

The implementation of the merdeka curriculum: A study of educational management at secondary schools in Mataram, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – The Merdeka Curriculum provides greater flexibility for schools to design, implement, and evaluate learning programs according to their contextual needs. However, its successful implementation requires effective school management practices. This study aims to explore how school management functions are implemented in the process of adopting the Merdeka Curriculum in secondary schools in Mataram City, Indonesia.

Method – The study employed a qualitative case study approach involving six secondary schools consisting of three senior high schools and three junior high schools. Data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews with principals, teachers, and school staff, as well as document analysis. The data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

Findings – The findings reveal that school management in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is carried out through four key stages: planning, organizing, implementation, and monitoring. In the planning stage, schools conduct curriculum planning meetings, diagnostic assessments, and teacher training programs. The organizing stage involves the establishment of curriculum development teams and teacher performance assessment teams. During implementation, teachers apply teaching modules aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum while schools conduct workshops and professional development activities to strengthen teachers' competencies. Monitoring and evaluation are conducted through summative assessments, the National Assessment (ANBK), and the use of educational report data. These findings highlight the crucial role of school leadership and collaborative management in ensuring the effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The study contributes to the understanding of school-level management practices that can support curriculum reform in the Indonesian education system.

Keywords: Educational Management, Merdeka Curriculum; Secondary School; Curriculum management; Curriculum Reform.

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INTRODUCTION

Education plays a fundamental role in improving the quality of human resources and supporting sustainable national development (Cong, D. H., 2025). In many countries, educational reform has become a strategic effort to improve learning outcomes, strengthen institutional capacity, and respond to the rapid changes occurring in the global knowledge economy. One of the most significant instruments of educational reform is

curriculum development. Curriculum reforms are often implemented to align educational systems with new pedagogical approaches, technological advancements, and societal needs (Grimus, M., 2020). Consequently, changes in curriculum policies require schools to adapt their organizational structures, teaching practices, and management strategies to ensure successful implementation.

In Indonesia, one of the most recent curriculum reforms is the introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum, which was developed as part of the national strategy for learning recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic (Rizaldi, D. R., & Fatimah, Z., 2023). The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes flexible learning, competency-based education, and the development of students' character through the Pancasila Student Profile (Firdaus, I. A., 2026). Unlike previous curricula, the Merdeka Curriculum provides greater autonomy for schools and teachers to design learning activities that are relevant to the needs and characteristics of students (Hunaepi, H., & Suharta, I., 2024). Schools are encouraged to develop innovative learning approaches, integrate project-based learning, and create more student-centered learning environments.

Although the Merdeka Curriculum provides opportunities for educational innovation, its successful implementation depends not only on policy formulation but also on effective management at the school level. Curriculum reform is essentially an organizational process that requires coordination among school leaders, teachers, administrative staff, and other stakeholders (Sullanmaa, J., et.al., 2019). Effective school management is therefore essential to ensure that curriculum policies are translated into concrete educational practices (Díez, F., et.al., 2020). School leaders must organize institutional resources, facilitate teacher professional development, and establish effective monitoring systems to support curriculum implementation.

In the field of educational management, the implementation of organizational functions such as planning, organizing, implementing, and monitoring plays an important role in managing educational change (Nurhikmah, N., 2024). According to George R. Terry's management framework, these functions represent key managerial processes that enable organizations to achieve their goals effectively and efficiently (Dewi, A. D. M., & Sahal, Y. F. D., 2025). Within the context of schools, these management functions help ensure that curriculum implementation is systematically planned, well-coordinated among stakeholders, effectively carried out by teachers, and continuously evaluated for improvement.

Previous studies have examined various aspects of curriculum reform and educational change. For example, Successful educational reform requires strong leadership (Reyes, V. C., 2023), collaborative school cultures (Hu, Y., & Duyar, I., 2024), and continuous professional development for teachers (Ambon, J., et.al., 2024). Similarly, Gading, S. J. L. (2024) highlight the importance of school leadership in shaping organizational conditions that support instructional improvement. Their research demonstrates that effective leadership can significantly influence teacher performance, student learning outcomes, and the sustainability of educational innovation.

Research on curriculum implementation also highlights the role of school leadership and institutional capacity in supporting educational reforms. Kilag, O. K. T., & Sasan, J. M. (2023) argues that instructional leadership plays a critical role in guiding teachers, coordinating curriculum implementation, and improving the quality of teaching and learning. Effective school leadership enables educational institutions to adapt to policy changes and to maintain organizational coherence during periods of reform.

In the Indonesian context, several studies have examined the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in schools. Andayani, S., Noor, M., & Subandowo, D. (2024) found that the Merdeka Curriculum encourages the adoption of student-centered learning and the development of 21st-century competencies. Their study suggests that curriculum flexibility allows teachers to design learning experiences that better accommodate students' individual differences. Similarly, Sukaesi et al. (2025) reported that the Merdeka Curriculum contributes to improving the quality of learning by providing greater autonomy to schools and teachers in designing educational programs.

Other studies have also highlighted challenges in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, including teacher readiness, limited understanding of curriculum guidelines, and the need for professional development. These studies emphasize that teachers play a crucial role in adapting curriculum reforms into classroom practices. However, most of these studies focus primarily on pedagogical aspects of curriculum implementation, particularly classroom instruction, teaching strategies, and teacher competencies. This study poses two research questions. First, what does the management of the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum at secondary schools in Mataram? Second, what is the role of teachers in implementing the Merdeka curriculum at secondary schools in Mataram?

Despite the growing body of literature on the Merdeka Curriculum, relatively limited attention has been given to the organizational and managerial dimensions of curriculum implementation at the school level. In particular, there is still a lack of empirical research that examines how school management processes support the implementation of curriculum reform. Existing studies rarely explore how key management functions—such as planning, organizing, implementing, and monitoring—are applied within schools to facilitate curriculum change. Furthermore, many previous studies examine curriculum implementation from a single institutional perspective, often focusing solely on teacher experiences or policy analysis. This approach provides valuable insights into classroom practices but does not fully capture the complex organizational processes that occur within educational institutions. Curriculum reform is not only a pedagogical transformation but also an organizational change that requires coordination among multiple actors within the school system.

Another limitation in the existing literature is the lack of contextual analysis at the regional level. Educational institutions in Indonesia operate within diverse social, cultural, and institutional environments that may influence how curriculum reforms are implemented. Understanding how schools in specific regions organize and manage

curriculum implementation is therefore important to identify institutional strategies and contextual challenges that shape educational reform processes.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to explore school management practices in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in secondary schools in Mataram City, Indonesia. Specifically, this research examines how schools manage curriculum implementation through four key management functions: planning, organizing, implementation, and monitoring. By investigating these managerial processes across multiple schools, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how educational institutions operate curriculum reform at the organizational level. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the literature on educational management and curriculum reform by providing empirical insights into school-level management practices that support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. In addition, this research offers practical implications for school leaders, policymakers, and educational practitioners in developing effective management strategies for curriculum implementation in secondary education.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a case study design to explore how school management practices support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in secondary schools. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of social phenomena, institutional practices, and participants' perspectives within their natural context. The case study design was considered appropriate for examining complex organizational processes occurring within schools during the implementation of curriculum reform.

The study was conducted in six secondary schools located in Mataram City, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. The selected schools consisted of three senior high schools (SMA) and three junior high schools (SMP) that had begun implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The schools included SMA Negeri 3 Mataram, SMA Negeri 6 Mataram, SMA Negeri 7 Mataram, SMP IT Anak Soleh Mataram, SMP Negeri 9 Mataram, and SMP Negeri 18 Mataram. The criteria for the purposive sampling of these six secondary schools were based on two considerations. First, the selection of these six secondary schools was the result of the researcher's preliminary survey prior to conducting the study. Before conducting the study, the researcher made visits as initial observations to several secondary schools to map out and select schools that ideally implemented the Merdeka curriculum educational management system. Second, the selection of the six secondary schools also took into account recommendations from the Mataram City Education Office, as the government agency responsible for overseeing and evaluating educational institutions under its jurisdiction. Another consideration for selecting these six schools as the research sample stemmed from discussions and feedback received from the Mataram community regarding the success of these secondary schools in implementing the Merdeka curriculum.

This study collected interview data from approximately 12 respondents, who served as the study's data sources. These 12 sources were selected based on their key roles in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at secondary schools in the city of Mataram. The individuals interviewed were those directly responsible for planning, carrying out, and overseeing the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, such as school principals, vice principals, vice principals in charge of curriculum (curriculum vice principals), and subject teachers.

Before conducting the interviews, the researcher first visited the schools and met with the administrators of the educational institutions serving as the research sites. These visits were also intended to establish communication and obtain consent for the interviews, along with agreements regarding the confidentiality of the interview data used in this study. The interviews were in-depth and lasted approximately 1–2 hours. The interview questions were formulated specifically and in detail in accordance with the research problem and themes to be analyzed, presented in a coherent manner, and the interviews were clearly recorded. The data obtained from the interviews were cross-checked with findings from observations and compared with accounts provided by various parties. The interview recordings are transcribed and thoroughly analyzed, then reported in the form of a well-structured and organized research report.

Participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals who were directly involved in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The participants included school principals, vice principals, teachers, and educational staff. These participants were considered key informants because they play important roles in planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating curriculum-related programs within their respective schools.

Data were collected through three main techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Direct observations were conducted at each participating school to examine how school management practices support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Observations focused on school activities related to curriculum planning, coordination meetings, teacher training activities, and learning implementation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with school principals, teachers, and administrative staff involved in curriculum management. The interviews aimed to gather information about planning processes, organizational structures, implementation strategies, and evaluation practices related to the Merdeka Curriculum. Documentation data were collected from school records and institutional documents related to curriculum implementation. These included curriculum planning documents, school operational curriculum (KOSP), teaching modules, training reports, and other relevant institutional materials.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive data analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Matthew B. Miles, A. M. H. J. S., 2014). Data reduction involved selecting, simplifying, and organizing relevant information obtained from observations,

interviews, and documentation. Data display involved presenting the data in an organized form to facilitate interpretation and pattern identification. Conclusion drawing and verification involved interpreting the findings and confirming the consistency of the results across different data sources. To ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings, this study applied data triangulation. Triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from different data sources, including interviews, observations, and documentation. This process helped validate the findings and ensure that the interpretations accurately reflected the real conditions of curriculum implementation in the participating schools.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The Indonesian Government has issued a policy through Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology Decision No. 56 of 2022 regarding guidelines for the implementation of the curriculum in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum learning recovery (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology Decision, 2022). This decision sets out the principles of learning within the Merdeka curriculum, which comprises three types of learning: intracurricular learning, co-curricular learning and extracurricular learning. This curriculum aims to return the authority for educational management to schools and local governments. The authority for management referred to here relates to granting flexibility to schools and local governments in planning, implementing and evaluating educational programmes carried out in schools.

The delivery of learning within the Merdeka curriculum is carried out in several stages, which are followed systematically. First, the Diagnostic Assessment. This is the stage at which a teacher conducts an initial assessment—or initial observation—to identify pupils' potential, characteristics, needs, stage of development and level of learning achievement. The Diagnostic Assessment stage is usually carried out at the start of the academic year, so that the results of the observations and analyses conducted by the teacher can be used as material for evaluation and planning in the following academic year or semester. Second, the planning stage, which is the subsequent stage, where a teacher designs the learning process in accordance with the results of the Diagnostic Assessment and groups pupils based on their ability levels. Third, the learning stage. During the learning process, teachers are encouraged to carry out formative assessments on a regular basis to monitor pupils' learning progress and adjust teaching methods accordingly. At the end of each learning process, teachers may also conduct summative assessments to evaluate the achievement of learning objectives (Sukaesi et al., 2025).

The findings from the observation, collection and analysis of data regarding school management in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at six secondary schools in the city of Mataram can be summarised by the researcher into four main aspects, namely: planning, organisation, implementation and monitoring in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Planning of Merdeka Curriculum Implementation

Planning represents the initial stage of school management in preparing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in secondary schools in Mataram City. The findings reveal that schools conduct systematic planning processes through several interconnected activities, including gathering information about the Merdeka Curriculum, strengthening teacher capacity, assessing institutional readiness, conducting planning meetings, utilizing evaluation data, adopting best practices from other schools, and identifying students' learning characteristics through diagnostic assessments.

One of the first steps in the planning process involves collecting information about the Merdeka Curriculum and strengthening teachers' understanding of its implementation. Schools organize training activities and encourage teachers to participate in professional development programs provided through the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM). These activities aim to enhance teachers' readiness in implementing the curriculum. As explained by a sociology teacher at SMA Negeri 7 Mataram:

Planning begins by seeking information about the Merdeka Curriculum. The school also conducts training on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, and teachers participate in activities available on the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM). (Sociology Teacher, SMA Negeri 7 Mataram, 2025)

The interview data suggest that teacher preparation is considered an essential element in the planning stage. By participating in training programs and accessing teaching resources through digital platforms, teachers are better equipped to understand the principles and teaching strategies required by the Merdeka Curriculum.

In addition to improving teacher readiness, schools also assess their institutional readiness before implementing the new curriculum. This includes evaluating the availability of facilities and infrastructure, the competencies of teachers, and the characteristics of students. As stated by the vice principal of SMP IT Anak Soleh Mataram:

In our planning process, we first examine the readiness of teachers, school facilities, and students. Since the facilities are adequate and many teachers are relatively young and able to adapt quickly, we decided that the school was ready to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. After that, we developed the School Operational Curriculum (KOSP) as a guideline for organizing learning activities in the school. In SMP IT, grades 7 and 8 use the 2013 Curriculum, while grade 9 still uses the 2013 Curriculum but incorporates elements of the Merdeka Curriculum. We also conduct work meetings and student diagnostic assessments. (Vice Principal of SMP IT Anak Soleh Mataram, 2025)

The data indicate that school readiness plays an important role in determining the implementation strategy of the curriculum. Schools evaluate their internal capacities before adopting the Merdeka Curriculum to ensure that the implementation process can run effectively.

Another important component of the planning process is the organization of institutional planning meetings, commonly referred to as annual work meetings (rapat

kerja). These meetings are conducted at the beginning of the academic year to design educational programs and determine school development strategies for the upcoming year. In addition, schools use evaluation data such as the education report card (rapor pendidikan) as a reference for developing improvement programs. As explained by the principal of SMP IT Anak Soleh Mataram:

The Merdeka Curriculum has been implemented for two years. At the beginning of each academic year, we hold a work meeting to plan school programs for the next year. We use the education report card as a reference for developing school programs, and aspects that still need improvement will be addressed through school development programs. (Principal of SMP IT Anak Soleh Mataram, 2025)

The use of evaluation data enables schools to identify institutional weaknesses and design targeted improvement strategies. This indicates that curriculum planning is not only based on policy guidelines but also on reflective evaluation of previous educational performance.

Furthermore, schools also adopt best practices from driving schools (Sekolah Penggerak) as references in designing curriculum implementation strategies. However, these practices are adapted through internal discussions to ensure their suitability with the school's context. As described by the vice principal of SMA Negeri 3 Mataram:

SMA 3 is part of the Independent Change School program in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Our planning process involves developing practices that have already been implemented in driving schools. After discussing and evaluating them, we adopt the practices that are more suitable for our school context. Teachers who are not yet familiar with the curriculum can access teaching modules available in the system while receiving guidance from school leaders. At the beginning of the academic year, the school conducted planning meetings and socialization sessions. (Vice Principal of SMA Negeri 3 Mataram, 2025)

Another important aspect of the planning process is the identification of students' learning characteristics through diagnostic assessments. Schools conduct both cognitive and non-cognitive diagnostic tests at the beginning of the academic year, particularly for new students. The results of these assessments are used to design learning strategies that accommodate the diverse needs of students.

The findings indicate that the planning of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation involves several strategic processes, including improving teacher capacity, assessing institutional readiness, organizing planning meetings, utilizing evaluation data, adopting best practices from other schools, and conducting student diagnostic assessments. These processes demonstrate that curriculum planning is conducted comprehensively to ensure that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum aligns with both institutional capacity and students' learning needs.

Organizing of the Merdeka Curriculum Implementation

The organizing stage refers to how schools structure roles, responsibilities, and coordination mechanisms to support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The

findings indicate that schools establish organizational structures through coordination among educators, the development of operational curriculum guidelines, and the clear distribution of tasks among school stakeholders.

One important aspect of the organizing process is institutional coordination among educators and school leaders. Schools maintain continuous communication to ensure that all teachers understand their roles in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Coordination is carried out through both formal and informal mechanisms. Formal coordination occurs through meetings involving school leaders and teachers, while informal communication takes place through direct interactions among educators. As explained by a sociology teacher at SMA Negeri 7 Mataram:

The school always maintains coordination with all educators within the school environment, both formally through vice-principal meetings or teacher meetings and informally through direct communication. (Sociology Teacher, SMA Negeri 7 Mataram, 2025)

The interview data suggest that regular communication among school stakeholders is an important organizational strategy to ensure that curriculum implementation is coordinated effectively. Through formal meetings and informal communication channels, schools are able to discuss challenges, share information, and align educational practices among teachers and administrators.

In addition to maintaining coordination among educators, schools also establish operational curriculum guidelines to regulate the organization of curriculum implementation. These guidelines are formulated during institutional planning meetings and serve as a framework for organizing educational activities. As explained by the vice principal for curriculum at SMP Negeri 18 Mataram:

The school has a School Operational Curriculum (KOSP) that is prepared during the annual work meeting. Within the KOSP, the division of tasks, committees, resources, stakeholders, and even the Person in Charge (PIC) are clearly defined. (Vice Principal for Curriculum, SMP Negeri 18 Mataram, 2025)

The existence of the School Operational Curriculum (KOSP) provides a structured organizational framework for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Through this document, schools clearly define roles, responsibilities, and institutional resources required for curriculum implementation.

The findings indicate that the organizing stage of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation involves the establishment of effective coordination mechanisms among educators and the development of structured operational guidelines. These organizational practices help ensure that curriculum implementation is carried out systematically and collaboratively within the school environment.

Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

The implementation stage refers to how schools carry out learning activities and educational programs based on the Merdeka Curriculum framework. The findings indicate

that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in secondary schools in Mataram City involves several key components, including the use of teaching modules in classroom learning, teacher professional development activities, the implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), and various student development programs.

One important aspect of curriculum implementation is the use of teaching modules as a guide for classroom learning. Teachers are expected to conduct learning activities in accordance with the teaching modules that have been prepared during the planning stage. In addition, schools organize various training programs to strengthen teachers' competencies in implementing the curriculum. As explained by the principal of SMA Negeri 3 Mataram:

Learning activities run as usual, and teachers are expected to teach according to the teaching modules. There are also various training programs to support teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, such as training on curriculum introduction, differentiated learning models, and assessment methods. In extracurricular activities, students are involved in programs such as Parents Day, where students can develop themselves by organizing activities according to their interests. In addition, there are activities called 'Panen Karya,' where students present the results of their learning and projects. (Principal of SMA Negeri 3 Mataram, 2025)

The interview data indicate that teacher training plays an important role in supporting curriculum implementation. These training activities aim to improve teachers' understanding of new learning approaches, such as differentiated instruction and innovative assessment strategies. In addition, schools provide opportunities for students to develop their creativity and interests through various extracurricular activities.

Another important component of curriculum implementation is the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5). The findings show that P5 activities have been implemented in several schools and integrated into the learning process. These activities aim to develop students' character, collaboration skills, and social awareness. As explained by a teacher at SMP IT Anak Soleh Mataram:

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the school has been running quite smoothly. Learning activities can be carried out properly, including the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), which has also been implemented successfully. (Teacher, SMP IT Anak Soleh Mataram, 2025)

However, the findings also reveal that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is still in a transitional stage in some schools. In certain cases, schools continue to use the previous curriculum (Curriculum 2013) for specific grade levels while gradually integrating elements of the Merdeka Curriculum. For example, one school still applies the previous curriculum for grade IX while incorporating elements of P5. As explained by the vice principal of SMP Negeri 9 Mataram:

Grade IX still uses the 2013 Curriculum, but we have incorporated P5 activities. At the moment, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the school is still not fully optimal. Diagnostic tests are still conducted for students, but so far they are

mainly limited to academic subjects. For extracurricular activities, we use interest and talent analysis (ABM). Currently, we are still lacking teaching modules. (Vice Principal of SMP Negeri 9 Mataram, 2025)

The interview data suggest that although the implementation process has begun, schools still face several challenges, such as limited teaching modules and the need for further improvement in instructional practices.

In addition, some schools evaluate the success of curriculum implementation based on national assessment indicators and school evaluation instruments. The results of the National Assessment (ANBK) and the School Environment Survey (Survei Lingkungan Belajar) are used as references to evaluate learning outcomes and institutional performance. As explained by the vice principal of SMP IT Anak Soleh Mataram:

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the school has been quite good, especially if we look at the results of ANBK. There are written tests for students and surveys for teachers such as the School Environment Survey. P5 activities are also conducted regularly, even every week, often integrated with certain subjects such as sustainable lifestyle and democratic values. However, teaching practices still need improvement, particularly in terms of assessment practices.”(Vice Principal of SMP IT Anak Soleh Mataram, 2025)

The findings indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in secondary schools in Mataram City has generally been carried out through the integration of teaching modules, teacher professional development programs, and student-centered learning activities such as P5 projects. However, the implementation process is still evolving, and several challenges remain, particularly in terms of teaching resources, instructional practices, and the transition from previous curriculum systems.

Monitoring and Evaluation of the Merdeka Curriculum Implementation

Monitoring and evaluation constitute the final stage of school management in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The findings indicate that schools conduct evaluation activities through several mechanisms, including summative assessments, national assessment instruments, educational report data, and internal evaluation forums among teachers and school leaders. These evaluation activities aim to measure the effectiveness of curriculum implementation and identify areas that require improvement.

One important mechanism used by schools to evaluate curriculum implementation is summative assessment conducted during the learning process. These assessments include mid-semester and end-of-semester examinations, which are used to measure students' learning achievements and evaluate the effectiveness of teaching practices. As explained by the principal of SMA Negeri 3 Mataram:

The evaluation of the Merdeka Curriculum is conducted through summative assessments. So far, the evaluations include the end-of-semester assessment for the first semester and the mid-semester assessment. The evaluation for the second semester will be conducted soon. The overall evaluator is the principal, while for intraclass activities the evaluator is the curriculum division, for co-curricular activities

it is the co-curricular coordinator, and for extracurricular activities it is the vice principal for student affairs. (Principal of SMA Negeri 3 Mataram, 2025)

The interview data indicate that evaluation activities involve several institutional actors within the school organization. School leaders play a central role in supervising curriculum implementation, while different units within the school are responsible for evaluating specific educational activities.

In addition to internal assessments, schools also utilize national assessment instruments as indicators of curriculum effectiveness. One of the main instruments used is the National Assessment (ANBK), which measures students' literacy and numeracy competencies as well as the quality of the learning environment. As explained by a teacher at SMP Negeri 18 Mataram:

Evaluation in the school is conducted through the National Assessment (ANBK) and through mid-semester and end-of-semester assessments. The overall evaluator is the principal, while the curriculum division plays a more specific role in implementing the evaluation process. (Teacher, SMP Negeri 18 Mataram, 2025)

Another important aspect of the evaluation process is the use of education report cards (*rapor pendidikan*) as indicators of school performance. Schools analyze the results of the national assessment and education report data to determine the level of success in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. As explained by the principal of SMP Negeri 9 Mataram:

We use ANBK and the education report card to measure the success of the Merdeka Curriculum in the school. Fortunately, most indicators show positive results, although there are still some notes regarding teaching staff, particularly because many teachers are still relatively young and lack teaching experience. The evaluators of the Merdeka Curriculum are the principal and the education supervisor. In addition, focus group discussions among subject teachers are used as a forum to evaluate the implementation of the curriculum in each subject area. (Principal of SMP Negeri 9 Mataram, 2025)

The findings also show that schools conduct internal evaluation forums, such as focus group discussions (FGDs) among teachers, to reflect on teaching practices and identify areas for improvement in curriculum implementation. These discussions allow teachers to share experiences, discuss challenges, and develop strategies to improve learning quality.

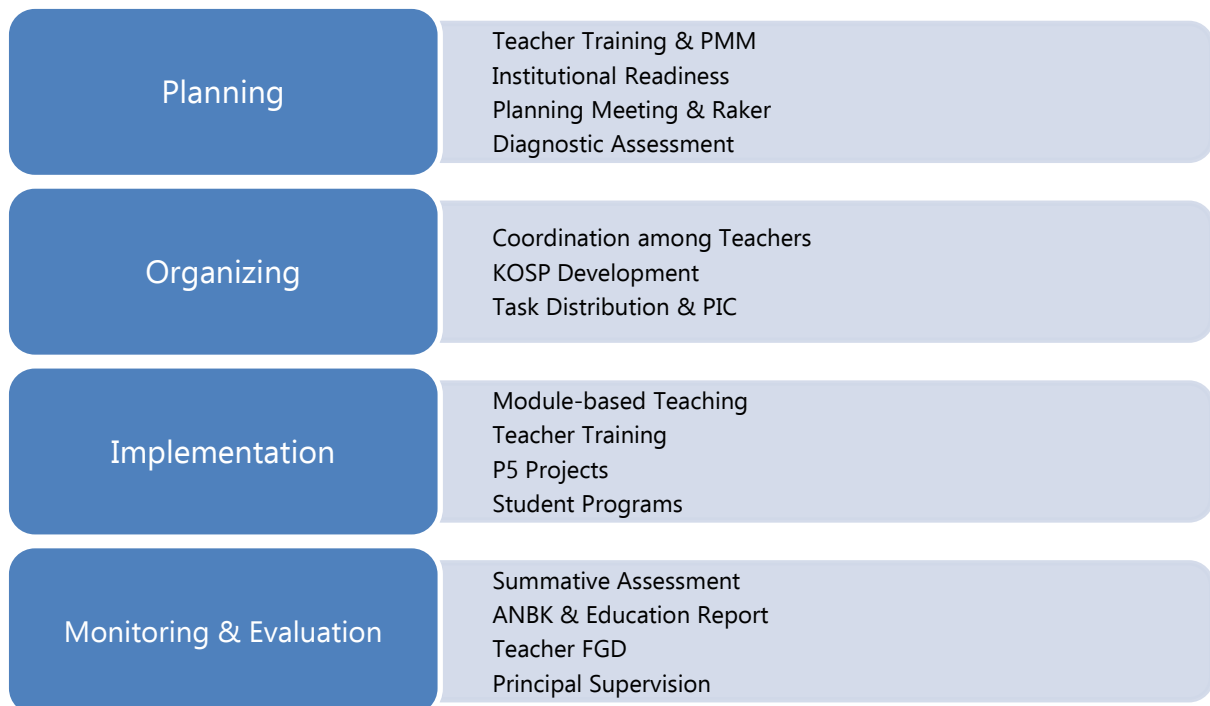
The findings indicate that the monitoring and evaluation of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation involve multiple evaluation mechanisms, including summative assessments, national assessments, education report analysis, and collaborative evaluation forums among educators. These processes enable schools to continuously assess and improve the effectiveness of curriculum implementation within their institutional context.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in secondary schools in Mataram City is managed through four interconnected management functions: planning, organizing, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. These findings suggest that curriculum reform at the school level requires systematic management processes to translate policy changes into effective educational practices.

Figure 1.

Conceptual Model of School Management in the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum



Planning of Curriculum Implementation

The findings indicate that the planning stage involves several strategic activities, including seeking information about the Merdeka Curriculum, strengthening teacher capacity through training programs, assessing institutional readiness, conducting planning meetings, and implementing student diagnostic assessments. These activities highlight the importance of preparation in managing curriculum reform.

Planning plays a fundamental role in educational management because it provides direction for organizational activities and helps institutions allocate resources effectively. According to Kamara, Y., et.al., (2024), strategic planning in educational institutions enables school leaders to identify priorities, develop institutional goals, and prepare teachers for educational change. In this study, schools conducted planning meetings and training activities to prepare teachers and institutional resources before implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

The findings also indicate that teacher preparation is an important component of curriculum planning. Teachers participate in training programs and professional development activities to improve their understanding of the curriculum framework. This finding is consistent with research emphasizing that teacher readiness is one of the most important factors influencing the success of curriculum implementation (Delita, F., et.al., 2025). Professional development programs enable teachers to develop new instructional strategies and adapt to curriculum innovations.

Another important aspect of the planning process identified in this study is the use of diagnostic assessments to understand students' learning characteristics. Diagnostic assessments allow teachers to identify students' abilities and learning needs, which can then be used to design differentiated learning strategies. Research by Djatmika, E. T., & Astutik, P. P. (2023) emphasizes that understanding students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles is essential for implementing effective differentiated instruction.

Organizing of Curriculum Implementation

The findings show that the organizing stage focuses on institutional coordination among educators and the development of operational guidelines such as the School Operational Curriculum (KOSP). Schools maintain coordination through both formal meetings and informal communication among teachers and school leaders.

This finding highlights the importance of organizational collaboration in implementing educational reform. According to Lehmeidi, M. (2025), effective school leadership requires strong coordination mechanisms that enable educators to work collaboratively toward common institutional goals. Coordination among teachers and school leaders facilitates the alignment of educational policies with classroom practices.

The development of KOSP as an operational guideline also reflects the institutionalization of curriculum policies within schools. Organizational structures that clearly define roles, responsibilities, and resources enable schools to implement curriculum reforms more effectively. Ehren, M., & Baxter, J. (2020) argues that well-defined organizational structures help schools manage complex educational processes and ensure accountability among institutional actors.

Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

The findings reveal that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum involves several key components, including module-based teaching, teacher professional development, and project-based learning activities such as the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5). These activities aim to support both academic learning and students' character development.

The emphasis on student-centered learning and project-based activities reflects contemporary approaches to curriculum implementation that focus on developing students' competencies rather than merely delivering content knowledge. According to Ramdani, D., & Susilo, H. (2022), effective learning occurs when students are actively involved in meaningful learning activities that encourage critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity.

However, the findings also show that some schools are still in a transitional stage of curriculum implementation. In several cases, schools continue to combine elements of the previous curriculum with the Merdeka Curriculum. This transitional condition is common in educational reform processes. Law, M. Y. (2022) notes that curriculum change often occurs gradually, as schools require time to adjust institutional practices, develop teacher competencies, and adapt organizational structures.

Monitoring and Evaluation of Curriculum Implementation

The findings indicate that schools conduct monitoring and evaluation through several mechanisms, including summative assessments, the National Assessment (ANBK), education report analysis, and internal evaluation forums such as teacher focus group discussions.

Monitoring and evaluation play an important role in ensuring the effectiveness of curriculum implementation. According to Sundaryanti, N., & Supriyoko, S. (2025), school leaders who actively monitor teaching practices and student learning outcomes contribute significantly to improving school performance. By using both internal and external evaluation instruments, schools can identify strengths and weaknesses in curriculum implementation.

The use of national assessment instruments such as ANBK also demonstrates the increasing role of data in educational decision-making. Data-driven evaluation enables schools to monitor student learning outcomes and develop targeted improvement strategies. Research by Munagandla, V. B., et.al., (2024) highlights that data-informed decision making helps schools improve instructional practices and enhance institutional performance.

CONCLUSION

This study explored school management practices in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in secondary schools in Mataram City. The findings indicate that the implementation process is managed through four interconnected management functions: planning, organizing, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. In the planning stage, schools prepare curriculum implementation through teacher training, institutional readiness assessment, planning meetings, and student diagnostic assessments. The organizing stage focuses on coordination among educators and the development of operational guidelines such as the School Operational Curriculum (KOSP). Meanwhile, the implementation stage involves module-based learning, teacher professional development, and student-centered programs such as the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5). Finally, monitoring and evaluation are conducted through summative assessments, national assessments (ANBK), education report analysis, and internal reflection forums among teachers.

The findings of this study provide both theoretical and practical implications for educational management. From a theoretical perspective, the study confirms that classical management functions—planning, organizing, implementation, and controlling—remain

relevant in managing curriculum reforms at the school level. Curriculum implementation is not only a pedagogical process but also an organizational process that requires effective leadership, coordination, and continuous evaluation. From a practical perspective, the results highlight the importance of strengthening teacher capacity, ensuring institutional readiness, and establishing clear organizational structures to support the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. The research was conducted in a limited number of schools within one city, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research may expand the scope of research by examining curriculum implementation in different regions or educational levels. In addition, future studies could employ mixed method approaches to obtain more comprehensive insights into the factors influencing the successful implementation of curriculum reforms in educational institutions.

DECLARATIONS

Author Contribution

Makki, M., Conceptualization, research design, data analysis, manuscript writing, and corresponding author; **Mustari, M.**, methodology development, data collection, and manuscript review; **Hakim, M.**, data analysis, interpretation of results, and manuscript editing; **Fachry, M.**, data collection, literature review, and technical support in manuscript preparation

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Declaration of AI Use

The authors used artificial intelligence tools solely to assist with language editing and improving the clarity of the manuscript, while all research design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation were conducted entirely by the authors.

Additional Information

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