

ANALYSIS OF INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION IN ENCOURAGING STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS IN ECONOMICS SUBJECTS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum encourages students' critical thinking skills in economic subjects, especially at SMAN 1 Sukaraja and SMAN 49 Jakarta. This research was conducted using descriptive qualitative, where several data collection techniques were carried out, namely interviews, observation, and documentation. The results of this study show that teachers have fully implemented the Merdeka curriculum with interactive strategies such as group discussions, analysis, case study quizzes, and small projects. It was found that this strategy had a positive impact on encouraging students' critical thinking skills. And it was found that students responded positively to the learning strategies used by teachers, especially in economic learning, which means that the strategies carried out produce more active student interactions and hone critical thinking patterns. These results encourage that the strategy carried out in implementing the Merdeka curriculum is one of the solutions to encourage students' critical thinking in economic learning.

Keywords: independent curriculum, economic learning, critical thinking, teacher strategies, implementation, student response

ABSTRAK

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui sejauh mana implementasi kurikulum Merdeka mendorong kemampuan berpikir kritis siswa pada mata pelajaran ekonomi, khususnya di SMAN 1 Sukaraja dan SMAN 49 Jakarta. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan menggunakan deskriptif kualitatif, dimana dilakukan beberapa teknik pengumpulan data, yaitu wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa guru telah sepenuhnya menerapkan kurikulum Merdeka dengan strategi interaktif seperti diskusi kelompok, analisis, kuis studi kasus, dan proyek kecil. Ditemukan bahwa strategi ini berdampak positif dalam mendorong kemampuan berpikir kritis siswa. Dan ditemukan bahwa siswa memberikan respon positif terhadap strategi yang dilakukan yang berarti strategi yang dilakukan menghasilkan interaksi siswa yang lebih aktif dan mengasah pola berpikir kritis. Hasil ini mendorong bahwa strategi yang dilakukan dalam mengimplementasikan kurikulum Merdeka merupakan salah satu solusi untuk mendorong berpikir kritis siswa dalam pembelajaran ekonomi.

Kata Kunci: kurikulum merdeka, pembelajaran ekonomi, berpikir kritis, strategi guru, implementasi, respon siswa

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum changes in Indonesia from time to time are a response to social changes, culture and the times. The Merdeka curriculum is one of the major changes in national education. Created to give teachers and educational institutions more freedom to build learning that is relevant to students' needs, it encourages more active and flexible learning and promotes students' character development and critical thinking skills. This curriculum includes the subject of economics, which is very close to real life. (Kemendikbudristek, 2024)

This study was conducted due to the fact that the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in senior high schools still faces many challenges, including teacher readiness, student character, and availability of facilities. This study focuses on how economics teachers use Merdeka Curriculum at SMAN 1 Sukaraja and SMAN 49 Jakarta. It also discusses how

teachers use active and contextual learning approaches to improve students' critical thinking skills. Not just at the concept or policy level, this study focuses on real classroom practices.

Some recent literature has discussed how the Merdeka Curriculum provides space for learning that is more meaningful and oriented towards strengthening students' critical thinking competencies. (Permana, 2023)(Maratusholihah & Maruti, 2023). However, most of the previous studies have mostly highlighted aspects of curriculum design or implementation at the policy level and have not reviewed in depth how it is implemented in the classroom, especially in Economics subjects that require student involvement in thinking and analyzing problems.

Previous publications have shown the potential of Merdeka Curriculum to enable more varied and customized learning. However, they are still lacking in showing the actual school conditions and how students respond to Merdeka Curriculum-based learning, especially in terms of developing critical thinking skills. This study raises how the teacher's approach, implementation barriers, and student responses to the Merdeka Curriculum in two different schools are described through a descriptive qualitative approach and data triangulation techniques. The results show that learning approaches that allow exploration, discussion, case analysis, and project-based learning can improve critical thinking skills. This is in accordance with the concept of active and contextualized learning promoted by recent curriculum policies. (Tomlinson, 2017) (Kemendikbudristek, 2023)

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explain in detail how Merdeka Curriculum is implemented in economics learning and how it encourages students' critical thinking skills. This research also uses a micro approach, which looks at how teachers use strategies in the classroom and how students respond directly. Thus, this research is expected to help improve future learning practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Independent Curriculum

The independent curriculum is a curriculum presented by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology or commonly called Kemendikbudristek. which is part of efforts to restore post-pandemic learning and develop education that is relevant to the demands of the times. this curriculum is focused on strengthening student competence and character through flexible, differentiated and project-based learning. one of the main characteristics of the independent curriculum is that there is room for teachers to adjust learning materials and methods tailored to the needs and potential of students. this creates a great opportunity to shape a more active and contextual learning process. conceptually, the independent curriculum not only regulates the structure of content in learning, but also emphasizes the learning process that gives meaning to students. The development of the Merdeka Curriculum is carried out by first considering several main foundations, namely philosophical, sociological, and psychopedagogical foundations, also supported by historical and juridical foundations (Subhkan & Wahyudin, 2024). By applying real experiences in the learning process, this approach emphasizes student-centered learning and encourages active student participation, it is hoped that this method will help students in encouraging critical, creative, and adaptive thinking skills (Djaja et al., 2023).

Conceptually, the independent curriculum not only regulates the content structure of learning, but also emphasizes the learning process that gives meaning to students. According to the experts listed by (Asri, 2017), the good and bad results of education are determined by the curriculum, whether it is able to build critical awareness of students or not. In the context of this research, Merdeka Curriculum is understood as a strategy for implementing learning by teachers to reflect the values of flexibility, teacher autonomy, and emphasis on strengthening character through the project of strengthening the Pancasila student profile (P5).

Operationally, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is seen in the way teachers build learning strategies, choose methods, adjust assessments to what students need, and provide learning facilities based on direct experience. where the teacher becomes the main actor to interpret the curriculum through concrete activities in the classroom.

Economics Learning

Economics learning at the high school level is not only about mastering economic theory, but also a means to hone students' critical thinking, analytical, and decision-making skills. Economic learning integrates economic concepts with social reality so that students can understand the economic dynamics that occur in the surrounding environment. Conceptually, economic learning is required to link theory with practice, as well as open space for discussion and critical reflection on contemporary economic issues.

Conceptually, economic learning is required to link theory with practice, as well as open space for discussion and critical reflection on contemporary economic issues. teachers are no longer assigned to be the main source of information, but teachers are used as facilitators who guide students in exploring various points of view on economic problems that occur.

In the context of this research, economic learning operationally includes activities used by teachers in delivering material, guiding discussion rooms, assigning analysis projects, and creating a learning environment that can enable children to think more critically and have the independence to ask questions. strategies used such as group discussions, analyzing news that occurs, and case study-based quizzes are part of efforts to build student understanding more actively and deeply.

Critical Thinking Skills

Critical thinking skills are abilities that allow a person to evaluate information, make logical judgments, and be able to organize based on evidence. In the context of 21st century education, this ability is one of the essential competencies that must be possessed by all students. according to Rahayu, that critical thinking includes the ability to analyze arguments, distinguish facts from opinions, and be able to draw logical and reasonable conclusions. According to (Wijayanti, 2017) Critical thinking involves the process of logically evaluating information to produce strong decisions or arguments. Learning is a tool to prepare students to become members of society in order to live responsibly and actively in a technology-based society, so schools at all levels should focus on developing students' critical thinking skills. According to the Indonesian Journal of Philosophy, critical thinking is a skill needed in the development of 21st century skills, which enables individuals to successfully solve problems in difficult situations (Rahardhian, 2022).

In the independent curriculum, critical thinking is part of the dimensions of the Pancasila learner profile, especially in the aspect of critical reasoning. Which means, students are expected not only to understand the content of the material, but also to be able to question, investigate, and formulate solutions to the real problems they are facing. operationally, in this study, students' critical thinking skills are identified through learning activities such as expressing opinions, providing arguments in discussions, compiling analysis of economic issues, and contributing to class projects. from this, researchers assess these indicators through direct observation, direct interviews with teachers and students, and supporting documentation.

METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the aim of describing in depth how the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum encourages students' critical thinking skills in economics subjects. Qualitative research is research that intends to understand the phenomenon of what is experienced by the research subject holistically and by means of descriptions in the form of words and language, in a special natural context by utilizing various scientific methods. Because it aims to understand and describe in depth from the point of view

of the participants or informants involved (Moleong, 2017). This approach is considered relevant because it allows researchers to explore the meaning behind behaviors, practices, and responses that arise in the learning process scientifically, and not in the form of numbers or statistics. The subjects in this study were students and teachers of economics subjects in two schools, namely SMAN 1 Sukaraja and SMAN 49 Jakarta. the selection of informants was carried out using a purposive side technique, which means that the selection of subjects was deliberately based on certain criteria such as direct involvement in the Economic learning process based on the Independent Curriculum.

Data collection was carried out through several techniques, namely in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation. data analysis in this study uses the Miles and Huberman model, which includes three stages, namely first data reduction where the stage of filtering information that is relevant to the focus of the research, second data presentation where the stage of compiling data into narrative form, interview quotes, and field notes, and third conclusion drawing and verification, namely concluding findings based on patterns and themes that emerge repeatedly from the results of field data. to ensure data validity, this study uses source triangulation and data triangulation techniques. Source triangulation is done by comparing data from teachers and students, while data triangulation is done by comparing the results of three different data collection techniques, namely observation interviews, and documentation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum by Economics Teachers

The findings show that both at SMAN 1 Sukaraja and SMAN 49 Jakarta, where teachers have implemented the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum quite consistently. After observations were made, at SMAN 49 Jakarta, the economics teacher encouraged students to analyze economic issues through the news and gave students space to share the results of the analysis through the form of group presentations. meanwhile at SMAN 1 Sukaraja, the teacher applied interactive quizzes and made an economic-based educational game as a method to build students' critical understanding. The implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in both schools begins with the preparation and socialization stages carried out by the school as a form of initial introduction to teachers. This activity is also a place for teacher training to be better prepared to integrate the Merdeka Curriculum into learning activities. Although in its implementation there are still some challenges, the school is still trying its best to run this independent curriculum well. Teachers are encouraged to learn the independent curriculum more independently through the Merdeka Mengajar platform which contains various materials related to curriculum changes. This is in line with (Tomlinson, 2017) thinking about differentiated learning, where teachers need to adapt approaches according to student characteristics and readiness. In Merdeka Curriculum, this approach is considered an important part of promoting equitable achievement of minimum competencies (Kemendikbudristek, 2024).

Implementation Constraints

Although the independent curriculum was designed as a transformative effort in Indonesian education, the implementation in the field still faces various obstacles. based on research findings at SMAN 1 Sukaraja and SMAN 49 Jakarta, there are significant challenges in its implementation, especially in the context of learning Economics. At SMAN 1 Sukaraja, one of the main obstacles is the tendency of students to still be accustomed to the old passive way of learning, where students are still not accustomed to active methods such as discussions or analysis projects, and are more comfortable if they only receive explanations from the teacher without being actively involved even though this independent curriculum has entered its fourth year. this shows that the mental readiness and discipline of students' learning is still

a challenge in active learning based on the independent curriculum. Meanwhile, at SMAN 49 Jakarta, the obstacles that arise are more structural. one of the economics teachers has retired and has not been replaced optimally, resulting in an increased teaching load on the remaining teachers. this finding is in line with (Rahayu et al., 2022) which states that limited human resources and infrastructure are still the main obstacles in strengthening the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in various schools.

Teachers' Strategies in Encouraging Critical Thinking

In the face of these challenges, teachers still try to implement learning strategies that support the development of students' critical thinking skills. The economics teacher at SMAN 1 Sukaraja, for example, uses an economic news analysis approach, where students are asked to observe the latest economic phenomena happening around them, then proceed to compile a simple analysis and present it in front of the class. After the presentation, students are given time for a discussion session. This strategy is considered to be able to encourage students to connect between theory and reality and train their courage to express their opinions. Meanwhile, at SMAN 49 Jakarta, the strategies used are more diverse and based on interesting activities. Teachers conduct economic quizzes, small group projects, and open weekly discussion sessions. Teachers also try to build a more open classroom atmosphere, where students can feel comfortable to ask questions and do not need to feel afraid of being wrong. These approaches show a balanced application of contextual, inquiry, and expository strategies, each of which contributes to training students' critical thinking skills. Where contextualization allows students to connect the material to their daily lives (Irawan & Febriyanti, 2016), inquiry strategies encourage active exploration and curiosity (Anggareni et al., 2013), while expository strategies are still used to systematically explain basic materials (Chalish, 2011). With this combination, learning economics becomes more interactive and meaningful.

Student Response to Economic Learning

From the results of interviews, students gave quite positive responses to the learning patterns applied in the Merdeka Curriculum. One of the students of SMAN 1 Sukaraja stated that learning now feels more real and closer to everyday life. students feel more challenged because they are not only to memorize theories, but also invited to analyze and provide solutions to simple economic cases. this response shows that critical thinking skills can indeed be trained in the context of economic learning designed with a contextual and collaborative approach. The students' positive response is in line with constructivistic theory which states that students will learn better when they are directly involved in the process of building their own knowledge. In actively designed Economic learning, students are not only the recipients of information, but also the main actors in the learning process.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the results of research conducted at SMAN 1 Sukaraja and SMAN 49 Jakarta, it can be concluded that the implementation of the independent curriculum in learning Economics has been carried out with various forms of strategy adjustments and approaches that are quite relevant to the needs of students. Teachers in both schools implemented learning strategies that were contextual and encouraged reflective activities, such as analysis of actual economic issues, group discussions, interactive quizzes, and simple projects. This approach is proven to encourage students' engagement in the learning process and gradually improve their critical thinking skills. However, the success of this implementation has not been fully equitable because there are still obstacles such as the lack of teacher readiness in understanding the philosophy of Merdeka Curriculum as a whole, the limited teaching staff, and the lack of optimization of learning facilities and infrastructure.

These obstacles show that the success of curriculum implementation depends not only on the curriculum itself, but also on the readiness of human resources, institutional support,

and the learning culture of students who are still formed by old habits. On the other hand, the strategies implemented by teachers have shown strong potential in creating a more meaningful, active learning space and encouraging higher-order thinking skills. Positive student responses reinforce the finding that the project and discussion-based learning approach is able to increase students' interest and curiosity in Economics material, which was previously considered rigid and theoretical.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that schools and policy makers provide continuous training for teachers in understanding and implementing Merdeka Curriculum to the fullest, especially in the context of Economics learning which requires a practical and contextual approach. In addition, improving learning infrastructure and equitable distribution of teaching staff need to be a serious concern so that strategies that have worked well are not hampered by technical factors. Further research is recommended to further explore the relationship between project-based economic learning and student learning outcomes, as well as expand research objects at different levels or school areas in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum.

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