APLIKATIF
Journal of Research Trends in Social Sciences and Humanities
DOI: https://doi.org/10.59110/aplikatif.890
Vol. 5 No. 1, March 2025, pp. 15-30

A Comparative Analysis of Curriculum 2013 and Merdeka Curriculum Implementation in Elementary Schools: A Case Study in Pinrang Regency

Abdul Walid[1*], Muhardi[1], Sulaiman[1], Mawardi Jalil Masri[1]

[1]STKIP Darud Da'wah Wal Irsyad Pinrang, Pinrang, Indonesia
*abdulwalid@stkipddipinrang.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The transition from Curriculum 2013 to the Merdeka Curriculum represents a strategic effort to enhance flexibility and personalization in Indonesia's education system. This study conducts a comparative analysis of both curricula at the elementary level, focusing on philosophical foundations, curriculum structure, instructional strategies, assessment systems, and implementation challenges. A case study approach was employed through policy analysis and field observations at two elementary schools in Pinrang Regency. The findings reveal that Curriculum 2013 emphasizes standardized procedures and structured scientific approaches, which often limit instructional flexibility. In contrast, the Merdeka Curriculum adopts a phase-based structure that grants teachers greater autonomy to implement differentiated instruction responsive to students' diverse needs. The integration of the Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5) further strengthens contextual and character-based learning. However, the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum is strongly influenced by teacher readiness and institutional capacity. This study offers empirical insights to support policymakers and schools in designing adaptive curriculum transition strategies grounded in professional development, institutional support, and contextual considerations to ensure sustainable improvement in elementary education quality.

Keywords: *Curriculum 2013; Comparative Analysis; Differentiated Instruction; Elementary Education; Kurikulum Merdeka.*

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum plays a strategic role in the national education system, serving as both a regulatory framework and a practical instrument that translates educational goals into classroom practice. Through the curriculum, national objectives are transformed into structured learning experiences that shape students' knowledge, skills, and character. Since Indonesia's independence, curriculum reforms have been periodically

implemented to respond to social change, technological development, and global competitiveness (Bangquiao et al., 2025). These transformations also reflect efforts to integrate local cultural values while strengthening national identity (Rasidi & Istiningsih, 2025). In the context of 21st-century education, curriculum reform must additionally promote higher-order competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving skills (Cahyaningsih et al., 2025; Ismuni et al., 2024).

For nearly a decade, the 2013 Curriculum has functioned as the primary framework for educational implementation in Indonesia. This curriculum was designed to integrate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains through a scientific approach structured in five stages: observing, questioning, experimenting, reasoning, and communicating. Jamaludin et al. (2021) explain that the 2013 Curriculum emphasizes competency-based learning supported by structured lesson planning and measurable assessment standards. However, several evaluations of its implementation have revealed practical challenges in schools. Teachers frequently report rigid instructional structures, heavy administrative workloads, and limited flexibility in accommodating students' diverse characteristics (Lucero et al., 2025). As a result, learning processes often become procedural and compliance-oriented rather than adaptive and student-centered (Brown, 2003; Ginting et al., 2024).

In response to these challenges, the government introduced the Merdeka Curriculum as part of the Merdeka Belajar policy initiative. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes flexibility, contextual learning, and greater autonomy for teachers in designing instructional activities. It reduces content density, adopts a phase-based learning structure, and strengthens character education through the Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5). Azizah et al. (2023) argue that this curriculum aims to create a learning environment that supports students' talents and interests while promoting deeper conceptual understanding. From a philosophical perspective, the development of the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary level is grounded in emancipatory and learner-centered principles that aim to humanize the learning process (Rahman & Robandi, 2024). Compared to the 2013 Curriculum, the Merdeka Curriculum encourages differentiated instruction and formative assessment as integral components of classroom practice, although their implementation requires strategic preparation and teacher readiness (Hajis & Othman, 2024).

The transition from the 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum involves significant changes in curriculum structure, instructional planning, assessment systems, and classroom management. These changes include the shift from weekly lesson-hour regulation to annual time allocation, the replacement of RPP with Modul Ajar, and the introduction of integrated assessment criteria (KKTP). Ramadhan (2023) emphasizes that without adequate understanding and preparation, these structural changes may lead to inconsistencies in implementation quality across schools. Empirical findings from pilot elementary schools also indicate that the transition process requires institutional adaptation and continuous professional support (Purwanti et al., 2024). Therefore, examining how both curricula operate in practice becomes essential, particularly at the elementary school level, which forms the foundation of students' academic and character development.

Although several studies have discussed the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum, most focus on conceptual analysis or evaluate only one curriculum independently. Some studies have begun to explore the coexistence

or dual implementation of both curricula (Qoiriyyah & Mustofa, 2025), yet comprehensive comparative empirical investigations within the same local context, especially at the elementary school level, remain limited. In particular, there is still a need for research that simultaneously analyzes philosophical foundations, curriculum structure, instructional strategies, assessment systems, and field-level challenges in an integrated manner. This gap highlights the importance of conducting a contextual and evidence-based comparative analysis to better understand how curriculum reform is enacted in real classroom settings.

This study is conducted in Pinrang Regency, South Sulawesi Province, where schools are actively transitioning toward the Merdeka Curriculum. UPT SDN 275 Pinrang and UPT SDN 80 Pinrang were selected because both schools have experience implementing the 2013 Curriculum and are currently applying the Merdeka Curriculum. By examining these two schools, this research seeks to provide empirical insight into how curriculum changes are interpreted and implemented by school leaders, teachers, and students.

The analysis in this study focuses on five key aspects: (1) philosophical foundations of each curriculum, (2) curriculum structure and subject organization, (3) instructional methods, particularly differentiated learning practices, (4) assessment systems and reporting mechanisms, and (5) field implementation challenges and institutional support. By exploring these aspects comparatively, this research aims to identify strengths, limitations, and practical implications of both curricula.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the discourse on curriculum reform in Indonesia by providing an integrated comparative analysis grounded in field data rather than solely policy interpretation. Practically, the findings are expected to support policymakers, school leaders, and teachers in designing more effective transition strategies and professional development programs. Through this contextual investigation, the study seeks to ensure that curriculum reform leads not only to structural changes but also to meaningful improvement in learning quality at the elementary school level.

METHOD

The application of appropriate methodological procedures constitutes an indispensable prerequisite for ensuring the quality and validity of findings in scientific research. In this study, the researcher adopts a qualitative approach combined with a case study method. The choice of a qualitative paradigm is grounded in the need to explore educational phenomena in a naturalistic manner, whereby the researcher seeks to understand the meanings underlying curriculum policy transitions from the perspectives of educational stakeholders in real-world settings. As emphasized by (Vasileiou et al., 2018), the principal strength of qualitative research lies in its capacity to generate in-depth and comprehensive insights, even when involving a relatively small number of participants. Using a case study method, the researcher is afforded the opportunity to examine complex interactions among multiple educational variables while simultaneously accounting for the unique contextual factors present within each educational unit.

More specifically, this research is classified as a collective case study. This design is employed to obtain a broader and more integrative understanding of the comparative implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum. By investigating more than one research site, the researcher is able to conduct cross-case analysis, which facilitates the identification of recurring patterns as well as context-specific variations across schools. This approach is particularly crucial given that the implementation of national education policies often undergoes diverse forms of adaptation depending on factors such as human resource capacity, school leadership, and the availability of infrastructure at the local level. Accordingly, collective case study design is considered the most relevant framework for examining the discrepancy between policy ideals and implementation realities in primary schools.

The research sites were purposively selected from two public primary schools in Pinrang Regency, South Sulawesi Province, namely UPT SDN 275 Pinrang and UPT SDN 80 Pinrang. The selection criteria were based on the schools' established experience in implementing the 2013 Curriculum and their current position in the critical transition phase toward the Merdeka Curriculum. Pinrang Regency was chosen to provide a distinctive geographical and sociocultural context, as it represents educational dynamics outside the provincial administrative center. The research timeline was systematically designed to span three months, from October to December 2025. This period coincided with the active phase of the odd semester, during which the adaptation of new instructional tools was intensively underway, thereby enabling the researcher to capture the curriculum transition process in real time.

In determining research participants, purposive sampling was employed to identify informants who possessed the most relevant and information-rich experiences aligned with the research objectives. The primary informants consisted of two school principals who held full responsibility for managerial decision-making and curriculum transition processes within their respective schools. Additionally, six classroom teachers were involved, selected based on specific criteria: a minimum of three years of teaching experience using the 2013 Curriculum and active engagement in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. This criterion was deemed essential to ensure that the teachers possessed a robust comparative foundation derived from their own professional practice. To strengthen the primary data, ten students from Grades IV and V were also included as supporting informants. Student involvement aimed to capture the extent to which the curriculum transition influenced their learning experiences, ensuring that the data encompassed not only administrative perspectives but also pedagogical dimensions from the learners' standpoint.

Data collection techniques in this study comprised a combination of in-depth interviews, passive participatory observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format to provide flexibility for informants to articulate their experiences and perspectives narratively. The interviews focused on five principal dimensions: philosophical understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum, technical differences in lesson planning, changes in instructional strategies, assessment mechanisms, and subjective perceptions of perceived advantages and challenges. Throughout each interview session, the researcher endeavored to establish a dialogical atmosphere to encourage honest and reflective responses, including the disclosure of administrative or technical constraints that may not be documented in official records.

Simultaneously, field observations were conducted using a non-participant observation technique. In this method, the researcher assumed the role of an objective observer, monitoring classroom dynamics without intervening in the instructional process. Observations focused on teacher–student interactions, the implementation of differentiated learning strategies characteristic of the Merdeka Curriculum, and the utilization of innovative instructional media. The researcher also observed how teachers conducted authentic assessments during instructional time. All observational findings were meticulously recorded in field notes and supported by visual documentation in the form of photographs. This observational data played a critical role in validating whether the practices reported in interviews were genuinely enacted in classroom settings.

Complementing the techniques, document analysis was employed as the third data collection method. The researcher conducted a critical examination of various curricular documents utilized by the schools, including lesson plans (RPP) based on the 2013 Curriculum and teaching modules aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum. The analysis aimed to identify differences in learning objective structures, time allocation, and content organization between the two curricula. In addition, assessment instruments, textbooks, and documents related to the Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5) were reviewed. Document analysis served as a factual foundation that reinforced the verbal data from interviews and the visual data from observations, thereby creating a triangulated dataset with mutually corroborating evidence.

Following data collection, the analysis process adhered to the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman. This process is not linear but cyclical, involving continuous interaction among data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was conducted by sorting and categorizing the extensive raw data obtained from the field. The researcher concentrated on key thematic domains such as philosophical foundations, curriculum structure, instructional methods, and evaluation systems. Irrelevant or repetitive information was eliminated to sharpen the analytical focus. Through this reduction process, the initially broad and complex data were systematically organized into a more coherent conceptual framework while retaining analytical depth.

The subsequent stage involved data display, wherein the reduced data were organized into logical narratives, comparative tables, and flowcharts. These displays were designed to facilitate readers' understanding of the discrepancies between the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum in Pinrang Regency. For instance, comparative tables were used to illustrate differences in instructional time allocation across subjects, while flowcharts depicted formative assessment processes. Systematic data presentation enabled the researcher to discern relationships among variables more clearly prior to drawing conclusions. Conclusion drawing was conducted progressively, beginning with tentative interpretations and culminating in final conclusions that had undergone rigorous verification.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings, a comprehensive triangulation strategy was employed. Source triangulation involved comparing perspectives from school principals, teachers, and students regarding the same phenomena. For example, teachers' claims concerning the relative ease of assessment systems under the Merdeka Curriculum were cross validated with data obtained from principal interviews and student responses. Technique triangulation was conducted by examining the consistency among interview data, classroom observations, and

documentary evidence. Additionally, time triangulation was applied by conducting observations across different instructional periods to ensure that the observed phenomena were not merely situational occurrences.

As a final measure to safeguard data quality, member checking was conducted. This process involved engaging key informants to review draft findings or interview transcripts prepared by the researcher. The purpose of member checking was to ensure that the interpretations and narratives accurately reflected the informants' intended meanings. This step is particularly critical in qualitative research to mitigate excessive researcher bias. Through this rigorous and systematic methodological framework, the study is expected to produce credible and original analyses that contribute meaningfully to the discourse on curriculum policy development at the primary education level.

RESULT

Based on data collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis at UPT SDN 275 Pinrang and UPT SDN 80 Pinrang, this study identified findings concerning the comparative implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum across five main aspects: philosophical foundations, curriculum structure and subject organization, instructional methods, assessment systems, and field implementation.

Comparison of Philosophical Foundations

The findings reveal a substantial discrepancy at the fundamental level between the two curriculum models. The 2013 Curriculum is grounded in a synthesis of perennialism, essentialism, experimentalism, and social reconstructionism. Its primary orientation is the strengthening of core competencies that holistically integrate spiritual, affective, cognitive, and psychomotor dimensions (Sugianti et al., 2022). In contrast, the Merdeka Curriculum adopts a broader philosophical spectrum ranging from idealism to humanism, with a strong emphasis on the educational philosophy of Ki Hajar Dewantara. Its central focus lies in the emancipation of learners and teachers through pedagogical freedom (Cabey et al., 2024).

In-depth interviews with school principals at research sites confirm that the Merdeka Curriculum provides greater discretionary space for educators to interpret and enact educational values in accordance with local sociocultural realities. This stands in contrast to the 2013 Curriculum, which tends to be instructional in nature, follows more rigid patterns, and prioritizes uniform national standardization. Accordingly, this transition signifies a shift from a centralized and inflexible educational model toward a more adaptive and learner-centered educational ecosystem.

Interview data indicate that 5 of 6 teachers experienced increased autonomy in designing learning activities under the Merdeka Curriculum, whereas under the 2013 Curriculum only 1 teacher reported similar flexibility. This demonstrates that philosophical differences directly influence instructional practice.

Comparison of Curriculum Structure and Subject Organization

Substantial differences between the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum are evident in the organization of curriculum structures and the composition of subjects at the primary school level. Under the 2013 Curriculum, instructional time allocation is

strictly regulated by the central government, which determines a fixed number of lesson hours per week for each grade level. In contrast, the Merdeka Curriculum applies a more flexible managerial approach by determining instructional hours on an annual basis. This framework provides schools and teachers with greater autonomy to distribute weekly teaching time in accordance with students' needs and contextual characteristics.

In addition to time flexibility, the Merdeka Curriculum restructures subject organization through the integration of Natural Sciences and Social Sciences into a unified subject known as Natural and Social Sciences (IPAS) at the primary level. English is positioned as an elective subject and is implemented depending on institutional readiness. Empirical data from UPT SDN 275 Pinrang and UPT SDN 80 Pinrang demonstrate observable adjustments in instructional time allocation. For instance, in Grade 1, weekly instructional hours decreased from 30 under the 2013 Curriculum to 27 under the Merdeka Curriculum. In Grade 2, instructional hours were reduced from 32 to 27 hours per week. Similar adjustments occurred in higher grades, such as Grades IV and V, where weekly instructional hours shifted from 38 to 33.

The reduction in face-to-face instructional hours does not signify a decrease in learning intensity. Rather, approximately 20 percent of the annual instructional allocation is designated for the implementation of the Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5). This structural adjustment reflects the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on achieving balance between academic competency development and character education through contextual and project-based learning activities.

Table 1. Comparison of the Structure of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum at the Primary School Level

Aspect	2013 Curriculum	Merdeka Curriculum
Organization	Weekly organization per semester	Annual organization with weekly flexibility
Competency Framework	Annual Basic Competencies (Kompetensi Dasar/KD) to achieve Core Competencies (Kompetensi Inti/KI)	Learning Outcomes (Capaian Pembelajaran/CP) by phase (Phase A: Grades 1–2; Phase B: Grades 3–4; Phase C: Grades 5–6)
Distinctive Subjects	Natural Sciences (IPA) and Social Sciences (IPS) taught separately	Integrated Natural and Social Sciences (IPAS)
English Language	Local content (optional)	Elective subject
Instructional Hours (Grade 1)	30 lessons per week	27 lessons per week
Instructional Hours (Grades 4–5)	38 lessons per week	33 lesson hours per week + 20% allocated to P5
Special Projects	Not included	Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5)

Comparison of Instructional Methods

Methodological discrepancies in classroom instructional processes constitute one of the most critical findings derived from observations conducted at UPT SDN 275 Pinrang and UPT SDN 80 Pinrang. The implementation of the 2013 Curriculum remains heavily reliant on a scientific approach that is systematic and measurable, structured through the 5M instructional syntax observing, questioning, experimenting, reasoning, and communicating. This approach generates learning sequences that tend to be rigid and highly standardized, positioning teachers as facilitators operating within predefined instructional frameworks.

In contrast, educators who have adopted the Merdeka Curriculum demonstrate greater pedagogical autonomy through the implementation of differentiated instruction. This model no longer applies uniform treatment to all students; instead, instructional strategies are flexibly adapted based on individual levels of achievement and personal learner characteristics.

Classroom observations across 12 instructional sessions show that teacher-dominated activity accounted for 65–70% of classroom time under the 2013 Curriculum, while student-centered activities reached 55–60% under the Merdeka Curriculum. Active student participation increased from 9–11 students to 17–19 students per class.

The essence of differentiated instruction represents a concrete manifestation of the "Merdeka Belajar" vision, which seeks to accommodate the heterogeneity of learners' needs to optimize their unique potential. Based on empirical observations at the research sites, this strategy is operationalized through three primary pillars as articulated by (Yuli et al., 2023). First, content differentiation is implemented by adjusting the depth of learning materials and instructional resources according to students' readiness levels and cognitive profiles. Second, process differentiation is realized through variations in meaningful learning activities, including tiered assignments and flexible grouping, to ensure that each student can internalize concepts at an appropriate learning pace.

Third, product differentiation provides students with opportunities to demonstrate their mastery of learning outcomes through diverse formats of original work aligned with their individual interests. The integration of these three strategies indicates that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Pinrang Regency has begun to shift from methodological standardization toward a more inclusive model of educational personalization. Consequently, teachers are no longer solely focused on linear content completion but instead prioritize the effectiveness of knowledge acquisition in alignment with diverse learning profiles within the classroom.

Comparison of Assessment Systems

The assessment systems embedded within the two curricula reveal both philosophical and technical differences. The 2013 Curriculum applies minimum mastery criteria (KKM) based on the principle of mastery learning, in which attitudes, knowledge, and skills are assessed separately. In contrast, the Merdeka Curriculum employs learning objective attainment criteria (KKTP) and adopts a differentiated assessment strategy grounded in an integrated evaluation of attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Document analysis of assessment practices in both schools indicates that:

Table 2. Comparison of Assessment Systems in the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum

Aspect	2013 Curriculum	Merdeka Curriculum
Assessment Model	Segmented (attitude, knowledge, skills)	Integrated holistic evaluation
Criteria	KKM (Minimum Mastery)	KKTP (Learning Objective Attainment)
Assessment Focus	Summative-dominant	Continuous formative & diagnostic
Reporting	Single report card	Academic report + P5 report

Assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes strengthened formative assessment and the use of assessment results to design instruction aligned with students' stages of learning achievement. This includes enhanced authentic assessment, particularly within the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), without separating scores for attitudes, knowledge, and skills.

Field Implementation

Empirical data collected through interviews and classroom observations indicate that the implementation of both curricula at UPT SDN 275 Pinrang and UPT SDN 80 Pinrang presents diverse challenges. The 2013 Curriculum is perceived as technically less complex in instructional practice, largely because of its long-standing application, which has enabled teachers to adapt to its standardized structural patterns. However, teachers consistently report increased administrative workload, particularly in relation to the detailed preparation of lesson plans (Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran or RPP) and the segmented documentation procedures required for assessment.

Interviews with ten students reveal that 80 percent reported higher learning motivation under the Merdeka Curriculum. At the same time, classroom observations show that approximately 25 to 30 percent of lower-achieving students require intensive scaffolding during the implementation of differentiated instruction.

The transition to the Merdeka Curriculum provides broader pedagogical autonomy for teachers but simultaneously demands substantial adaptation and a shift in instructional paradigms. Several substantive findings emerge from this transition. First, regarding teacher competence and readiness, educators who have participated in professional development programs demonstrate greater confidence in classroom management. Nevertheless, they emphasize the need for sustained mentoring, particularly in designing and implementing differentiated learning strategies to ensure instructional effectiveness.

Second, in terms of infrastructure, the availability of textbooks and supplementary teaching modules has been adequate in both schools. However, disparities in digital technology access remain evident, as one school demonstrates more advanced technological facilities, which facilitate faster integration of digital learning practices.

Third, the success of curriculum implementation is closely related to managerial support. School principals at both research sites show strong commitment by allocating time for teacher professional development and facilitating the planning and execution

of Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Projects. This leadership support encourages teachers to engage more confidently in instructional innovation.

From the students' perspective, higher levels of enthusiasm and engagement are observed under the Merdeka Curriculum. This increased engagement is associated with varied learning activities and project-based tasks. Nevertheless, observations also highlight that students with lower academic achievement require more intensive and individualized guidance to prevent widening learning gaps within the differentiated instructional framework.

DISCUSSION

Philosophical Differences and Their Implications for Instructional Practice

The philosophical divergence between the 2013 Curriculum (K-13) and the Merdeka Curriculum represents a fundamental shift in the orientation of Indonesia's educational reform. The 2013 Curriculum is grounded in a synthesis of essentialism, perennialism, and social reconstructionism, emphasizing standardization, accountability, and measurable competencies aligned with nationally regulated benchmarks. As noted by Puad and Ashton (2022), K-13 positions the state as the dominant regulator of educational objectives and assessment, reinforcing uniformity across schools. While this model strengthens equity and accountability, it may also restrict pedagogical flexibility at the classroom level.

Findings from this study indicate that teachers implementing K-13 tended to prioritize compliance with structured lesson plans and competency indicators. Such orientation often resulted in procedural and coverage-focused instruction, limiting opportunities for adaptive and differentiated practices. This pattern aligns with Lucero et al. (2025), who argue that administrative intensification can narrow teachers' instructional creativity and shift focus on technical compliance rather than reflective pedagogy. Thus, although philosophically designed to ensure standard quality, K-13 may inadvertently constrain teacher agency.

A different philosophical orientation is evident in the Merdeka Curriculum, which draws inspiration from Ki Hajar Dewantara's learner-centered and emancipatory educational thought. Rahman and Robandi (2024) emphasize that its foundation at the elementary level promotes contextual responsiveness and the humanization of learning. The findings of this study reveal that teachers operating under the Merdeka framework demonstrated greater autonomy in designing contextual learning activities and adjusting instructional pacing according to students' needs. Nevertheless, this flexibility also demands higher professional competence. As highlighted by Fonsén et al. (2023) and supported by empirical findings from pilot schools (Purwanti et al., 2024), autonomy-based curriculum implementation requires strong pedagogical capacity and sustained institutional support.

These findings suggest that the philosophical distinction between K-13 and the Merdeka Curriculum should not be simplified as rigidity versus flexibility. Rather, the reform signifies a relocation of pedagogical authority from centralized control toward distributed professional discretion. This transition reshapes teacher identity from curriculum implementer to learning designer. At the same time, without adequate professional scaffolding, increased autonomy may generate disparities in instructional

quality across schools. Therefore, philosophical reform must be accompanied by systematic teacher development to ensure that flexibility contributes to consistent and equitable educational practice.

Curriculum Structure: Flexibility versus Standardization

The structural shift from a weekly instructional organization under the 2013 Curriculum to an annual time-allocation framework in the Merdeka Curriculum represents a significant managerial transformation. Under K-13, instructional time was tightly regulated per subject and per week, reinforcing standardized pacing across schools. In contrast, the Merdeka Curriculum provides broader discretion for schools to allocate time flexibly based on learning outcomes and contextual needs. As reported by Hasibuan et al. (2024), this flexibility enables more cohesive thematic integration and interdisciplinary learning, yet it simultaneously requires stronger curriculum planning competencies grounded in student learning data. The findings of this study indicate that while school leaders appreciate the flexibility, they also encounter challenges in maintaining balance between autonomy and accountability.

A notable structural innovation within the Merdeka Curriculum is the integration of Natural Sciences and Social Sciences into the IPAS domain at the elementary level. This consolidation aims to promote inquiry-based learning and strengthen foundational literacy and numeracy skills through interdisciplinary exploration in line with broader 21st-century educational transformation (Cahyaningsih et al., 2025). However, field data reveal adaptive challenges among teachers, particularly those with specialized disciplinary backgrounds who struggle to integrate scientific and social perspectives cohesively. This suggests that structural integration alone does not automatically generate pedagogical coherence; it requires sustained professional development to ensure meaningful interdisciplinary practice.

Another central component of the Merdeka Curriculum is the introduction of the Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5), which occupies approximately 20 to 30 percent of the annual learning load. P5 is designed to cultivate holistic competencies through contextual, project-based activities addressing real-world issues. Observations at the research sites show heightened student engagement and more active participation during P5 implementation compared to conventional classroom instruction. These findings align with Syaharani and Fathoni (2023), who found that P5 strengthens collaborative skills, reflective thinking, and student engagement in elementary settings. Nevertheless, effective implementation requires strong managerial coordination and collaborative planning among teachers to ensure that project themes align with national character education objectives. Similar patterns of institutional adjustment and the need for sustained professional support have also been identified in pilot implementations of the Merdeka Curriculum (Purwanti et al., 2024).

The structural reform embodied in the Merdeka Curriculum illustrates that flexibility in curriculum design can foster innovation and student engagement, but it also introduces new layers of complexity in institutional governance. The transition from standardized weekly scheduling to outcome-based annual planning shifts responsibility toward schools and educators. Without adequate planning capacity and collaborative culture, flexibility may generate inconsistency in implementation quality. Therefore, structural reform must be accompanied by institutional strengthening to ensure that autonomy enhances coherence rather than fragmentation.

Differentiated Instruction: Opportunities and Challenges

The shift from the uniform scientific approach emphasized in the 2013 Curriculum to differentiated instruction under the Merdeka Curriculum represents a significant pedagogical transformation. While K-13 structured learning through standardized stages of observation, questioning, experimentation, reasoning, and communication, the Merdeka Curriculum expects teachers to adapt instruction to diverse learner characteristics. Drawing on Tomlinson's framework, differentiated instruction involves adjustments in content, process, and product to address variations in students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Sukmadana & Sudarti, 2024). This shift signals a move from procedural uniformity toward responsive and learner-centered pedagogy.

Field findings from UPT SDN 275 Pinrang and UPT SDN 80 Pinrang indicate that elements of differentiation were present in classroom practices, although implementation depth varied according to teacher competence and experience. Content differentiation was observed through adjustments in learning materials and reading levels, while process differentiation appeared in the use of tiered questioning and varied task complexity. Product differentiation was reflected in allowing students to present learning outcomes in different formats. However, these practices were not always systematically designed but often applied intuitively. This suggests that conceptual understanding of differentiation does not automatically translate into structured instructional planning.

The findings further reveal that differentiated instruction, while effective in accommodating diverse student abilities, requires substantial preparation time and pedagogical analysis. Teachers reported difficulties in designing multiple learning pathways within classes consisting of 30 to 35 students. This aligns with broader discussions indicating that differentiation increases instructional complexity and demands strong classroom management skills and data-informed decision-making. Without adequate professional training and collaborative planning structures, the expectation of differentiation may create additional workload pressure rather than instructional empowerment.

The implementation of differentiated instruction within the Merdeka Curriculum presents both opportunity and challenge. It offers a pathway toward more equitable and inclusive learning experiences, yet it also exposes disparities in teacher readiness. Therefore, the success of differentiated pedagogy depends not only on curricular design but also on sustained capacity building, mentoring systems, and realistic workload regulation to ensure that responsiveness to diversity remains pedagogically meaningful rather than administratively burdensome.

Assessment System: From Segmented to Holistic Evaluation

The transformation from the segmented assessment model of the 2013 Curriculum to the holistic evaluation framework of the Merdeka Curriculum reflects a conceptual reorientation in measuring student competence. Under K-13, attitudes, knowledge, and skills were assessed separately, often resulting in compartmentalized reporting structures. While this model provided clarity and measurable indicators, it sometimes fragmented the representation of student learning. The Merdeka Curriculum integrates these dimensions within a more coherent formative assessment framework, emphasizing continuous feedback and the development of higher-order thinking skills and character formation. Ramdhani et al. (2024) support this perspective, noting that

integrated formative assessment strengthens learning quality by positioning evaluation as part of the instructional process rather than merely an outcome measurement tool.

Field findings in the present study show that teachers perceive the holistic model as more reflective of authentic student development. The use of Kriteria Ketercapaian Tujuan Pembelajaran (KKTP), replacing the former Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM), allows teachers to define achievement benchmarks based on learning objectives and contextual classroom realities. This flexibility enhances alignment between assessment and instructional design. However, the shift also introduces new demands. Several teachers reported difficulties in formulating precise KKTP indicators and conducting diagnostic analysis to determine appropriate achievement thresholds.

These findings echo de Vries et al. (2022), who emphasize that learning-objective-based assessment systems require strong assessment literacy and sustained professional development. Without adequate understanding of formative evaluation principles, the transition from segmented to holistic assessment risks becoming procedural rather than transformative. Thus, while the Merdeka Curriculum's assessment reform promotes a more integrated and meaningful evaluation approach, its effectiveness depends largely on teachers' analytical competence and institutional support structures.

Taken together, the evolution of the assessment system illustrates that structural reform alone does not guarantee pedagogical improvement. Holistic evaluation demands a shift in mindset from score-oriented measurement toward growth-oriented learning monitoring. Therefore, strengthening teachers' assessment literacy is essential to ensure that the integrated model advances authentic student development rather than reproducing new forms of administrative complexity.

Implications for Educational Policy

The findings of this study indicate that the transition from the 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum requires more than administrative adjustment; it necessitates systemic capacity building at multiple levels of the education system. The reform entails a shift in pedagogical orientation, assessment practices, and instructional planning structures. Therefore, policy responses should not be limited to regulatory directives but must address teacher competence, school leadership, and institutional readiness as interconnected components of curriculum implementation.

Empirical evidence from UPT SDN 275 Pinrang and UPT SDN 80 Pinrang demonstrates that the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum is strongly influenced by sustained professional development and collaborative support mechanisms. Teachers require ongoing, practice-oriented training to operationalize differentiated instruction and holistic assessment frameworks effectively. In addition, structured mentoring and supervisory assistance are essential to translate curricular autonomy into pedagogical coherence. The role of school principals emerges as particularly critical, as instructional leadership fosters collaborative cultures that support reflective practice and innovation.

Policy implications also extend to resource allocation and stakeholder engagement. Flexible curriculum structures demand diversified learning materials and adaptive planning tools aligned with student characteristics. Furthermore, constructive communication with parents is necessary to align expectations regarding learner autonomy and project-based learning approaches. Without shared understanding

among educators, school leaders, and families, philosophical reform may encounter resistance or misinterpretation at the implementation level.

These findings suggest that successful curriculum transformation depends on integrated policy design that aligns regulatory frameworks with professional development systems and institutional support structures. Curriculum reform should therefore be accompanied by structured mentoring programs, leadership strengthening initiatives, and realistic workload management to ensure that autonomy enhances instructional quality rather than generating implementation disparities. In this sense, educational policy must function as an enabling ecosystem that sustains pedagogical transformation at the classroom level.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the transition from the 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum at the primary school level in Pinrang Regency represents a fundamental reorientation of educational practice from centralized standardization toward pedagogical flexibility. The 2013 Curriculum, grounded in perennialist and essentialist traditions with strong emphasis on standardized competency attainment, has shifted toward the Merdeka Belajar framework inspired by Ki Hajar Dewantara's learner-centered philosophy. This transformation affects curriculum structure through the adoption of a phase-based learning system, the integration of Natural and Social Sciences into IPAS, and the allocation of approximately 20 to 30 percent of annual instructional time for the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project.

Instructionally, the reform marks a transition from the uniform 5M scientific approach to differentiated learning practices that allow teachers to adjust content, process, and product according to students' learning profiles. At the same time, this autonomy requires higher levels of professional competence. The assessment system also reflects this shift, moving from segmented evaluation based on Minimum Mastery Criteria to a holistic framework grounded in Learning Objective Attainment Criteria and integrated reporting mechanisms.

However, the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum depends on systemic readiness. Findings from UPT SDN 275 Pinrang and UPT SDN 80 Pinrang demonstrate that successful implementation requires sustained teacher professional development, adaptive instructional leadership, adequate infrastructure, and collaborative communication with stakeholders. Therefore, curriculum transition should be accompanied by contextual capacity strengthening to ensure that pedagogical flexibility leads to meaningful improvement in primary education quality.

REFERENCES

Azizah, S. Y., Khairat, A., Barroso, U., & Maja, G. (2023). Implications of the implementation of the independent curriculum for the development of students' talents and interests. *Lingeduca: Journal of Language and Education Studies, 2*(3), 187–195. https://doi.org/10.55849/lingeduca.v2i3.311

Bangquiao, S. G., et al. (2025). Curriculum reform and trends: Analyzing the evolution of curriculum, the challenges of innovation, and the role of technology in modern

curriculum. *Pantao: International Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences, 4*(3). https://doi.org/10.69651/pijhss0403422

Brown, K. L. (2003). From teacher-centered to learner-centered curriculum: Improving learning in diverse classrooms. *Education, 124*(1), 49–54.

Cabey, W., Strand, N., & Marshall, E. (2024). What might it mean to embrace emancipatory pedagogy in medical education? *AMA Journal of Ethics, 26*(1), e48. https://doi.org/10.1001/amajethics.2024.48

Cahyaningsih, A., et al. (2025). Transformasi kurikulum dalam menghadapi tantangan pendidikan abad 21. *Jurnal Nakula, 3*(3), 352–367. https://doi.org/10.61132/nakula.v3i3.1845

de Vries, J. A., Dimosthenous, A., Schildkamp, K., & Visscher, A. J. (2022). The impact on student achievement of an assessment for learning teacher professional development program. *Studies in Educational Evaluation, 74*, 101184. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2022.101184

Elli Sulistyaningsih. (2023). *[Judul artikel sesuai publikasi asli]*. [Nama Jurnal], [Volume(Issue)], [halaman].

Fonsén, E., Szecsi, T., Kupila, P., Liinamaa, T., Halpern, C., & Repo, M. (2023). Teachers' pedagogical leadership in early childhood education. *Educational Research, 65*(1), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2022.2147855

Ginting, D., et al. (2024). Student-centered learning in the digital age: In-class adaptive instruction and best practices. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education, 13*(3). https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v13i3.27497

Hajis, S. A., & Othman, N. (2024). Navigating challenges and strategies in implementing differentiated instruction: A conceptual overview. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business & Social Sciences, 14*(8). https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v14-i8/22153

Hasibuan, A. R. G., Amalia, A., Resky, M., Adelin, N., Muafa, N. F., & Zulfikri, M. A. (2024). Prinsip pembelajaran Kurikulum Merdeka: Tinjauan holistik paradigma Ki Hajar Dewantara sebagai pendekatan. *NUSRA: Jurnal Penelitian Dan Ilmu Pendidikan, 5*(2), 663–673. https://doi.org/10.55681/nusra.v5i2.2287

Ismuni, M., et al. (2024). Digital trends and 21st century competencies in educational transformation. *Kontigensi: Jurnal Ilmiah Manajemen, 12*(2), 930–939. https://doi.org/10.56457/jimk.v12i2.649

Jamaludin, U., Awiria, A., Sudrajat, A., & Prawira, A. Y. (2021). Analysis of character education values in 4th grade student thematic books in the 2013 curriculum. *Al-Ishlah: Jurnal Pendidikan, 13*(2), 1167–1174. https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v13i2.561

Lucero, E. M. Y., et al. (2025). La sobrecarga administrativa y su efecto en la práctica docente de educación general básica. *Boletín Científico Ideas y Voces, 5*(3). https://doi.org/10.60100/bciv.v5i3.237

Puad, L. M. A. Z., & Ashton, K. (2022). A critical analysis of Indonesia's 2013 national curriculum: Tensions between global and local concerns. *The Curriculum Journal*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1002/curj.194

Purwanti, K. L., et al. (2024). Analyzing the Merdeka Curriculum implementation at pilot Islamic elementary schools in Semarang, Indonesia. *Journal of Integrated Elementary Education, 4*(1), 26–41. https://doi.org/10.21580/jieed.v4i1.21249

Qoiriyyah, L. Z., & Mustofa, M. Y. (2025). Implementasi dualisme kurikulum: Kurikulum 2013 dan Kurikulum Merdeka. *Ihsan, 3*(3), 505–512. https://doi.org/10.61104/ihsan.v3i3.1227

Rahman, A., & Robandi, B. (2024). Foundations of Kurikulum Merdeka development in elementary education (From a philosophical perspective). *Inovasi Kurikulum, 21*(1). https://doi.org/10.17509/jik.v21i1.65859

Ramadhan, I. (2023). Dinamika implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di sekolah pada aspek perangkat dan proses pembelajaran. *Academy of Education Journal, 14*(2), 622–634. https://doi.org/10.47200/aoej.v14i2.1835

Ramdhani, L. I., Triana, D. D., & Madani, F. (2024). Enhancing student learning outcomes through formative assessment: A systematic literature review. *Mimbar Ilmu, 29*(3), 529–536. https://doi.org/10.23887/mi.v29i3.89840

Sugianti, L., Purwati, O., Setiawan, S., & Anam, S. (2022). Harmony of the philosophical foundation of English textbooks and the 2013 English curriculum. *Premise: Journal of English Education, 11*(3), 458–475. https://doi.org/10.24127/pj.v11i3.5018

Sukmadana, I. W. A., & Sudarti, N. W. (2024). Pembelajaran berdiferensiasi sebagai upaya menguatkan profil Pelajar Pancasila dalam Kurikulum Merdeka. *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Ilmu Pendidikan, 1*(1), 145–156. https://doi.org/10.62951/prosemnasipi.v1i1.17

Sulistyaningsih, E. (2023). Efforts to improve the quality of human resources in facing global competition in the industrial revolution era 4.0. *Journal of Legal and Cultural Analytics, 1*(4), 217–222. https://doi.org/10.55927/jlca.v1i4.1526

Syaharani, D. M., & Fathoni, A. (2023). The implementation of P5 local wisdom themes in the independent curriculum in elementary schools. *Jurnal Ilmiah Sekolah Dasar, 7*(1), 1–7. https://doi.org/10.23887/jisd.v7i1.56422

Vasileiou, K., Barnett, J., Thorpe, S., & Young, T. (2018). Characterising and justifying sample size sufficiency in interview-based studies: Systematic analysis of qualitative health research over a 15-year period. *BMC Medical Research Methodology, 18*(1), 148. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-018-0594-7

Yuli, R. R., Munandar, K., & Salma, I. M. (2023). Keselarasan implementasi pembelajaran berdiferensiasi dengan visi pedagogis Ki Hajar Dewantara dalam mewujudkan Merdeka Belajar. *Jurnal Teknologi Pendidikan, 1*(2), Article 10. https://doi.org/10.47134/jtp.v1i2.80

Rasidi, R., & Istiningsih, G. (2025). Education based on local wisdom: An alternative model for the integration of cultural values in the school curriculum in Indonesia. *BIS Education*, *1*, V125027-V125027. https://doi.org/10.31603/bised.175