast, technical triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation to ensure the credibility and accuracy of the research data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Curriculum Reform Planning

Curriculum reform planning at Klantingsari 02 Elementary School commenced following the formal socialization of the Merdeka Curriculum policy by the Sidoarjo

Regency Education Office. Based on in-depth interviews with the school principal and curriculum team members, the school established a small curriculum planning team consisting of the principal, class teachers, and representatives of the school committee. This team was responsible for preparing teaching modules, adapting learning objectives, and designing Pancasila Student Profile projects in accordance with the school's context and available resources. Documentary evidence, including meeting minutes, curriculum planning documents, and school decrees, confirms that curriculum planning activities were conducted in alignment with national guidelines.

Despite a formal planning structure, findings from document analysis and teacher interviews indicate that the planning process was predominantly top-down. Curriculum directions, learning priorities, and project themes were largely determined by policy directives rather than grounded in systematic internal needs analysis. Teachers were mainly involved in implementation, with limited opportunities to contribute to strategic decision-making during the planning phase. Observation data further indicate that planning meetings focused more on administrative compliance than on reflective discussion of student needs, teacher capacity, or contextual learning challenges. This condition positions teachers primarily as policy implementers rather than curriculum designers.

These findings are consistent with Wang (2022) theory, which argues that early-stage curriculum reforms are often administratively driven and externally imposed, resulting in limited participation by key implementers. The lack of meaningful teacher involvement has implications for curriculum ownership, as several teachers expressed uncertainty in interpreting the principles of differentiated learning and project-based instruction. Interview data suggest that this uncertainty resulted in varied understandings of the Merdeka Curriculum across classrooms, indicating that planning had not yet functioned as a collaborative professional learning process.

To strengthen the credibility of these findings, the planning process can be illustrated through a planning flowchart derived from triangulated data sources. The proposed diagram shows a linear planning pattern: policy socialization, leadership-led planning, limited teacher consultation, and classroom-level implementation. This planning model highlights the imbalance between policy direction and participatory practice, demonstrating that curriculum reform planning has not fully integrated bottom-up input. The inclusion of such a diagram is essential in qualitative results to visually represent patterns identified through interviews, observations, and documents, thereby reinforcing the analytical coherence between empirical data and theoretical interpretation.

Table: 1 Curriculum Reform Planning at Klantingsari 02 Elementary School

Characteristic	Decision Making	Teacher Involvement	Meeting Focus	Teacher Role	Curriculum Ownership	Understanding
Top-Down Planning	Policy directives	Limited	Administrative compliance	Policy implementers	Low	Varied

Bottom-Up Planning	Internal needs analysis	High	Reflective discussion	Curriculum designers	High	Consistent
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Organizing and Implementing Curriculum Reform Practices

The organization and implementation of curriculum reform at SDN Klantingsari 02 are closely interconnected and function as a continuous managerial process. Based on interview data and document analysis, the school implemented curriculum reform by establishing a curriculum development team, led directly by the principal. Teachers were assigned roles based on their grade level and subject responsibilities, including preparing teaching modules and implementing Pancasila Student Profile projects. Organizational coordination was formally facilitated through monthly meetings and internal discussion forums that aligned curriculum objectives and instructional practices.

However, classroom observations and teacher interviews indicate that organizational coordination has not yet fully supported collaborative professional practice. Although formal structures exist, many teachers continue to work individually when developing learning materials and instructional strategies. This fragmented approach has resulted in uneven understanding and application of the Merdeka Curriculum across classrooms. The organizational function thus appears to prioritize the distribution of administrative tasks rather than fostering shared reflection, collective problem-solving, and professional collaboration among teachers.

These organizational conditions directly influence the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in classroom practices. Implementation began in the 2024/2025 academic year, emphasizing differentiated learning and project-based activities aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile. Observation data indicate increased student engagement during project activities focused on environmental awareness and healthy living initiatives, with teachers assuming facilitative roles to guide learning. This indicates an initial shift toward student-centered learning as promoted by national curriculum policy.

Despite these positive developments, the implementation process remains in a transitional and adaptive phase. Several obstacles were identified, including limited learning facilities, extended time requirements for project planning, and varying levels of teacher understanding regarding differentiated instruction and authentic assessment. Interview data reveal that some teachers still rely on conventional instructional approaches, particularly in classroom time management and evaluation methods. These conditions suggest that curriculum implementation has not yet reached a consistent or fully internalized stage across the school.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings align with Sukmadinata's (2019) assertion that curriculum reform often encounters challenges related to human resource readiness and organizational capacity. The lack of strong collaborative structures limits the school's ability to translate curriculum principles into coherent classroom practices. Furthermore, Hall and Hord's change theory supports the interpretation that successful curriculum implementation requires continuous

mentoring and professional support to enable teachers to function as active agents of change rather than passive policy executors.

Overall, the integration of organizing and implementing functions in curriculum reform at SDN Klantingsari 02 reveals that structural arrangements alone are insufficient to ensure effective change. Sustainable curriculum reform requires organizational practices that promote intensive collaboration, shared understanding, and continuous professional learning. Without strengthening these elements, curriculum implementation risks remaining procedural and uneven, thereby limiting its potential impact on instructional quality and student learning outcomes.



Figure 1 : Implementation of Learning

Curriculum Renewal Evaluation

The findings indicate that curriculum renewal evaluation at SDN Klantingsari 02 is conducted periodically at the end of each semester through formal evaluation meetings involving the principal, homeroom teachers, and classroom teachers. These evaluation activities focus primarily on reviewing student learning outcomes, the implementation of Pancasila Student Profile projects, and the level of parental involvement in supporting learning activities. Document analysis of evaluation reports and meeting minutes confirms that assessment results and project documentation serve as the main reference points in determining the perceived success of curriculum implementation.

Interview data reveal that evaluation practices are largely outcome-oriented and emphasize measurable academic indicators. The school principal stated, “We usually evaluate based on students’ learning results and project products at the end of the semester. If students show progress, we consider the curriculum implementation to be successful.” This statement reflects an evaluation orientation that prioritizes visible outputs rather than examining the underlying processes that shape instructional quality and teacher readiness.

In addition to formal meetings, reflective discussions with teachers are conducted to identify challenges and achievements during the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers acknowledged that these reflection sessions provide opportunities to share classroom experiences and practical difficulties. One teacher

explained, “We discuss what worked and what did not, especially during project-based learning. However, the discussion is still general and not yet focused on improving specific teaching strategies.” This suggests that reflective practices exist but have not yet been systematically structured to support continuous professional development.

Despite these reflective efforts, the evaluation process has not yet incorporated systematic analysis of key process indicators, such as teacher preparedness, the effectiveness of differentiated learning strategies, and the impact of curriculum reform on school culture. Observation data indicate that evaluation instruments are not formally designed to capture changes in teacher professional competence or collaborative practices. As a result, evaluation findings tend to remain descriptive and are not fully transformed into actionable recommendations for improving subsequent curriculum planning and implementation.

These findings align with Ornstein and Hunkins’ perspective that curriculum evaluation should encompass context, process, and impact to ensure continuous refinement of educational change. In the context of SDN Klantingsari 02, evaluation practices have not yet addressed how organizational conditions, leadership support, and teacher collaboration influence curriculum outcomes. Consequently, evaluation results are underutilized as a strategic tool for strengthening curriculum management at the school level.

From a change management perspective, this condition supports Fullan’s (2019) argument that educational reform evaluation must integrate process, outcomes, and long-term impact to foster sustainable improvement. The absence of a comprehensive evaluation limits the school’s capacity to identify structural and professional gaps that hinder effective curriculum implementation. Therefore, strengthening evaluation mechanisms that systematically link reflection, evidence-based analysis, and follow-up actions is essential to enhance curriculum renewal sustainability and improve overall instructional quality.

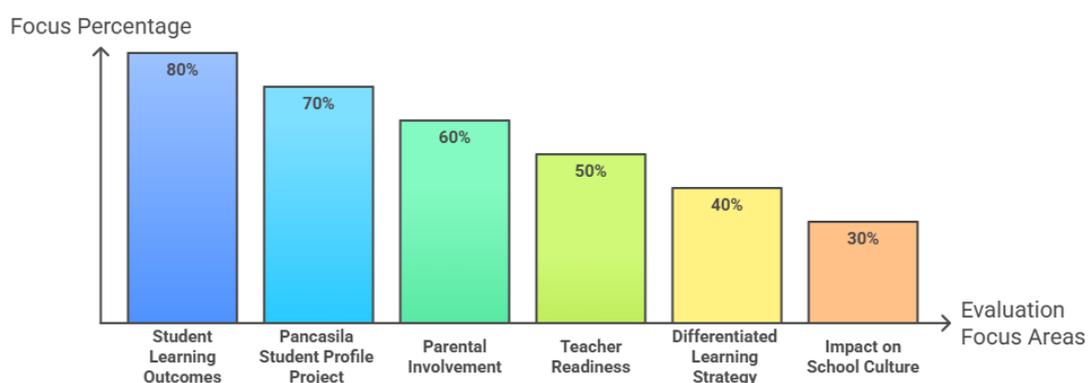


Figure 2. Area Focus Evaluasi

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that curriculum renewal management at SDN Klantingsari 02 reflects a policy-driven change process that is still predominantly administrative in nature. In the planning stage, curriculum reform was initiated in response to national policy socialization and structured through a formal planning

team. However, the limited involvement of teachers in strategic decision-making suggests that planning has not yet functioned as a reflective, participatory process (Najiburrahman et al., 2025; Putri & Jali, 2025). This condition supports change management theory, which suggests that curriculum reform imposed through top-down mechanisms often leads to weak ownership among implementers, thereby reducing the depth of curriculum internalization in classroom practices.

The organizing function further reinforces this pattern. Although an organizational structure for curriculum development has been formally established, the division of roles remains focused on task allocation rather than professional collaboration. Teachers tend to work independently in preparing learning materials, resulting in inconsistent interpretations and applications of the Merdeka Curriculum across classrooms (Sulala, 2023; Sidqi & Onia, 2025). This finding confirms Sukmadinata's view that effective curriculum organization should prioritize teamwork and intensive communication. Without collaborative structures that promote shared understanding, organizational arrangements risk becoming symbolic rather than functional in supporting sustainable curriculum change (Faisol et al., 2024).

The interaction between planning and organizing functions has direct implications for curriculum implementation. While the implementation phase shows initial progress toward student-centered learning through differentiated instruction and Pancasila Student Profile projects, these practices are unevenly applied. Variations in teacher readiness, limited learning facilities, and insufficient time for project planning constrain the implementation's effectiveness (El Iq Bali et al., 2020; Mahmud et al., 2021; Rosidah et al., 2021). This suggests that curriculum implementation is still in an adaptive stage, where teachers are negotiating between new curriculum demands and existing instructional habits.

From a change theory perspective, these findings align with Hall and Hord's assertion that curriculum reform requires continuous mentoring and professional support to enable teachers to transition into active change agents. The absence of structured professional learning communities limits opportunities for reflective practice and collective problem-solving, both of which are essential for translating curriculum principles into consistent pedagogical practice. Consequently, curriculum implementation tends to remain procedural rather than transformative (Rodliyah et al., 2024; Najiburrahman et al., 2025; Zohaib Hassan Sain Samsul Huda et al., 2025).

Overall, the integration of planning, organizing, and implementation functions reveals that curriculum renewal at the school level cannot be understood as a linear or technical process. Instead, it is a complex organizational change that requires participatory leadership, collaborative culture, and sustained capacity building. Without strengthening these interrelated dimensions, curriculum reform risks being reduced to policy compliance, thereby limiting its potential to improve instructional quality and meaningful student learning outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Curriculum renewal management at Klantingsari 02 Elementary School has been implemented in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum policy framework. However, the effectiveness of this implementation is highly dependent on the quality of change management at the school level. The findings indicate that curriculum renewal has not yet been fully positioned as a transformative process that actively involves teachers as key agents of change. Instead, it remains largely administrative and oriented toward policy compliance, limiting the internalization of curriculum principles in daily teaching and learning practices.

The study further demonstrates that successful curriculum reform cannot rely solely on formal planning documents and organizational structures. Effective implementation requires meaningful teacher participation, sustained professional collaboration, and school leadership capable of translating national curriculum policies into contextualized school practices. Without adaptive, reflective change management, curriculum implementation risks fragmentation and inconsistency across classrooms, thereby reducing its potential to improve instructional quality and student learning outcomes.

The implications of this study suggest that school leaders should strengthen curriculum planning through systematic internal needs analysis, foster collaborative teacher learning communities, and implement comprehensive evaluation systems that address process, outcomes, and long-term impact on teacher professionalism and school culture. Theoretically, this study contributes to the curriculum management literature by reinforcing the importance of participatory, process-oriented approaches to educational change. Practically, the findings provide a reference for schools and policymakers in designing sustainable curriculum reform strategies that are responsive to local contexts. Future research is recommended to explore curriculum change management across diverse educational settings to enhance the generalizability of these findings.

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This study contributes to knowledge by emphasizing that the effectiveness of curriculum renewal depends on integrated, participatory change management at the school level. It highlights teacher involvement, professional collaboration, and process-oriented evaluation as key factors in sustaining the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools with limited resources.

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