

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM POLICY AT MADRASAH ALIYAH AL WASHLIYAH, TEBING TINGGI CITY

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum policy at Madrasah Aliyah Al Washliyah, Tebing Tinggi City, as part of the national education policy. The Merdeka Curriculum is designed to provide flexibility for educational units and educators in carrying out learning oriented toward strengthening essential competencies and students' character. This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving informants consisting of the head of the madrasah, vice principal for curriculum affairs, teachers, students, parents, madrasah supervisors, and the madrasah committee. The analysis of policy implementation in this study uses the theoretical framework of Van Meter and Van Horn, which includes policy standards and objectives, resources, communication among implementers, characteristics of implementing organizations, social, economic, and political environments, as well as the attitudes of policy implementers. The results indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum policy at Madrasah Aliyah Al Washliyah, Tebing Tinggi City, has been running fairly well; however, it still faces several obstacles, particularly in terms of human resource readiness, availability of facilities and infrastructure, and optimization of coordination among policy implementers. Therefore, strengthening educator capacity, supporting learning facilities, and adaptive madrasah management are needed so that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum policy can be carried out more optimally.

Keywords: Policy Implementation, Merdeka Curriculum, Madrasah Aliyah

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a strategic role in developing the quality of human resources and determining the direction of a nation's progress. One of the main instruments in the implementation of education is the curriculum, as it serves as a guideline for planning, implementing, and evaluating learning at educational institutions. Curriculum change and renewal are inevitable responses to social dynamics, developments in science and technology, and global demands. In this context, the Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, has established the Merdeka Curriculum as a national education policy aimed at creating learning that is more flexible, contextual, and student-centered.

The Merdeka Curriculum provides greater autonomy for educational units and educators to develop learning in accordance with student characteristics, school needs, and environmental conditions. This policy emphasizes strengthening essential competencies, project-based learning, and character development. For madrasahs, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum presents unique challenges, as it must be aligned with institutional characteristics and Islamic values that are distinctive features of madrasah education.

Conceptually, public policy is understood as whatever governments choose to do or not to do in addressing public issues (Dye, 2006). Policy implementation is a crucial stage in the public policy cycle because it is at this stage that policies are translated into concrete actions in the field. Van Meter and Van Horn explain that the success of policy implementation is influenced by several variables, namely policy standards and objectives, availability of resources, communication among implementers, characteristics of implementing organizations, social, economic, and political environments, and the attitudes of policy implementers. This theoretical framework is relevant for analyzing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum as a national education policy at the level of educational institutions.

Various previous studies indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in educational institutions still faces diverse dynamics. (Rahayu et al. 2022) revealed that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in driving schools has been running fairly well, but still faces limitations in teacher readiness. (Alwan 2021) stated that the application of the Merdeka Curriculum in madrasahs has brought changes in learning patterns but requires continuous adjustment by educators. Meanwhile, (Zakiyah and Achadi 2023) found that madrasahs implementing the Merdeka Curriculum still encounter obstacles in terms of educator training and the availability of instructional materials.

Madrasah Aliyah Al Washliyah, Tebing Tinggi City, is one of the educational institutions that has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum. However, based on preliminary observations, the implementation of this policy still faces various challenges, including human resource readiness, availability of facilities and infrastructure, and policy implementation mechanisms at the madrasah level. Therefore, this study is important to conduct in order to analyze in depth the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum policy at Madrasah Aliyah Al Washliyah, Tebing Tinggi City.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Public Policy

Public policy essentially refers to decisions or actions taken by the government to address public problems and achieve specific goals. Dye (2006) explains that public policy includes everything the government chooses to do or not to do. In the context of education, public policy functions as a guideline for the implementation of the national education system, including the regulation of curricula as the main instrument of learning in educational institutions.

Policy Implementation

Policy implementation is an important stage in the public policy cycle because it determines whether a policy can be implemented in accordance with its intended objectives. Van Meter and Van Horn (in Indihono, Dwiyanto, 2016) state that policy implementation is influenced by several main factors, namely policy standards and objectives, availability of resources, communication among implementers, characteristics of implementing organizations, social, economic, and political environments, and the attitudes of policy implementers. This framework is used in this study to analyze how the Merdeka Curriculum policy is implemented at the madrasah level.

Merdeka Curriculum

The Merdeka Curriculum is a national education policy that provides flexibility for educational units and educators in designing and implementing learning. Barlian (2022) explains that the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes competency-based learning, character strengthening, and providing space for teachers and students to develop their potential according to needs and learning contexts. This curriculum also encourages student-centered learning and the use of various contextual approaches.

In the context of madrasahs, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum needs to be adapted to institutional characteristics and Islamic values. Education in madrasahs not only emphasizes academic aspects but also the formation of students' religious character. Therefore, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum policy in madrasahs requires the readiness of human resources, support for facilities and infrastructure, and madrasah management that is adaptive to policy changes.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. The research location is Madrasah Aliyah Al Washliyah, Tebing Tinggi City. Research informants consist of the head of the madrasah, vice principal for curriculum affairs, teachers, students, parents, madrasah supervisors, and the madrasah committee. Data collection techniques include observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Data analysis uses the interactive model of Miles and Huberman as cited in Sugiyono (2020), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum Policy in Improving Educational Quality at Madrasah Aliyah Al Washliyah, Tebing Tinggi City

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum policy at Madrasah Aliyah Al Washliyah, Tebing Tinggi City, was analyzed using the policy implementation indicators proposed by Van Meter and Van Horn. The use of these indicators aims to assess the extent to which the Merdeka Curriculum policy has been implemented optimally and contributes to improving the quality of education at the madrasah.

Policy Standards and Objectives

Policy standards and objectives represent the benchmarks or goals to be achieved through policy implementation. According to Van Meter and Van Horn in Indiahono and Dwiyanto (2016), the clarity of policy standards and objectives plays a crucial role in determining implementation success, as they serve as guidelines for policy implementers in the field.

The findings indicate that although there is conceptual alignment regarding policy standards and objectives, this alignment has not been fully accompanied by consistent implementation in classroom practices. To achieve optimal policy implementation, further improvement in teachers' understanding and capacity is required, particularly in lesson planning, the selection of student-centered learning strategies, and the implementation of competency-based assessment. Capacity strengthening efforts can be carried out through continuous training, curriculum implementation mentoring, and the reinforcement of teacher learning communities so that the standards and objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum policy can be realized more evenly and sustainably in the madrasah learning process.

Resources

According to Van Meter and Van Horn in Indiahono and Dwiyanto (2016), resources include human resources, financial resources, and facilities and infrastructure that support policy implementation. The availability and readiness of resources are critical factors in determining policy implementation success.

The research findings show that resources in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Madrasah Aliyah Al Washliyah, Tebing Tinggi City, present two interrelated aspects: strengths and weaknesses. On the strength side, curriculum implementation is supported by a relatively high level of teacher commitment and the madrasah's adaptive capacity in aligning the Merdeka Curriculum policy with institutional characteristics and students' needs. This commitment is reflected in teachers' willingness to adjust learning strategies, independently develop instructional materials, and actively participate in professional development activities despite existing limitations.

However, on the weakness side, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum still faces resource constraints, particularly uneven teacher training, limited funding to support learning innovation, and inadequate facilities and infrastructure to support project-based and technology-enhanced learning. These contrasting perspectives reflect the reality of policy implementation at the school level, where policy success is determined not only by goodwill and commitment but also by sufficient, well-managed, and sustainable resource support. This finding underscores the importance of synergy between policy design,

implementer capacity, and resource support to achieve the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum optimally in the madrasah context.

Communication among Implementers

According to Van Meter and Van Horn in Indiahono and Dwiyanto (2016), communication among policy implementers relates to the processes of information dissemination, coordination, and shared understanding among parties involved in policy implementation.

The findings indicate that communication among implementing bodies of the Merdeka Curriculum at Madrasah Aliyah Al Washliyah, Tebing Tinggi City, has been structurally established and demonstrates relatively good coordination. Nevertheless, there is still a need to strengthen technical and operational communication to prevent differences in interpretation during curriculum implementation. Therefore, the development of more detailed implementation guidelines, continuous mentoring, and intensive communication forums is necessary to ensure that the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented more effectively and consistently.

Characteristics and Attitudes of Implementers

According to Van Meter and Van Horn in Indiahono and Dwiyanto (2016), the characteristics and attitudes of implementers refer to the commitment, responsiveness, and readiness of policy actors in accepting and implementing established policies.

Although implementers demonstrate a high level of commitment, limitations in social and economic resources may still constrain implementation effectiveness. In addition, a positive social environment and family support play an important role in project-based learning, as students require moral encouragement and motivation to optimally develop their competencies. An approach that integrates internal support (teachers and school leadership) with external support (parents and the community) has been shown to enhance curriculum implementation success.

Thus, the social, economic, and political environment at Madrasah Aliyah Al Washliyah, Tebing Tinggi City, plays a dual role. A positive social environment and moderate parental support can encourage student engagement, while economic limitations and inadequate facilities remain obstacles that need to be addressed to ensure more effective and sustainable implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum Policy in Improving Educational Quality at Madrasah Aliyah Al Washliyah, Tebing Tinggi City

Supporting Factors

Supporting factors in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum policy at Madrasah Aliyah Al Washliyah, Tebing Tinggi City, include support from madrasah leadership, teachers' commitment to implementing learning activities, and government policies that provide flexibility for educational institutions. In addition, training and mentoring provided by relevant stakeholders have helped the madrasah better understand and implement the Merdeka Curriculum.

Inhibiting Factors

Inhibiting factors in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum policy include limited understanding of the curriculum concept among some teachers, inadequate learning facilities and infrastructure, and suboptimal coordination and communication among policy

implementers. These factors affect the effectiveness of policy implementation and the achievement of educational quality outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and discussion, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum policy at Madrasah Aliyah Al Washliyah, Tebing Tinggi City, has been carried out in accordance with the direction of national education policy; however, the level of implementation has not yet been fully optimal. The implementation of this policy is reflected in the madrasah's understanding of the standards and objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum, the initial application of student-centered learning approaches, and the commitment of school leadership and teachers to adjusting the learning process in line with the principles of the curriculum.

Analysis based on the policy implementation indicators of Van Meter and Van Horn indicates that the clarity of policy standards and objectives has been conceptually understood, but challenges remain at the level of instructional practice. In terms of resources, limitations in the competencies of some teachers, uneven access to training, and inadequate learning facilities and infrastructure affect the effectiveness of Merdeka Curriculum implementation. Meanwhile, communication among policy implementers and the attitudes of implementers demonstrate a relatively strong level of support and commitment, although these are not yet fully supported by a structured and sustainable coordination system.

Supporting factors for the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum policy include support from madrasah leadership, teachers' commitment, the flexibility of government policies, as well as training and mentoring related to curriculum implementation. Conversely, the main inhibiting factors include limited understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum concept among some teachers, insufficient supporting resources, and suboptimal communication and coordination among policy implementers. Therefore, efforts are needed to strengthen educators' capacities, improve learning facilities and infrastructure, and enhance internal management and coordination within the madrasah to ensure that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum policy can be carried out more effectively and sustainably.

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