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An Analysis of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the Instruction of Integrated Natural and Social Sciences (IPAS) in Grade III at SDN 2 Lemahabang

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ABSTRACT

The issuance of the Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 12 of 2024 officially establishes the Merdeka Curriculum as the national curriculum, effective from the 2024/2025 academic year. A notable innovation of this curriculum is the integration of Natural Sciences (IPA) and Social Sciences (IPS) into a single subject called Integrated Natural and Social Sciences (IPAS), distinguishing it from previous curricular frameworks. Despite this advancement, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in the context of IPAS instruction, has not yet fully achieved its intended objectives. This study aims to examine the implementation process, challenges encountered, and educational impacts of the Merdeka Curriculum in IPAS learning, grounded in its core principles. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive methodology, the research was conducted with Grade III teachers and students at SDN 2 Lemahabang. Data collection methods included observation, interviews, and document analysis, with data processed through reduction, display, and conclusion drawing techniques. Triangulation of sources and methods was employed to ensure data validity. Findings reveal that the implementation of IPAS within the Merdeka Curriculum framework is still partially misaligned with its foundational principles. Primary challenges involve time limitations during instruction and assessment phases, compounded by large class sizes. Nevertheless, the adoption of this curriculum has produced positive outcomes for both educators and learners.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education fundamentally bears the responsibility of preparing high-quality human resources, enabling individuals to actively engage with resilience, competitiveness, independence, creativity, and professionalism (Fikriyah et al., 2024). Consequently, learning activities serve as the most effective method to achieve educational objectives. However, realizing these objectives requires careful and strategic preparation. A critical initial step is the development of a curriculum and the provision of supporting resources to facilitate the teaching and learning process. Both students and the broader community, as users of the curriculum, must have their diverse needs and

expectations adequately addressed (Masykur, 2019). Furthermore, changes across various aspects of life are among the consequences of advancements in science and technology in the contemporary era. This has led to a transformation in the conceptual framework for managing lifelong learning, embracing a perspective that recognizes the diversity of human needs essential for survival. Therefore, meeting human needs, both material and spiritual, is an imperative that must be fulfilled.

Curriculum development constitutes a primary driver for changes in instructional management. The curriculum holds a strategic role in the learning process by facilitating the holistic development of learners, encompassing both physical and psychological aspects. Furthermore, the curriculum functions as a benchmark for assessing educational progress within a nation. Consequently, any modifications to the curriculum should be grounded in scholarly reviews and expert evaluations that carefully consider contemporary and future demands and conditions (Masykur, 2019). This principle should serve as a foundational guideline for Indonesia, which has undergone multiple curriculum reforms in its national education system, ensuring that graduates from both schools and universities remain relevant to the evolving needs of society.

The curriculum serves as a fundamental framework in education to achieve specific learning objectives; hence, it is essential to consider the following principles (Fauzan, 2017):

1. The principle of relevance, ensuring alignment between the learning content and societal demands;
2. The principle of flexibility as a foundational concept, providing room for curriculum developers, educators, and students to engage in critical thinking and generate innovative ideas regarding the curriculum;
3. The principle of continuity, guaranteeing coherence and progression of instructional materials across educational levels and types of learning programs;
4. The principles of effectiveness and efficiency, whereby the curriculum design can be effectively implemented and accomplished through learning activities.

Indonesia has experienced several curriculum reforms prior to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in 2022, which was introduced as a strategy to revitalize the learning process (Suhelayanti et al., 2023). This reflects Indonesia's commitment to curriculum development guided by established educational principles. The Merdeka Curriculum adopts a talent- and interest-based approach, granting students the autonomy to select subjects aligned with their interests and capabilities throughout the learning process (Arezsya et al., 2024).

Learning is understood as a transformative process that converts various inputs, such as guiding less-educated students toward greater knowledge and expanding limited perspectives into broader understanding. Students initially exhibiting behaviors and routines that do not reflect positive qualities are expected to develop into disciplined and well-mannered individuals. The emergence of unique learning trajectories among students is indicative of effective and successful learning. A learner is considered to have undergone the learning process once they transition from not knowing to understanding new concepts (Sartika et al., 2022). This underscores the essential role of teachers, students, and schools actively engaging in the learning process in accordance with curriculum guidelines to ensure positive educational outcomes.

A significant feature of the Merdeka Curriculum is the integration of Natural Sciences (IPA) and Social Sciences (IPS) into a single subject: Integrated Natural and Social Sciences (IPAS). This integration mandates schools to allocate 20–30% of instructional time for project-based learning. Such curriculum consolidation addresses contemporary challenges faced by humanity, which have evolved significantly over time, differing markedly from those of previous generations. Addressing these escalating issues necessitates advancements in science and technology. The primary objective of IPAS learning is to cultivate a scientific mindset characterized by strong curiosity, enabling students to think critically and analytically, and to draw well-founded conclusions. This lays the foundation for scientific methodology and fosters wisdom (BSKAP, 2022).

Moreover, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes flexibility and specificity in instruction, focusing on essential content to nurture student competencies at each educational level. The curriculum's relevance and interactivity stand out as key advantages, facilitating meaningful engagement between educators and learners. Successful IPAS learning within this framework depends heavily on active interaction and reciprocal communication (Fadlilah et al., 2024). Nonetheless, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in IPAS instruction presents challenges (Azzahra et al., 2023). Teachers are required to possess a comprehensive understanding of all learning phases, including mastery of learning outcomes, objectives, sequencing of goals, the design of teaching modules in lesson planning, and effective management of assessment data.

2. MERDEKA CURRICULUM

Equal opportunities for every student, regardless of gender, to select subjects according to their interests and skills during the learning process is a key aspect of the Merdeka Curriculum (Amrulloh, 2024). The Merdeka Curriculum embodies the concept of "freedom to learn," granting autonomy to educational institutions, teachers, and students to independently and innovatively enhance their learning experiences.

The philosophy behind the Merdeka Curriculum allows students the freedom to think and act according to their choices while engaging in educational activities. Students are further encouraged to explore their potential

and generate creative ideas. The Merdeka Curriculum aims to cultivate students' noble character through meaningful and effective education, strengthening their faith and devotion to God Almighty as its ultimate goal, while fostering students' creativity, empathy, and motivation to embody the values of Pancasila throughout their lives.

The dynamics of the global labor market, social, cultural, and political landscapes have shifted, alongside national interests related to cultural heritage, nationalism, and the implementation of national development. These changes occur within an international context that must be balanced accordingly. Such transformations are reflected in the 1945 Constitution (UUD 1945) and Pancasila. This context has prompted the Merdeka Curriculum to develop the Pancasila Student Profile program (Wahyudin et al., 2024).

3. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the data collected from the study conducted in Grade 3 at SDN 2 Lemahabang, this discussion is structured around three sources of problem statements, namely:

3.1 Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in IPAS Learning

3.1.1 Planning of IPAS Instruction

Based on interviews with the Grade III teacher at SDN 2 Lemahabang, it was found that the teacher generally demonstrates a thorough understanding of implementing learning according to the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. The teacher understands the Grade III IPAS (Integrated Natural and Social Sciences) learning outcomes outlined in Phase B. After comprehending these outcomes, the teacher identifies key terms to formulate clear learning objectives. Following this, the teacher develops a sequence of learning objectives to structure the instructional process throughout the academic year. Moreover, the teacher is capable of designing and developing teaching modules to guide IPAS instruction both inside and outside the classroom.

However, it is advisable for teachers to develop a comprehensive lesson plan by formulating an Annual Teaching Plan (ATP) for the entire academic year and continuously refining teaching modules to facilitate effective IPAS instruction. Challenges often emerge when teachers struggle with articulating and sequencing learning objectives, frequently stemming from an insufficient foundational understanding of how to derive and structure these objectives in alignment with phase-specific learning outcomes (Putri et al., 2023). Overcoming these challenges is essential to ensure the learning process is carried out efficiently and effectively.

3.1.2 Implementation of IPAS Instruction

Based on observations and interviews conducted with both teachers and students, the learning process aligns well with the guidelines of the Merdeka Curriculum. The teacher facilitates learning in an interactive manner, employing discussions and group work, which enhances student engagement in the IPAS learning process. Within an inspiring learning environment, the teacher leverages the school surroundings as a valuable resource for student learning. Additionally, in a positive and enjoyable classroom atmosphere, the teacher implements question-and-answer sessions that actively involve students, thereby fostering greater motivation and enthusiasm for learning IPAS.

Looking ahead, it is recommended that teachers integrate e-learning strategies into their instructional practices, as e-learning is increasingly utilized to support contemporary learners. Instructional approaches must adapt to technological advancements and evolving educational landscapes. Online learning represents a progressive and innovative development in education. In the digital age, e-learning has become an essential component of student learning, emphasizing the use of technology to enhance the educational process. This integration not only systematizes instruction but also makes learning materials more engaging, thereby stimulating student interest and participation (Novibriawan, 2023).

3.1.3 Processing of Assessment Results

Assessment, which involves the collection and processing of data, is used to identify students' needs, monitor their progress, and evaluate their learning achievements. The results of assessments serve as a foundation for enhancing the quality of instruction. Teachers can assess student performance through both quantitative and qualitative measures, enabling them to compare student outcomes against established learning objectives (Anggraena et al., 2022).

Assessment results can be processed based on individual learning objectives, with summative assessments administered periodically after the completion of one or two objectives. These results are then compiled to reflect each student's achievement. Ultimately, these aggregated achievements are converted into final grades, which represent a student's overall performance in a subject for a semester and serve as official documentation of their attainment of the curriculum goals.

Specifically, the Grade III teacher processes assessment data collected from written tests and observations, which include both qualitative and quantitative information. Assessment processing for each learning objective is conducted following the completion of each thematic unit and is referred to as summative assessment at the material scope. The final grade calculation incorporates results from formative assessments, summative assessments of material units, midterm examinations, and final semester examinations. This assessment processing adheres to the format prescribed by the Merdeka Curriculum.

3.2 Challenges in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in IPAS Learning

The challenges encountered by teachers and students in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum within IPAS instruction are as follows:

3.2.1 Planning of IPAS Instruction

In planning IPAS instruction under the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers face challenges related to limited time, lack of experience, and insufficient training. The brief interval between curriculum transitions has been perceived by teachers as a significant constraint. Nevertheless, teachers can address these time-related challenges by engaging in continuous professional development and competency enhancement. This includes participating in regular teacher working group meetings (KKG), attending webinars focused on the effective use of the Merdeka Mengajar platform, and utilizing free educational platforms accessible to teachers. Moreover, teachers are encouraged to adopt innovative approaches in designing and developing teaching modules that align with the core principles of the Merdeka Curriculum and foster effective learning outcomes (Darwin et al., 2024).

3.2.2 Implementation of IPAS Instruction

In general, the primary challenge experienced by Grade III teachers at SDN 2 Lemahabang pertains to time constraints, largely due to the limited use of technology-based instructional media aligned with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. This limitation impedes students' ability to participate in interactive, inspiring, enjoyable, and motivating learning activities, leading to reduced engagement in IPAS lessons and a diminished understanding of the material delivered by the teacher. To address this, teachers who lack proficiency in digital technology are encouraged to participate in specialized training focused on educational technology integration, digital content design, and learning platform development (Disdik HSU, 2024). Such professional development initiatives would enhance teachers' readiness to deliver effective instruction and facilitate the integration of diverse multimedia resources, such as audio, visual, and video materials, within various educational applications and platforms.

3.2.3 Processing of Assessment Results

Teachers face challenges in processing assessment results, primarily due to time constraints and the large number of students, which hinder the thorough completion of assessments. As a result, teachers struggle to finalize formative and summative assessments for the Chapter 4 curriculum, scheduled during the first semester according to the learning objectives outlined. Nonetheless, teachers can adopt innovative, effective, and efficient digital learning tools to enhance student learning outcomes. One such tool is Quizizz, an accessible digital assessment application that supports learning evaluation and promotes student engagement (Fitriyani, 2022). For teachers unfamiliar with its use, professional development opportunities such as webinars provided by various educational platforms are available to facilitate mastery of this technology.

3.3 The Impact of Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum on the IPAS Learning Process

The impacts of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in IPAS learning on both teachers and students are outlined as follows:

3.3.1 Planning of IPAS Instruction

The third-grade teacher at SDN 2 Lemahabang noted that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in planning IPAS instruction provides varied objectives across all stages of the planning process, thereby enabling teachers to systematically develop learning materials tailored to students' needs. The teacher is able to comprehend the competencies students are expected to achieve by the end of each phase and to identify the competencies and content to be attained within each learning objective.

As a result, the teacher gains a clear framework for delivering instruction throughout the academic year, accompanied by comprehensive guidance on the learning and assessment processes. Teachers can leverage this framework to improve teaching modules in two ways: by selecting or adapting government-provided modules to suit student needs or by independently designing modules aligned with specific content and learner requirements (Maulida, 2022). This method facilitates effective and efficient instruction and enhances students' understanding of the subject matter. Furthermore, interviews with the teacher revealed that designing and developing teaching modules yields positive outcomes for educators.

3.3.2 Implementation of IPAS Instruction

One of the primary indicators of successful learning is student engagement. Students who actively ask questions, participate in discussions, and complete assignments tend to exhibit a deeper understanding than those who remain passive. Moreover, student engagement reflects the teacher's effectiveness in creating a conducive and stimulating learning environment (Tabriji, 2025). In this regard, the implementation of IPAS instruction in Grade III at SDN 2 Lemahabang has demonstrated a positive impact. Classroom activities such as discussions and group work have encouraged greater student involvement, fostering increased motivation and enthusiasm for learning. The integration of accessible learning resources, such as exploring the school environment—has made the learning experience more meaningful and contextually relevant for students. Additionally, interactive dialogue between teachers and students has contributed to an effective and enjoyable learning atmosphere, supporting students' comprehension of IPAS content in a more engaging and accessible way.

3.3.3 Processing of Assessment Results

Assessment plays a critical role in the learning process, serving as a form of feedback that enables teachers to tailor instruction according to students' individual needs, academic progress, and learning outcomes. It is also a key factor in determining students' eligibility for grade promotion or graduation (Mamarimbing, 2024). As such, assessment outcomes offer valuable insights for teachers—not only to gauge how far students have progressed in their learning, but also to adjust instructional materials to align with learning objectives and make informed decisions regarding academic advancement. This has had a demonstrably positive impact on the implementation of IPAS (Integrated Science and Social Studies) in Grade III at SDN 2 Lemahabang.

Challenges faced by teachers in planning IPAS instruction within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum can be mitigated through continuous professional development. Participation in teacher working group (KKG) meetings, engagement in webinars on utilizing the GTK platform, and access to free educational platforms are among the recommended strategies for enhancing teacher competency.

In terms of instructional delivery, it is advisable for educators to integrate e-learning technologies, which are widely used today to support student learning. Teaching approaches must evolve in tandem with technological developments and the shifting demands of modern education. To address time-related constraints in assessment processing and to ensure accuracy, educators are encouraged to leverage available digital platforms. One such platform is Quizizz, an interactive and efficient assessment tool that facilitates more effective evaluation and enhances student engagement in the learning process.

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