

Evaluation of Teachers' Performance and School Environment on the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum: A Literature Review

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Abstract: This study evaluates the role of teacher performance and school environmental support in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. Teachers' performance, including pedagogical skills, innovation in teaching, and project-based learning management, as well as school environmental support in the form of technological facilities, a conducive work climate, and a collaborative culture, are two main factors in the success of this curriculum. Through a systematic literature review, the findings of this study indicate that adequate facilities and managerial support contribute significantly to teacher motivation and performance effectiveness, which have a positive impact on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. However, obstacles such as high administrative burdens, unequal access to training, and lack of managerial support still hinder the optimization of teachers' performance. This study found that the synergy between adequate teacher competence and optimal environmental support can create a more interactive and independent learning experience for students. Thus, the conclusion of this study emphasizes the need for policies that support reducing administrative burdens, increasing access to ongoing training, and providing adequate facilities. These findings are expected to be the basis for developing education policies that are more responsive to the needs of teachers and schools in order to strengthen the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia.

Keywords: Curriculum Implementation, Education Evaluation, Merdeka Curriculum, Teachers' Performance, School Environment

A. Introduction

Education plays an important role in building quality human resources, especially in the era of globalization that increasingly demands high adaptability and competence. To meet this need, Indonesia has launched various policies to improve the quality of education, including the Merdeka Curriculum. This curriculum aims to provide schools with flexibility in designing learning processes that are relevant

and in accordance with the characteristics and potential of students, with a focus on developing competence, creativity, and critical skills (Sherly et al., 2021). In implementing a project-based curriculum such as the Merdeka Curriculum, the role of teachers is not only as a transmitter of material but also as a facilitator who supports students' learning independence (Fahlevi, 2022; Komalia, 2013). Furthermore, a conducive school environment supports teachers to achieve optimal performance. These conditions include adequate facilities, a supportive work climate, and a culture of collaboration among teaching staff. Research shows that a supportive environment can improve teacher motivation and performance, which further strengthens the implementation of project-based learning and scientific approaches in accordance with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum (Yuka et al., 2020). Learning models supported by this curriculum, such as Project-Based Learning (PjBL), have been shown to be effective in improving students' skills in collaboration, communication, and problem-solving abilities if teachers are supported by a supportive environment to innovate in their teaching (Basit & Komalasari, 2023; Iba et al., 2021).

However, there is not enough evidence to explain how the synergy between teachers' performance and the school environment specifically contributes to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Although each of these components is important, focused studies that reveal how the interaction of these two elements directly affects the success of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum are still limited. There is also a limited understanding of the support of the school environment that can directly facilitate teachers to adopt new learning methods that are in accordance with the characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum. In addition, along with the development of the implementation of project-based learning, in-depth studies on how the interaction between teachers' performance and school environmental support can strengthen student learning outcomes have also not been widely described. A better understanding of the role of teachers' performance and environmental factors in the early implementation stages of the Merdeka Curriculum will provide additional valuable perspectives, especially for education stakeholders in designing more targeted policy interventions.

Recent research has shown that factors such as motivation and the quality of the school environment have an important influence on improving teachers' performance. In a study conducted in Bekasi, it was found that a good working environment and intrinsic motivation of teachers have a significant effect on creativity and innovation in environment-based teaching, which is relevant to the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum (Yuka et al., 2020). In addition, teacher training and mentoring have also been shown to increase their capacity in implementing learning that is relevant to the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, as well as helping them understand how to evaluate their performance effectively (Raharjo, 2020). Another study on the implementation of a project-based learning

model that is in line with the Merdeka Curriculum, such as at SMAN 8 Malang, shows that PjBL can improve students' collaboration and communication skills if teachers are supported by a conducive environment and school policies that support teaching innovation (Basit & Komalasari, 2023).

This study will provide a new perspective that focuses on the interaction between teachers' performance and the school environment in supporting the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Unlike previous studies that examined these two factors separately, this study will reveal how these two components can work synergistically to create an effective and independent learning environment. The results of this study are also expected to provide a new map of the support needed by teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum effectively, especially in utilizing the school environment as the main supporting factor.

This study is expected to provide a significant contribution to the development of education policies, especially in improving the quality of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. Theoretically, this study will enrich the literature on evaluating teachers' performance and the school environment in the context of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. From a practical perspective, the results of this study are expected to provide policy recommendations for the government, school administrators, and other education stakeholders to pay more attention to the synergy between teachers' performance and the school environment in supporting effective learning.

In addition, the results of this study are expected to provide clearer guidance on what support needs to be provided by the school environment so that teachers' performance can be more optimal in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Thus, this study will help create a more responsive educational environment to the needs of independence-based learning expected from the Merdeka Curriculum. Based on the background that has been described, the research questions that will be the focus of this study are: How do teachers' performance evaluation and school environmental support play a role in supporting the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia?

B. Methods

This literature review will be conducted using a systematic method to identify, select, analyze, and synthesize studies relevant to the evaluation of teachers' performance and school environment towards the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This approach consists of several stages, namely literature search, study selection, analysis and categorization, and synthesis of findings. Literature will be collected from various sources such as academic journals, books, conference proceedings, and research reports related to teachers' performance, school

environment, and the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The database that will be used is the Google Scholar database. The keywords used include "Merdeka Curriculum," "teachers' performance," "school environment," "educational evaluation," and "curriculum implementation".

The selection process is carried out in two stages, namely selection based on title and abstract and full selection based on the content of the article. Inclusion criteria include studies conducted in the context of education in Indonesia, especially those discussing teachers' performance and school environment in relation to curriculum implementation. Studies that are not relevant or do not meet the inclusion criteria will be excluded. The selected studies will be analyzed and categorized based on the main themes, namely teachers' performance, school environment, and implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The focus of the analysis will cover supporting and inhibiting factors in curriculum implementation, as well as the relationship between teachers' performance and the school environment in creating an effective learning atmosphere. The results of the study analysis will be synthesized to provide a comprehensive picture of how teachers' performance and the school environment influence the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This synthesis will also highlight the synergy between the two factors in supporting or inhibiting the learning process.

C. Results and Discussion

Teachers' Performance Analysis in the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

In the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, improving teacher professional competence is very important, especially in the application of project-based learning methods (Project-Based Learning/PjBL). Research shows that developing teacher competence in implementing innovative and contextual learning in Indonesia still faces various challenges. Marta et al. (2023) found that in the transition from the 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum, most teachers still need support in planning effective learning, especially in integrating the PjBL method to motivate students through independent and creative learning. This finding underlines that teacher professional competence does not only include mastery of the material but also the ability to adapt relevant and interesting teaching methods. Classroom management competence is also very necessary in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers are required to be able to adjust classroom management to interactive learning dynamics, for example, in collaborative learning, which is commonly used in PjBL.

Murwindra et al. (2020), in their research at SMAN 2 Singingi, showed that teachers' performance in cross-disciplinary interest-based teaching of chemistry was assessed

well by students and teachers themselves, although some teachers admitted to facing obstacles in managing the class when implementing this new approach. This shows that teacher professional competence in classroom management plays a very important role in the implementation of a more effective Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers are required to innovate in order to be able to apply learning methods according to the characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum, especially in implementing PjBL. Basit & Komalasari (2023) study at SMAN 8 Malang highlighted that the PjBL learning model was able to improve students' skills in aspects of cooperation, collaboration, and communication, which are relevant to the profile of Pancasila students to be achieved in the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers who are able to adapt this method show flexibility in teaching strategies and the ability to involve students more actively. In addition, research by Listia et al. (2023) in Banjarmasin also showed that the application of local topic-based learning such as wetlands increased students' understanding and their learning motivation, which also supports innovation in learning design in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum.

In addition to the implementation of PjBL, the use of technology in the design of learning based on the Merdeka Curriculum also encourages innovation in teachers. Setiawan & Martin (2023) showed that the development of Augmented Reality (AR)-based teaching materials in Indonesian language lessons at Pancor Elementary School can significantly increase students' interest in learning. The use of AR technology not only makes it easier for students to understand the material but also allows students to engage in more creative and innovative learning in accordance with the demands of the new curriculum. Innovations like this show the importance of digital skills for teachers, which can not only facilitate learning but also support student involvement more optimally in the learning process.

Although innovation and adaptation are the focus of the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers still face various obstacles in its implementation. Research by Aditama et al. (2023) in Terseno and Limpung Districts, Central Java, revealed that many teachers still feel confused in implementing assessment concepts that are in accordance with the demands of the Merdeka Curriculum. This is due to the lack of intensive training and assistance in developing pedagogical competencies, which causes difficulties in preparing integrated learning and assessment plans. In addition, limited technological facilities and infrastructure are also significant obstacles for teachers. In certain schools, access to adequate technological aids is very limited, which hinders teachers from implementing project-based methods that require the use of digital media or other interactive devices. This is reinforced by the findings of Ali Muckromin et al. (2023), which state that the lack of technological facilities in schools can reduce the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum, especially in efforts to digitize education, which is one of the focuses of this curriculum.

Another obstacle faced by teachers is the lack of adequate time allocation to design project-based learning. Research by Retnawati (2016) in Yogyakarta showed that many mathematics teachers found it difficult to adjust the learning time needed to implement the scientific approach, especially since the new curriculum demands a more in-depth and interactive learning process. Teachers felt that the additional workload in designing and implementing authentic assessments and portfolios was very time-consuming, which impacted the effectiveness of the learning process. Overall, the study showed that although the Merdeka Curriculum offers a more flexible approach and focuses on developing 21st-century skills, its implementation requires strong support from various parties. This support includes further training for teachers, improving technological facilities, and policies that allow for more adequate time allocation for planning and implementing project-based learning.

Support for school facilities and infrastructure plays an important role in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Adequate facilities such as classrooms equipped with technology, learning aids, and internet access greatly support the active and interactive learning process recommended by this curriculum. Research by Pratiwi et al. (2022) shows that learning facilities such as classrooms and technology have a significant impact on students' learning motivation and their learning outcomes at SMP Negeri 3 Lingsar. In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, access to facilities like this allows students to learn independently and increase their involvement in project-based learning activities. Another study by Wulansari (2016) on the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum showed that the lack of supporting facilities, such as electronic teaching materials and technological devices, is still an obstacle to the implementation of scientific-based learning methods. This is relevant to the Merdeka Curriculum, which relies on a project-based and innovation-based approach, where the availability of supporting facilities is essential to implement the curriculum according to plan.

School climate and collaborative culture among staff and teachers contribute greatly to increasing teacher motivation and creativity in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. In the research of Murtiningsih et al. (2023) on Adiwiyata schools in Sukoharjo, it was found that the formation of a culture of environmental care and collective awareness in schools not only helps students develop positive character but also increases teachers' enthusiasm in facilitating environmental-based learning. The collaborative culture between teachers and school management creates a mutually supportive environment and enables more sustainable innovation in teaching. Meanwhile, Gusman et al. (2021) showed that a supportive work culture, such as teacher involvement in decision-making and providing opportunities for innovation, increases the success of implementing new systems in an organizational context. In terms of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, cultural support that encourages innovation and creativity will be very important for teachers to feel

motivated and able to overcome challenges in implementing the project-based approach and independent learning that are at the heart of this curriculum.

School management policies and support also play a major role in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Management that provides ongoing training for teachers and provides access to learning platforms, such as the Merdeka Mengajar Platform, helps accelerate teacher adaptation to new approaches and methods. Martiani et al. (2023) found that mentoring and training activities on the Merdeka Mengajar Platform features improved teachers' understanding of project implementation and encouraged the adoption of learning practices in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum in North Bengkulu. In addition, Lestari et al. (2016) stated that policies that support the active involvement of teachers in decision-making regarding the curriculum and their performance assessments can strengthen teacher involvement in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. When teachers feel they have control over the teaching methods applied and are supported by school policies, they are more motivated to innovate and adjust teaching methods according to curriculum needs. Overall, the role of the school environment in the form of adequate facilities, a collaborative culture, and supportive managerial policies are important elements in ensuring the success of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Synergy between teachers' performance and the school environment is essential to achieve effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, especially in urban environments that tend to have better access to resources and technology. Studies show that in urban schools supported by adequate facilities, teachers can be more optimal in implementing project-based learning modules. For example, Marta et al. (2023) found that adequate access to technology in urban schools supports teachers to develop innovative project-based modules in accordance with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. An environment equipped with electronic devices and a stable internet connection allows teachers to use interactive learning media, which increases student engagement in the learning process and helps students achieve deeper learning. In addition to facilities, support from school management also plays an important role in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in urban areas.

Research by Supriyanta (2021) highlights that collaboration between teachers and school management in planning and implementing project-based learning improves the quality of learning. In urban schools, moral and professional support from colleagues and principals allows teachers to share experiences, innovative ideas, and new methods that are relevant to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This collaborative approach not only strengthens teacher motivation but also builds a work culture that is more supportive of innovation and experimentation in teaching, which contributes to higher quality learning in the classroom.

However, although the synergy between teachers' performance and the school environment in urban areas has many positive aspects, there are also some challenges. One obstacle that often arises in urban schools is the difference in the availability of facilities between schools. Not all urban schools have equal access to technology and facilities to support project-based learning. For example, Wulansari (2016) found that the lack of facilities and resources in several urban schools, especially technological devices and digital teaching materials, hindered teachers in implementing project-based learning methods according to the Merdeka Curriculum standards. This deficiency forced teachers to rely on traditional teaching methods, which resulted in difficulties in achieving more collaborative and interactive learning goals.

In addition to the problem of facilities, administrative pressure is also a challenge for teachers in urban environments. Retnawati's study (2016) showed that teachers in urban areas often experience high administrative burdens, such as filling out performance reports, planning extracurricular activities, and serving a relatively large number of students in class. These administrative demands reduce the time they can allocate to prepare and develop project-based learning plans to the fullest. In the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers are expected to conduct holistic evaluations that require not only pedagogical skills but also sufficient time for planning, while administrative burdens often reduce these opportunities.

A positive example of strong synergy between teachers' performance and the urban school environment can be seen at SMAN 8 Malang, where the implementation of the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model has been effective thanks to the support of adequate facilities and the commitment of school management. Basit & Komalasari (2023) research found that good facility support and training from the principal enabled teachers at SMAN 8 Malang to develop PjBL modules that support the development of students' collaborative skills. This shows that when the synergy between teachers' performance and the school environment is running well, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum can produce more effective learning outcomes, improving students' skills in collaboration, communication, and problem-solving. However, not all urban schools have this convenience. In some schools with limited budgets, managerial support in the form of incentives or compensation is not always adequate. For example, research by Imroatun & Sukirman (2016) shows that in some urban schools with limited budgets, teachers feel less supported to implement project-based learning methods due to limited facilities and managerial support. This results in a lack of innovation in teaching, and teachers are often reluctant to implement new methods due to facility challenges and lack of adequate support from the school.

These findings suggest that the synergy between teachers' performance and the school environment plays a significant role in the successful implementation of the

Merdeka Curriculum. When the school environment is supportive – either in terms of facilities, moral support, or managerial policies – teachers are better able to develop and implement project-based learning that is in accordance with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. However, this support must be evenly distributed so that there are no gaps in the quality of curriculum implementation, even in urban schools with limited budgets.

To enhance this synergy, education policies need to ensure that all schools receive adequate facilities and ongoing training programs for teachers. Support from school management, either in the form of sufficient time for planning or appropriate incentives, is also important in creating an environment that allows teachers to innovate and improve their performance. In addition, reducing the administrative burden on teachers can be an effective strategy so that they can focus on developing a curriculum and learning methods that are in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum.

The synergy between teachers' performance and the school environment is crucial in ensuring the effectiveness of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, especially in urban environments that have better access to resources and technology. However, although urban schools generally have more complete facilities, there is a large variation in terms of support and infrastructure that affects teachers' performance and the quality of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Challenges related to gaps in facilities, administrative burdens, and variations in managerial support are still significant obstacles.

Technology facilities play a major role in supporting the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in urban schools. Schools that have adequate facilities, such as computer laboratories, electronic devices, and internet connectivity, provide opportunities for teachers to develop more interactive project-based learning modules. According to Marta et al. (2023), schools equipped with sophisticated technology allow teachers to use digital learning platforms to increase student engagement in the learning process. This is in line with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasize independent and project-based learning. However, the large variation in the availability of these technology facilities is very visible, especially in schools with limited budgets or in areas with high student density. For example, Wulansari (2016) found that many schools face difficulties in meeting the needs of sufficient technological devices for all students and teachers. Some schools even have limited access to computers or internet connections, so teachers cannot implement project-based learning that is in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum standards.

As a result, teachers often have to rely on traditional teaching methods that limit student engagement in the interactive learning process. Support from school

management also plays a significant role in facilitating the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in urban areas. Schools with good managerial support tend to be more successful in implementing project-based learning methods. Research by Supriyanta (2021) shows that schools that provide moral support, such as training and collaboration between teachers, create a more conducive work environment for teachers to innovate. In these schools, teachers feel more motivated and encouraged to experiment with teaching methods that are more relevant to the Merdeka Curriculum.

However, not all schools have adequate managerial and budgetary capabilities to provide similar support. Some schools with limited budgets have school management that is less able to provide regular training or incentives for teachers, which has an impact on low teacher motivation in implementing new learning methods (Imroatun & Sukirman, 2016). This inconsistent managerial support makes some teachers reluctant to try project-based learning methods due to the lack of training that allows them to develop the competencies needed for effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The high administrative burden is one of the main obstacles for teachers in preparing project-based learning plans according to the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers are often burdened with administrative tasks such as assessment reports, managing extracurricular activities, and planning school programs. This high administrative burden reduces the time that teachers can allocate to designing interactive and collaborative learning modules. As a result, teachers tend to use simpler teaching methods due to limited time to design more complex methods, as expected in project-based learning (Retnawati, 2016).

Some teachers also reported that they had to sacrifice personal time to complete this additional workload, which resulted in burnout and decreased motivation to try new teaching methods. This administrative burden is a major challenge in urban schools, especially those with large student populations and high activity levels. However, not all schools can provide the same support. Some schools with limited budgets have limited ability to provide the incentives, facilities, or training needed to encourage teaching innovation. Teachers in these schools often experience limited resources and support, resulting in low success in implementing project-based learning. This disparity creates differences in teachers' performance, with teachers who do not receive sufficient training having difficulty implementing project-based learning effectively.

To support the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, there are several practical steps that need to be implemented, as well as important education policies to be strengthened. First, strengthening teacher competency through ongoing training is a top priority. Teachers need ongoing relevant training to develop pedagogical and technical skills that support project-based learning

methods (Pratama & Lestari, 2020). Second, reducing the administrative burden on teachers is essential to help teachers focus more on planning and implementing learning. Excessive administrative burdens often reduce the time teachers can allocate to their core tasks, such as guiding students and designing project-based learning that is in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum (Lembong et al., 2023).

Furthermore, effective use of technology is also a key factor in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Technological support in the form of computer devices, internet connections, and adequate training is essential so that teachers can utilize technology optimally. The use of technology in learning allows teachers to provide interactive materials that are in accordance with the principles of project-based learning. Thus, schools need to ensure that digital infrastructure is available and functioning properly to support interactive learning processes so that teachers can use digital platforms that enrich students' learning experiences (Zahwa & Syafi'i, 2022). Finally, strong managerial support from the principal and management staff is also important to encourage teacher motivation and innovation. Managerial support that includes a collaborative culture, moral support, and additional incentives for teachers who demonstrate innovative performance is very helpful in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers who are supported by proactive school management tend to be more motivated to innovate and develop learning approaches that are relevant to students' needs. With strong managerial support, teachers feel appreciated and encouraged to continue developing creative teaching methods (Muh Ibnu Sholeh, 2023).

Research on the influence of the school environment on teachers' performance has been conducted previously, but studies that specifically explore the most influential environmental elements in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum are still very limited. Many previous studies have focused on individual factors, such as the availability of facilities or general school policies, but studies that empirically identify specific environmental factors that support teachers' performance in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum are still rare. Studies that measure the impact of each environmental element such as technological facilities, collaborative culture, or managerial support directly on teachers' ability to implement project-based learning or active learning methods are still very open to exploration. Future research needs to be directed at empirical studies that identify the most influential environmental elements on teachers' performance. This empirical evidence is very important for understanding school environmental factors that significantly support or hinder teachers' performance, especially in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

D. Conclusions

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in urban schools shows that teachers' performance and school environmental support play a significant role in the success of this curriculum. Despite the advantages in terms of access to technology and facilities, challenges related to administrative burdens, limited managerial support, and gaps in access to training continue to hamper the optimization of teachers' roles. This study shows that the synergy between teacher competence and equitable environmental support can create a more interactive and immersive learning experience for students. Education policies that strengthen ongoing training, facilitate technology, and reduce administrative burdens are important steps that can support the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum in the long term.

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