

## **Problems and Strategies of Teachers in the Application of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian Language Learning at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Al Fithrah Surabaya**

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### **Abstract**

*The application of the Merdeka curriculum in Indonesian language learning has become a complex and challenging topic. Although the Merdeka Curriculum aims to provide more freedom to teachers and students in determining learning methods and materials, there are various problems that arise in its implementation. This research aims to identify and analyze the problems faced in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, especially in learning Indonesian. As well as solutions carried out by teachers in overcoming problems that occur in the Class 5C Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Al Fithrah Surabaya class. This research method uses a descriptive qualitative approach and data collection techniques using observation, interview and documentation. Data analysis is carried out through data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of research on the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Al Fithrah Surabaya have started in stages since the 2022-2023 academic year and are going quite well even though there are obstacles such as students' low interest in reading, poor understanding of vocabulary, and the inability to differentiate between standard language and internet language. The solutions implemented include getting students used to reading, choosing reading that they like but are educational, creating vocabulary learning media, as well as providing in-depth training and using technological media for contextual learning with regular evaluations.*

**Keywords:** *Learning transformation, Merdeka curriculum, Indonesia language learning*

## **INTRODUCTION**

According to Law Number 20 of 2023 related to the National Education System, education is a series of planned and systematic efforts with the aim of forming active learning without leaving the potential of students. This aims to build a spiritual soul, be able to control yourself, have a good personality, be intelligent, have noble character, and have the skills needed for yourself, others, the nation, and the country.<sup>1</sup> Education plays an important role in shaping a character and building the quality of a nation's human resources.<sup>2</sup>

A curriculum is a set of learning plans that manage a set of subject matter, learning methods, and the objectives of learning or education that have been designed or targeted. A comprehensively designed learning system includes steps to achieve its goals.<sup>3</sup> A relevant and adaptive curriculum has the opportunity to improve and improve the quality of education, and can also be a provision for students. So that students have skills and knowledge that are in harmony with the needs of the times.<sup>4</sup> Along with the times, the curriculum in Indonesia has also undergone various curriculum reforms. It is the Merdeka Curriculum that is currently a curriculum reform that emphasizes learning independence and learning differentiation.

The Merdeka Curriculum is a policy from the Ministry of Education which was officially enforced on February 10, 2022 as a revision of the 2013 Curriculum, which was previously known as

the Prototype Curriculum.<sup>5</sup> This curriculum design was introduced to provide flexibility to schools in adapting the curriculum according to the characteristics of students and the learning environment. Therefore, it is hoped that learning goals can be achieved optimally and produce competitive students in the global arena. One of the interesting initiatives of the Merdeka Curriculum is the Merdeka Learning program, a step forward with the noble goal of producing intelligent and outstanding students at the national and international levels.<sup>6</sup>

In accordance with the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum itself, education is expected to be more relevant, responsive to the times, and able to maximize the potential of students.<sup>7</sup> Education in Indonesia has undergone a number of changes in recent decades. Each of these changes tries to adapt to the development of the times, technology, as well as the challenges and problems that arise in the world of education. However, keep in mind that while these changes are expected to bring significant improvements, their implementation has not always gone smoothly.

One of the subjects that continues to undergo changes in education is Indonesian. Indonesian learning can be done by emphasizing on project solutions to various problems that occur in the student environment. This approach is very compatible with Indonesian learning in the Merdeka Curriculum, with a more flexible learning structure to develop student character that is useful in the community. Competencies that can be formed in students include: noble character, piety, and faith in God Almighty, independence, creativity, critical reasoning, and forming global cooperation in students.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the implementation of the Merdeka Learning Curriculum in Indonesian subjects.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has expanded in various schools with the main goal of producing superior and competitive quality graduates. One example is Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Al Fithrah Surabaya, which has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum as part of efforts to provide quality education. However, in its implementation at MI, there are problems with the Learning Objectives Flow that has been agreed upon in the Teacher Working Group but is not in accordance with the student material book. Therefore, teachers need a good understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum, including concepts, learning strategies, and assessment of learning outcomes. In addition, limited resources are also an obstacle in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Al Fithrah Surabaya. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum requires adequate resources, such as textbooks, learning tools, and training for teachers.<sup>9</sup>

In this study, the school chosen was Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Al Fithrah Surabaya. The school is one of the institutions that has long been recognized by the public in general, both in terms of quality and quantity. In the 2022/2023 academic year, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Al Fithrah has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum is applied to grades 1, 2, 4, and 5, while grades 3 and 6 still use the 2013 Curriculum. Changes also occur in the learning system, where the Merdeka Curriculum gives teachers the flexibility to choose various teaching tools that are tailored to the learning needs of students. However, this policy also has weaknesses because not all teachers understand differentiation learning due to recent curriculum changes. As is known, the Merdeka Curriculum is new in Indonesia. The Merdeka Learning Curriculum was implemented in 2021/2022 and not all schools have implemented it, so the references are still very few, especially at the elementary school education level. In learning, a teacher is required to be more creative, innovative, and have the ability to master learning materials and develop interesting and fun materials in depth.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum**

Curriculum Merdeka is a curriculum with diverse intracurricular learning, where subject matter will be optimized so that students have enough time to explore concepts and strengthen competencies. Teachers are given the flexibility to choose various teaching tools so that learning can be tailored to students' learning needs and interests. The Merdeka Curriculum is one part of the learning recovery effort, where previously this curriculum was known as a prototype curriculum designed as a more flexible curriculum framework, still focusing on essential materials and character development and student competencies. The key characteristics of this curriculum that support learning recovery are:<sup>10</sup> Project-based learning for soft skills and character development according to the Pancasila student

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profile; Focus on essential materials so that there is enough time to learn basic competencies in depth, such as literacy and numeracy, and; Flexibility for teachers to carry out learning oriented according to students' abilities and make adjustments to the local context and content.

So, the Merdeka Curriculum provides opportunities for teachers to be more flexible in developing learning tools and gives students the freedom to adjust their learning needs and interests.

The Merdeka Curriculum has been implemented since the 2021/2022 school year in schools that participate in the driving program, and in the 2022/2023 school year, educational units can choose to implement it based on the readiness of each school. In the first year of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, only classes I and IV used this curriculum, while classes II, III, V, and VI still used the 2013 Curriculum. There are three options in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary/middle school level, namely:<sup>11</sup> Merdeka Learning Category, schools that fully implement the Merdeka Curriculum; Merdeka Change: schools that adopt the Merdeka Curriculum by changing some subjects, and; Merdeka Sharing, schools that implement the Merdeka Curriculum but still integrate some elements of the 2013 Curriculum.

The Merdeka Curriculum includes three types of learning, namely: Intracurricular Learning, implemented in a structured and planned manner in the main curriculum; Co-Curricular Learning, it is a strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile which is based on interdisciplinary learning, which focuses on character development and general competencies, and; Extracurricular Learning, in accordance with the interests of students and utilizing the resources available in the educational unit. Thus, the Merdeka Curriculum aims to provide a holistic and relevant learning experience for students.<sup>12</sup>

According to Director General Irwanto, teachers must integrate national values and character in accordance with the Pancasila Student Profile into learning. This is an effort that supports the achievement of educational goals and the continuation of the character strengthening program based on the values of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. Teachers are also required to create creative and innovative learning in designing anything that can be taught to students, in accordance with the Pancasila student profile.<sup>13</sup>

### **Indonesian Language Learning**

Indonesian plays an important role as a national language and a unifier of the nation. Therefore, Indonesian is included as a subject in the school curriculum. The concept of the Indonesian language as a unifier of the nation includes its function as a means to build unity and unity among heterogeneous ethnic communities in Indonesia.<sup>14</sup>

Learning is a deliberate cognitive process carried out by individuals to go from a state of not knowing to knowing, from a state of not having a certain mindset to having a suitable mindset, or from a state of not having skills to being proficient in a given task. The learning process starts from the interactions that occur during learning activities.<sup>15</sup>

Indonesian learning in elementary schools is expected to train students' communication skills well and increase appreciation for the Indonesian language and existing literary works. This learning aims to develop Indonesian language skills as a means of communication, learning, thinking, and as a tool to unify intercultural. Through Indonesian learning activities, teachers can guide students to develop communication skills as well as critical and creative thinking skills. Therefore, learning Indonesian is very important and is a subject that must be taught to students in school.<sup>16</sup>

### **Problems of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum**

Problems are problems that require a solution. If there are problems in learning or education, it can hinder the achievement of goals optimally. Therefore, a solution is needed to solve the problem. In learning, there are several possible problems that can occur, including: First, problems related to students. Students are the main subjects of all educational and teaching activities. Students play an important role in the learning process, because teachers only play the role of motivators and facilitators. Internal factors of students include intelligence, attention, interest, talent, motivation, maturity, and readiness. Each student has his own problems, so teachers are required to understand the nature and characteristics of students and have skills in guiding them.<sup>17</sup>

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Second, problems related to educators. Educators in the learning process play a major role. Because in the hands of educators, the success or failure of achieving learning goals is very dependent. Problems related to educators include: Problems teachers' mastery of the material. A teacher's knowledge and abilities are influenced by the education obtained beforehand, so that whatever is given to students is really in accordance with their skills. As a teacher, it is important to master the material to be taught and continue to develop it, in the sense of improving their abilities in terms of knowledge. This greatly determines the learning outcomes that will be obtained and achieved by students;<sup>18</sup> Problems of teacher mastery over classroom management. Managing the classroom is a skill that teachers must have to create and condition learning optimally and solve problems that may occur in the teaching and learning process. In other words, it is an activity that aims to create ideal conditions in the learning process.<sup>19</sup> In their role as a learning manager or learning manager, teachers must be able to manage the classroom because the classroom is a learning environment and one of the aspects of an organized school environment. Teachers must understand the skills needed to be able to carry out their duties and functions well, and;<sup>20</sup> Problems related to learning evaluation. Evaluation or assessment functions to understand whether or not the teaching goals are achieved and to assess the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process that has been carried out by teachers. Without evaluation, teachers will not be able to know the learning outcomes achieved by students and cannot evaluate their actions in teaching, so there is no effort to improve them.<sup>21</sup>

## **METHOD**

The type of research used in this study is qualitative research using a descriptive approach. This study seeks to reveal the symptoms that existed at the time the research was carried out with an explanation that leads to a description of the problems of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian language learning at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Al Fithrah Surabaya. Primary data in this study can be obtained directly from observations, interviews, and documentation used to corroborate the results of research conducted by researchers from: principals, deputy head of curriculum, class 5C homeroom teachers, and Indonesian learning observers in Class 5C Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Al Fithrah Surabaya class. The secondary data is in the form of learning documents and other support. The data analysis methods applied in this study are data collection, data reduction, data presentation (data display), and finally conclusion drawing (verification).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of the research conducted in the Class 5C class of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Al Fithrah Surabaya show that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian learning has a positive impact while presenting a number of challenges. The curriculum provides flexibility for teachers to design learning according to student characteristics, as well as encourages a more contextual and project-based approach. However, in its implementation, three main problems were found that hindered the achievement of language competence optimally.

First, low interest in reading students. Challenges in learning Indonesian in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the Class 5C MI Al Firthrah Surabaya class include the lack of students' interest in reading. One of the factors that affects students' low interest in reading is the absence of interest in reading itself. Without a person's interest in reading, it will be difficult to understand the content of the reading. On the other hand, if a person has a high interest in reading, they will find it easier to understand reading without having difficulties, because interest plays an important role in encouraging someone to do an activity. Fostering an interest in reading is a process that does not just appear, but a process that must be instilled from an early age. In line with the theory expressed by Syarqawi et al., if the interest in reading has grown in children, they will always be challenged and curious if there is an interesting book that they have not read. Since reading provides a lot of knowledge and experience, children's interests should be nurtured during their developmental period.<sup>22</sup> Overcoming the problems of Indonesian learning in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MI Al Firthrah Surabaya requires a joint effort between teachers, students, and the school to create effective strategies in increasing students' interest, motivation, and reading ability equally.

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Second, limited vocabulary mastery. The problem in learning Indonesian in the application of the Merdeka Curriculum in the Class 5C class of MI Al Fithrah Surabaya is the lack of application of Indonesian vocabulary. Vocabulary mastery has a great effect on a person's language skills, especially for elementary school students, because they have not mastered much vocabulary. This low vocabulary mastery is caused by the lack of students in using Indonesian as a means of communication in daily life; Generally, they only use Indonesian during class hours. As a result, students have difficulty understanding Indonesian vocabulary. In line with the theory of vocabulary mastery, vocabulary mastery is the skill of mastering or the ability to understand and use words contained in a language, both spoken and written.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, teachers need to clearly understand the characteristics of students in class, especially class V. Some of the characteristics possessed by students in class V include: Improved cognitive abilities. Students are already starting to be able to solve more complex problems, as they already have enough knowledge, insight, and experience from the previous learning process; Imagination ability. Students are able to think further and have good imagination of the objects depicted, and; Understanding Cause and Effect. Students are able to understand the cause-and-effect relationship that occurs from an event and are able to find solutions to solve problems.

These characteristics are important for teachers to understand in designing learning that can improve students' vocabulary mastery. Thus, the right strategy can be applied so that students are more active in using Indonesian in their daily lives.<sup>24</sup>

Teachers have an important role in improving students' Indonesian vocabulary mastery by paying attention to students' characteristics. Good vocabulary mastery has a great influence on students' thinking and creativity in the language learning process. Therefore, vocabulary mastery is one of the determining factors for the quality of students' language.

The quality of a person's language skills is highly dependent on the number of vocabulary mastered. The more vocabulary students have, the better their language skills. This is because the broad vocabulary allows students to express their thoughts, ideas, and feelings more appropriately and diversely. For example, students with good vocabulary mastery can:<sup>25</sup> Communicate ideas clearly. They can convey opinions and ideas more clearly, making communication more effective; Enhances creativity. A rich vocabulary encourages students to think creatively and innovate in expressing ideas, both verbally and in writing, and; Understand reading better. Students who have a lot of vocabulary will have an easier time understanding the text being read, which in turn will improve their reading and writing skills.

Thus, teachers need to design teaching strategies that support vocabulary mastery, such as introducing new vocabulary contextually, using various learning media, and providing exercises that allow students to use these vocabulary in various situations.

Third, inability to distinguish between the use of standard and formal language. Problems in Indonesian language learning in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the Class 5C Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Al Fithrah Surabaya class include students' limitations in distinguishing between the use of standard Indonesian and formal Indonesian. Students often face difficulties in recognizing the difference between informal everyday use of language and more formal and appropriate use of language, such as in an academic or formal context. This can affect their ability to write in an appropriate format, compose clear and structured writing, and communicate effectively in situations that require formal Indonesian.

Teachers at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Al Fithrah Surabaya strive to provide clearer guidance and targeted exercises in recognizing and using standard and formal Indonesian. They also support students by providing constructive feedback and guiding them to improve their understanding and skills in contextual use of language. In addition, an inclusive and interactive learning approach is used to help students practice the use of formal Indonesian in relevant and real situations.

Overall, improving students' understanding of the differences between standard and formal Indonesian is one of the important aspects in efforts to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. This not only helps them in achieving better language competence, but also prepares them to use the language appropriately and effectively in various life and career contexts in the future. In line with the theory, according to Rini Damayanti stated that "the word baku is a word that is used in accordance with the

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rules of the Indonesian language that have been determined. In official sentences, both verbal and written with the proper expression of ideas. While non-standard words are words that are used not in accordance with the determined Indonesian rules, such as everyday language, namely spoken language.”

The problem of students’ limitations in distinguishing between the use of standard Indonesian and formal Indonesian shows the need for a more in-depth and structured learning approach in the Merdeka Curriculum. Apart from the aspect of direct teaching, the role of teachers is very important in providing appropriate examples and providing clear explanations of the differences between these two types of languages.

In addition, awareness of the importance of using appropriate language according to the context also needs to be instilled from an early age in students. This can be done by providing a wide range of learning resources that include official texts, scholarly articles, and discussions about the use of language in social media and everyday life. This way, students can more easily understand the needs and benefits of using both standard and formal language in their lives.

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study is that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian language learning in Class 5C MI Al Firthrah Surabaya class faces several challenges. First, students’ interest in reading is low, which is caused by a lack of interest and reading habits. Increasing interest in reading must begin early through collaborative efforts between teachers, students, and schools. Second, students’ low ability to understand vocabulary, which hinders their language skills. Vocabulary mastery is essential for effective communication, and teachers need to design appropriate teaching strategies to assist students in developing their vocabulary. Third, there is limited understanding of students about the use of standard and formal Indonesian, which results in difficulties in communicating in a formal context. Teachers should provide clear guidance and exercises to help students understand the differences in language usage in different situations. Overall, to overcome these problems, a more in-depth and structured learning approach is needed, as well as awareness of the importance of using appropriate language in relevant contexts.

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