

Challenges Faced by History Teachers in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Vocational Schools

Helmi Akmal^{1*}, Ersis Warmansyah Abbas², Mutiani³, Nurul Mila Anggraini⁴

^{1,2,3}Social Science Education, Universitas Lambung Mangkurat, Indonesia

⁴History Education, Universitas Lambung Mangkurat, Indonesia

*correspondence email : helmiakmal47@ulm.ac.id

Received 19 December 2024; Received in revised form 11 April 2025; Accepted 12 April 2025

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji permasalahan guru sejarah di sekolah menengah kejuruan dalam merancang, melaksanakan, dan melakukan penilaian pembelajaran berdasarkan konsep Kurikulum Merdeka. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ialah deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data meliputi observasi, wawancara, dan analisis dokumen. Data yang telah diperoleh dianalisis menggunakan model analisis interaktif. Temuan dalam penelitian menunjukkan bahwa masalah utama guru sejarah di sekolah menengah kejuruan ialah kesulitan dalam merumuskan capaian pembelajaran, tujuan, dan alur tujuan pembelajaran. Hal tersebut mengakibatkan guru kurang mampu merancang dan mengembangkan modul ajar sesuai kebutuhan peserta didik. Selain itu, keterbatasan kemampuan dalam menggunakan teknologi dan keterbatasan fasilitas pembelajaran yang tersedia juga menambah kompleksitas tantangan dalam penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka. Oleh karena itu, demi mengatasi tantangan tersebut, perlu adanya komitmen dari pemangku kepentingan sekolah untuk memberikan pelatihan khusus bagi guru agar meningkatkan pemahaman dan kemampuan mengelola pembelajaran sesuai konsep Kurikulum Merdeka. Penambahan fasilitas pembelajaran juga diperlukan sesuai dengan kebutuhan implementasi kurikulum.

Kata kunci: guru, kurikulum merdeka, implementasi, pembelajaran sejarah.

Abstract

This study examines the challenges faced by history teachers in vocational high schools in designing, implementing, and assessing learning activities in alignment with the Merdeka Curriculum framework. The research employs a qualitative descriptive method with data collection techniques, including observation, interviews, and document analysis. The data collected were analyzed using an interactive analysis model. The findings reveal that the primary challenges faced by history teachers in vocational high schools include difficulties in formulating learning outcomes, learning objectives, and the flow of learning objectives. These difficulties hinder teachers' ability to design and develop teaching modules that meet students' needs. Additionally, limited proficiency in using technology and inadequate learning facilities compound the complexities of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. To address these challenges, school stakeholders must demonstrate a strong commitment to providing specialized training for teachers to enhance their understanding and capabilities in managing learning processes in accordance with the curriculum's principles. Moreover, improvements in learning facilities are essential to support the effective implementation of the curriculum.

Keywords: teachers, merdeka curriculum, implementation, history learning.

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum plays a crucial role in education, as education cannot be implemented according to its intended direction without it (Sulaeman et al.,

2022). It serves as a guideline to ensure that educational processes run effectively. Schools and educators must develop a deep understanding of curriculum. The curriculum must inevitably accommodate

changes brought about by developments in science and technology. As science and technology continue to advance and evolve, curriculum refinements will persist to adapt to these changes (Yamin & Syahrir, 2020).

Indonesia's curriculum has historically undergone several modifications. The journey began with the 1947 Curriculum or the 1947 Learning Plan, initiated during the early independence period as the first curriculum focusing on character formation of independent and sovereign Indonesian citizens. Subsequent iterations included the 1952 Curriculum or Detailed Learning Plan, followed by the 1964 Curriculum which introduced the Pancawardhana concept (development of morality, intelligence, emotion, skills, and physical abilities). The 1968 Curriculum emphasized the formation of true Pancasila individuals, while the 1975 Curriculum utilized the Instructional System Development Procedure (PPSI). The 1984 Curriculum implemented the Active Student Learning Method (CBSA), followed by the 1994 Curriculum. Later developments included the Competency-Based Curriculum (KBK), which emphasized student achievement of specific competencies, and the School-Based Curriculum (KTSP), which granted autonomy to schools. The 2013 Curriculum (K13) introduced a scientific approach,

leading finally to the current Independent Curriculum.

The Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia introduced the Independent Curriculum in 2020. This newest curriculum concept grants schools the freedom to design and implement curricula based on their students' needs and characteristics. It aims to foster a more flexible learning environment that aligns with contemporary developments while enhancing student engagement in the learning process (Kemdikbud, 2020). The concept of "independent learning" fundamentally emphasizes freedom of thought for both teachers and students. Daga (2021) suggests that independent learning facilitates students' character autonomy development, allowing them to freely and joyfully explore various knowledge domains to enhance their abilities and shape their identity as educated individuals. For vocational high schools (SMK), the Independent Curriculum is expected to address industry needs and equip students with appropriate skills for workforce adaptation.

History as a subject holds significant importance in the character formation proposed by the Independent Curriculum. It shapes students' character and understanding of national identity across all educational levels: elementary, junior high, senior high, and vocational schools. However, vocational high schools

face particular challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum's history component. Students often perceive history as less relevant compared to vocational subjects, creating difficulties for history teachers in generating student interest. The Research and Development Agency of the Ministry of Education and Culture reports that only 30% of SMK students express interest in history lessons (Badan Litbang, 2021). This statistic highlights an urgent need for redesigning history instruction to enhance its relevance and appeal for SMK students.

Studies by Sari (2021), Rahman (2022), and Prabowo (2023) have identified insufficient training and school support as primary obstacles for teachers implementing the Independent Curriculum. Additional research has highlighted specific challenges faced by SMK history teachers in integrating historical content with workforce-relevant practical skills. These challenges require careful analysis to develop appropriate solutions.

This research aims to identify and analyze the challenges that history teachers encounter while implementing the Independent Curriculum, and to provide recommendations for improving history learning outcomes in SMK. Given history's role in shaping national identity within social and cultural contexts, understanding these challenges should lead to effective solutions supporting

teachers in implementing a more relevant and effective curriculum.

METHODS

This study focuses on examining the challenges of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in vocational high schools, particularly concerning teacher misconceptions as curriculum implementers in history instruction. Based on this focus, a qualitative descriptive research method was employed. Qualitative research is an approach that uncovers specific phenomena by accurately describing facts, articulated through words and guided by data collection and analysis techniques conducted by the researcher as the primary instrument (Sugiyono, 2008; Wahyu, 2012).

The research was conducted at SMK Negeri 1 Banjarmasin, SMK Negeri 2 Banjarmasin, and SMK Negeri 3 Banjarmasin, representing public schools in each district of Banjarmasin City, South Kalimantan Province. These schools were selected as research sites due to their implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum since 2022. Data collection techniques, including observation, interviews, and document analysis, were employed to comprehensively describe the challenges faced by history teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Conceptually, data collection techniques are appropriate methods used to gather

the necessary data to address research questions, ultimately providing valid and reliable information (Arikunto, 2009; Noor, 2013).

During the observation stage, the researcher conducted direct but passive observations, meaning the researcher observed the activities performed by the subjects without participating in them. Observations focused on the teaching process, including the opening, core, and closing stages. In the interview stage, the researcher employed purposive sampling to select informants suitable for in-depth interviews. Informants were chosen based on their relevance to the research framework and included the school principal, vice principal for curriculum, history teachers, and students. The final data collected included documents supporting the research, such as teaching modules designed by history teachers. These documents were analyzed to assess their alignment with the needs and characteristics of students.

The data analysis was performed using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1992), which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Subsequently, the validity of the analyzed data was ensured through techniques such as triangulation of techniques and methods, member checking, and extended observation. These measures were taken to ensure the accuracy and reliability of

the collected data, making the research findings credible and trustworthy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges in Planning Learning Activities

Mulyasa (2021) argues that success in implementing a new curriculum depends on teachers' ability as implementers to understand the essence of curriculum changes and appropriate ways to conduct learning activities according to the concepts formulated in the new curriculum. This research finds that history teachers in vocational high schools face challenges in lesson planning due to their limited understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum concept, which remains largely technical rather than conceptual. History teachers experience difficulties in analyzing learning outcomes (CP), identifying learning objectives (TP), and formulating learning objective pathways (ATP). These difficulties ultimately impact their ability to develop teaching modules aligned with students' needs and characteristics.

Beyond formulating CP, TP, and ATP, teachers also struggle to select relevant and engaging teaching methods and models for students, often resulting in implementation that deviates from planned activities, forcing teachers to improvise to ensure students comprehend the material effectively. This indicates that teachers have not yet fully developed

strong analytical competencies. Teachers tend to prefer traditional methods such as lectures and question-answer sessions, despite the Merdeka Curriculum's conceptual framework encouraging active student engagement through methods such as project-based and problem-based learning. Sari's (2021) research found that teachers' barriers to implementing innovative teaching methods stem from insufficient training in new pedagogical approaches. This finding is reinforced by Rahayu et al. (2021) and Faatih et al. (2023), who indicate that when teachers lack technical proficiency in curriculum implementation, intensive training is necessary to enhance their skills in developing learning components aligned with curriculum requirements. Such training must support teachers' competency development in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, which aims to promote active student engagement in learning. According to Vygotsky's (1978) constructivist theory, learning must involve social interaction and meaningful activities to build student understanding. Therefore, enhancing teachers' lesson planning capabilities is crucial to ensure implementation creates learning conditions that meet student needs.

The ideal learning design within the Merdeka Curriculum requires teachers to creatively develop teaching modules aligned with students' general needs and characteristics. Nevertheless, many

history teachers in vocational high schools still rely on sample teaching modules provided in the Merdeka Teaching Platform (PMM) without adapting them to their students' needs. These modules are examples uploaded by history teachers from other schools to share best practices designed to meet the needs and characteristics of students taught by those sharing teachers. History teachers in vocational schools should appropriately adjust these materials to meet their students' needs. This indicates teachers' lack of reflective skills in understanding student needs based on characteristics or socio-cultural backgrounds, as suggested by Freire in his theory of liberating education, which emphasizes that educational processes must align with students' needs and experiences rather than merely following existing examples or predetermined patterns (Freire, 1996). Rahman's (2022) research also reinforces Freire's perspective, finding that teachers cannot often develop adaptive teaching modules, resulting in less relevant and engaging learning experiences for students.

Challenges in Learning Implementation

The successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is reflected not only in the accuracy of lesson planning but also in the extent to which learning activities align with established plans. During the implementation phase, research findings

indicate that history teachers struggle to utilize media that effectively engage student interest, particularly technology-based media, despite students' proficiency in using technology. Teaching practices remain limited to conventional tools such as blackboards and textbooks, while digital technology-based media, which students prefer, are rarely utilized in learning activities. Anderson (2018) states that technology integration in learning processes can enhance the effectiveness of achieving learning objectives while improving students' digital literacy in preparation for increasingly global digital challenges. Based on Anderson's perspective, technology has become integral to learning. Therefore, every teacher should utilize technology to help create effective learning conditions to achieve objectives. This contrasts with field findings, where history teachers in vocational schools rarely use digital technology-based media due to their low digital literacy skills. Consistent with these research findings, studies conducted by Anggeraini (2020), Nada and Indrawan (2023), and Raihany et al. (2022) emphasize that teachers' technological literacy in Indonesia remains low, with teachers tending to avoid digital-based learning due to difficulties in its implementation.

Additionally, limited learning facilities in schools pose barriers to creating effective learning environments.

One of the three schools in the study implements a moving class system due to insufficient classrooms to accommodate many students, requiring students to use available classrooms alternately. Another facility-related obstacle is the shortage of LCD projectors used to display visual media, despite visual media being highly effective in helping explain abstract historical content. This directly impacts students' learning motivation, as Jumiati et al. (2024) found that learning motivation and learning facilities significantly influence students' academic achievement. Furthermore, research by Siregar and Manurung (2021) found that complete and adequate learning facilities and students' self-motivation to learn positively affect their learning achievement. The availability of learning facilities is crucial to support the learning process. Therefore, barriers to providing adequate learning facilities will affect learning effectiveness.

Another challenge history teachers face in implementing learning at vocational schools is delivering material appropriate to students' knowledge levels. In the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers can develop and adapt materials based on student needs. This material should be contextual and meaningful, termed essential material, to encourage students to understand better and find meaning in the delivered content, making it relevant to real-life contexts. Field findings

indicate that teachers struggle to determine which material is essential to convey to students according to their knowledge level. This is exacerbated by students' basic knowledge conditions resulting from education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Learning loss during pandemic-era education has resulted in weak foundational knowledge among students. Referring to the Ministry of Education and Culture report (2021), indications of learning loss are evident in the low learning progress of students who experienced pandemic education, particularly in subjects requiring analytical thinking abilities such as history. These conditions make it difficult for teachers to deliver appropriate and essential material.

Moreover, most students view history learning as irrelevant to workplace needs. History learning that teaches conceptual and abstract material is unrelated to improving students' practical skills. This perception is reinforced when history teachers only teach historical facts and events without conveying the meaning behind events that could encourage students to analyze them. Field research results show that history teachers generally only convey material as facts and events without touching on the significance of historical events. This reinforces the gap in making history learning relevant for vocational school students. This reveals the need for

teachers' creative ability in designing learning to be appropriate and acceptable to students. According to Mulyasa (2021), the Merdeka Curriculum encourages teachers to create innovative learning that can ignite students' enthusiasm for learning.

Challenges in Learning Assessment

Pusmenjar (2021) states that learning assessment involves collecting and analysing information to understand learning needs, development, and student learning achievement. In the Merdeka Curriculum, assessment emphasizes three aspects: assessment as learning (AaL), assessment for learning (AfL), and assessment of learning (AoL). These three assessment principles are practically implemented through initial diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments. The aim is to ensure assessment not only measures learning outcomes but also considers student success throughout the learning process and their foundational knowledge. Therefore, assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum can be characterized as holistic, where assessment is no longer viewed merely as a determinant of learning success but as a tool to help teachers identify student development, enabling them to determine appropriate forms of learning to develop students' potential.

Field findings indicate that history teachers face obstacles in determining

appropriate assessment types to evaluate student learning processes. This is due to the numerous assessment forms and the difficulty in selecting those that align with the taught material and students' needs and characteristics. Consequently, teachers struggle to develop valid and relevant assessment instruments. Consistent with these findings, research by Nandini et al. (2024) found that teachers' barriers in implementing diagnostic assessment include insufficient understanding of diagnostic assessment substance and methods for developing valid and diverse assessment instruments to evaluate each student's characteristics effectively. Another difficulty experienced by history teachers in vocational schools is providing effective feedback to improve student understanding through formative assessment. Teachers only assign daily tasks to students as a form of formative assessment. This ultimately burdens students with constant assignments, leading to a lack of discipline in completing them. This demonstrates that teachers have not yet profoundly understood the concepts of diagnostic and formative assessment. However, according to research by Asworo et al. (2024), formative assessment plays a crucial role in improving learning quality, as this form of assessment helps teachers understand students' strengths and weaknesses to provide appropriate and constructive feedback.

Unlike diagnostic and formative assessments, which challenge teachers to implement, summative assessment is more manageable as it is performed only once at the end of each semester. The summative assessment instrument teachers use is a written assessment in a multiple-choice format aimed at measuring students' comprehension levels after studying material for one semester. As teachers are more capable of conducting summative assessments than the other two forms, the assessment conducted to identify student development and potential becomes non-holistic. Therefore, in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers should study diagnostic and formative assessment more deeply to ensure assessment can be holistic and continuous.

CONCLUSION

History teachers in vocational high schools face several challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. In the learning planning phase, teachers struggle to formulate learning outcomes (CP), learning objectives (TP), and learning objective pathways (ATP). These difficulties stem from teachers' limited understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum's conceptual framework, evidenced by their reduced capability to develop teaching modules aligned with student needs and characteristics. In the learning implementation phase, teachers face

difficulties determining and utilizing technology-based media. This is caused by teachers' immature technological literacy and limited school learning facilities. These factors lead teachers to ultimately use traditional teaching methods, failing to encourage active student engagement. In the learning assessment phase, teachers cannot conduct assessments according to the Merdeka Curriculum's holistic assessment principles, with teachers' limited understanding of various assessment forms being the main barrier, resulting in only summative assessment being well-implemented.

These challenges require systematic improvement in curriculum implementation. First, intensive teacher training, focusing on deepening conceptual and practical understanding of curriculum implementation, is needed. Second, complete and adequate learning facilities are necessary to support effective learning that can enhance students' thinking abilities and practical skills.

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