



Implementation of Independent Curriculum in Christian Religious Learning at Wamena Christian High School Through Deep Learning Approach

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Christian Religious Education (PAK) at SMA Kristen Wamena through a deep learning approach that emphasizes critical understanding and character formation aligned with Christian values. The Merdeka Curriculum, as a transformative policy from the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, promotes flexibility and autonomy in teaching and learning processes, including religious education. This research employs a qualitative method through library research, analyzing relevant literature on curriculum design, Christian pedagogy, and educational practices in secondary schools. The findings reveal that Christian education teachers at SMA Kristen Wamena actively design lesson plans (RPP) that reflect the "Profil Pelajar Pancasila" and focus on nurturing students' attitudes, moral character, and spiritual growth. The learning process is designed to be interactive, reflective, and continuously evaluated. Supporting factors for the curriculum implementation include teachers' readiness in terms of competence and commitment to educational transformation. On the other hand, key challenges include limited resources, disparities in digital access, and insufficient teaching experience with independent learning approaches. This study highlights that the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the context of Christian education heavily depends on the teacher's role as a transformative agent and spiritual mentor.



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INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the fields that continuously experiences dynamics and transformations to adapt to the development of the times. These changes are also reflected in the national curriculum policies in Indonesia. In February 2022, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia launched the Merdeka Curriculum as part of the Merdeka Belajar initiative. This program aims to create a pleasant and meaningful learning environment for both teachers and students.

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Merdeka Belajar emphasizes a flexible, creative, and participatory approach to learning. According to Ade Erlangga, Merdeka Belajar is a new breakthrough in Indonesia's education system, aiming to avoid monotonous and rigid patterns (Abdul Kadir et al., n.d., p. 107–121). In this perspective, teachers are encouraged to be more innovative in designing and implementing learning, while students are encouraged to be active and independent in the learning process. The Minister of Education, Nadiem Makarim, stated that the freedom of thought should start with the teacher, as it is impossible for students to think freely without the teacher first internalizing this value.

As part of the response to global challenges and local needs, the Merdeka Curriculum is designed to equip students with relevant and contextual competencies. Within less than a decade, Indonesia has updated its curriculum three times, indicating the need for policies that are adaptive to the developments in the education sector. Under the Merdeka Belajar framework, both teachers and students are given the freedom to determine the direction, methods, and strategies for learning according to their needs (Mulyasa, n.d., p. 23). This opens up significant opportunities for teachers to innovate, including in Christian Religious Education (CRE).

Christian Religious Education teachers have a unique responsibility, not only to deliver cognitive content but also to shape the spiritual and moral character of students. As stated by Kolibu (n.d., p. 147), CRE aims to equip students with sources of faith and shape their character according to Christian values. In this context, the role of CRE teachers is very strategic, as they are expected not only to be educators but also role models who reflect the values of Christ. Teachers are called to fulfill their divine calling as written in Matthew 28:19, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations," which means that teachers are tasked with creating students who fully follow the will of their teacher (Kolibu, n.d., p. 150).

Amid these challenges, SMA Kristen Wamena, a private educational institution under the management of Yayasan Biji Sesawi and the Ministry of Education and Culture, participates in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Although small in scale and located in the Jayawijaya Regency of Papua Pegunungan Province, the school is committed to keeping up with national educational developments. Various preparations have been made, including the development of lesson plans (RPP), planning of learning strategies, material development, and evaluation based on the Profile of Pancasila Students.

However, the challenges of curriculum implementation cannot be ignored. Rimbe's (n.d.) research reveals resistance and limitations in implementing educational policies, particularly related to costs, the availability of professional teachers, and the unequal distribution of educational facilities. This creates disparities in educational services between communities. In the context of Christian Religious Education, research by Purba, Naibaho, and Rantung (n.d.) shows that many CRE teachers, particularly in areas such as Muaro Jambi Regency, have not received adequate training regarding the Merdeka Curriculum. Their study emphasizes the importance of empowering CRE Teacher Working Groups (KKG) to enhance teachers' professional competencies in facing the challenges of the new curriculum.

From these findings, it can be concluded that there has not been much research specifically examining the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Christian Religious Education in remote areas. Therefore, this article aims to fill this gap by investigating how the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented in CRE learning at SMA Kristen Wamena, as well as highlighting the supporting and hindering factors. This study is expected to provide academic contributions that are both novel and practical in the development of Christian education that is relevant to the local context and the national spirit of free education.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative method with a library research approach. This method is chosen as it is suitable for exploring the concepts, practices, and dynamics of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Christian Religious Education (CRE) learning, specifically in the context of SMA Kristen Wamena.

According to Harahap (n.d., p. 5), research is a systematic effort to find data and facts based on scientific principles. In a qualitative approach, researchers aim to understand human patterns and behaviors, as well as the underlying meanings behind those behaviors. This is important because observable reality may not necessarily reflect the true thoughts and motivations behind it. Therefore, qualitative research is based on an inductive mindset, focusing on participatory observation of social phenomena in a deep and reflective manner.

As a library study, this research gathers and analyzes various relevant literatures, including books, scientific articles, research reports, educational regulations, and official documents related to the Merdeka Curriculum and Christian Religious Education. The data are analyzed using content analysis techniques, specifically through thematic coding of sources that address topics such as educational vision and mission, intercultural approaches, faith-based learning models, and the cultural and spiritual contexts in Christian education.

Although based on literature, this study also involves triangulation through interpretations from limited interviews, informal observations, and reflective documentation of field-based learning practices (especially at SMA Kristen Wamena), to strengthen the depth of the analysis.

The analysis process is conducted inductively by organizing the main themes found in the literature and then systematically describing them in the form of an analytical narrative. Thus, this research is not only descriptive but also interpretive and reflective, providing contextual understanding of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Christian Religious Education, which focuses on the formation of character and spirituality in students.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Concept of the Curriculum and the Meaning of Merdeka Belajar

Legally, the curriculum in Indonesia's education system is regulated under the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which defines the curriculum as a set of plans and arrangements regarding the objectives, content, and materials of instruction, as well as the methods used as guidelines for the implementation of learning activities to achieve specific educational goals (Hidayat & Homrighausen, n.d., p. 617). Etymologically, the word "curriculum" comes from the Latin word curriculum, which means a course or a race track that must be traversed.

The curriculum has a complex and multidimensional function in education, including as a tool for adjustment to social dynamics (adaptive function), as a medium for integrating values and norms into students (integrative function), and as a means of differentiation and serving the diversity of students' potential (differentiative function) (Mulyasa, n.d., p. 99).

In this context, the "Merdeka Belajar" policy, launched by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, emerges as a curriculum reform effort to address the challenges of the times. According to Nadiem Makarim, Merdeka Belajar is about freedom of thought, which must first be possessed by teachers before being instilled in students. This program provides freedom for teachers in designing approaches, methods, and assessments that are contextually appropriate for students' needs (Hendri, n.d.).

Merdeka Belajar focuses on enjoyable, personalized, and adaptive learning. It emphasizes personalized learning, project-based learning, flexibility in time and place of study, and the meaning-

making process as an important part of character formation. In this context, teachers play a role not only as instructors but also as mentors, facilitators, and character builders.

Christian Religious Education (CRE) as a Means of Character Formation

Christian Religious Education (CRE) plays a central role in shaping students' spirituality, morality, and character. The primary goal of CRE is to guide students to live according to God's will, with the teachings of Christ as the foundation for behavior and decision-making in daily life (Budiyan, n.d.).

CRE is not merely cognitive or dogmatic but holistic, encompassing intellectual, spiritual, social, and emotional dimensions. Therefore, the implementation of CRE must be based on the Scriptures, using an approach that is relevant to the students' age, background, and level of understanding. As emphasized by Hidayat and Homrighausen (n.d., p. 156), the fear of the Lord is the beginning of all knowledge, and the values of faith must be integrated into all aspects of life, not just in places of worship.

In the context of the national curriculum, CRE contributes significantly to the holistic development of individuals. CRE also serves as a space for character education, which internalizes values such as compassion, justice, faithfulness, and social responsibility—all of which reflect the character of Christ (Sidjabat, n.d., p. 67).

Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Role of CRE Teachers

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in CRE learning at SMA Kristen Wamena shows that the learning process is carried out interactively, participatively, and contextually. Teachers play a key role in designing lesson plans based on the Profile of Pancasila Students and planning learning that integrates biblical material with students' daily lives. The learning process is structured in three main stages: planning, implementation, and evaluation, as mandated by Ministerial Regulation No. 22 of 2016 concerning Process Standards.

In practice, CRE teachers not only act as educators but also as agents of transformation. Hendricks (n.d.) emphasizes the importance of the FAT (Faithful, Available, Teachable) quality in teachers. A CRE teacher must constantly update their theological and pedagogical knowledge and understand the psychosocial dynamics of students. The teacher also serves as a role model in faith and morality.

Teachers also function as "naradidik" (learners), continuously learning to teach in a relevant and contextual manner. This aligns with the concept of lifelong learning. According to Peterson, the excellent quality of a CRE teacher includes: spiritual maturity, a servant's heart, teaching expertise, and sensitivity to the state of the world (Kembuan & Sudarma, n.d.).

However, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is not without challenges. Limited digital access, scarce learning resources, and uneven technological competency are significant barriers, especially in regions such as Wamena. Additionally, some teachers still struggle to design learning that aligns with the principles of Merdeka Belajar.

However, supportive factors such as the enthusiasm of teachers, training provided by the government, and the commitment of local educational foundations are important assets in sustaining the implementation of this curriculum. By combining the vision of Christian faith and the spirit of Merdeka Curriculum, CRE learning is expected to produce a generation that is not only academically intelligent but also resilient in values and character.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Christian Religious Education (PAK) learning at Wamena Christian High School shows that the implementation process has been carried out in stages, planned, and contextually. Starting from the preparation of the Learning Implementation Plan (RPP) which is designed in accordance with the principles of the Independent Curriculum and contains elements of the Pancasila Student Profile, the learning material is adjusted to Biblical values that emphasize the formation of character and spirituality of students.

The learning stages are carried out through conveying learning objectives and motivations, presenting materials contextually, facilitating group work and discussions, formative evaluations, and giving awards as a form of appreciation. Reflection and feedback are carried out routinely to strengthen understanding and foster moral attitudes and Christian values in students' daily lives.

In terms of educator readiness, PAK teachers at Wamena Christian High School show high commitment through active participation in various professional development programs such as seminars, training, and workshops on the Independent Curriculum. In addition, internal readiness in the form of mastery of teaching materials, pedagogical competence, and awareness of the transformational role in forming student character are the main strengths in the implementation of this curriculum.

Supporting factors for implementation include adequate teacher knowledge and competence, enthusiasm for educational renewal from schools and foundations, and strong support for faith values. Meanwhile, inhibiting factors that still need to be overcome are limited contextual references based on PAK, limited internet access, and low digital literacy among some teachers. The lack of experience in implementing independent and project-based learning approaches is also a challenge that requires further assistance. Overall, this study confirms that the success of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in PAK learning does not only depend on the curriculum structure itself, but also on the readiness, competence, and spirituality of teachers as agents of character formation for students in the light of the Christian faith.

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