



# Unleashing Student Creativity: A Dynamic Look at *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum's Impact

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## ABSTRACT

*This study explores the Implementation Analysis of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum at SMKN 10 Luwu to foster creative and innovative students. The research delves into the curriculum implementation process, challenges faced, and outcomes through qualitative descriptive methods, including interviews and observations. Findings reveal successful implementation for the 2022/2023 academic year, showcasing teachers' proficiency in lesson planning and differentiated learning. Challenges include teachers' creative teaching methods, school environment considerations, and resource constraints. Addressing these requires training, community support, improved infrastructure, increased supervision, and collaboration. While the curriculum is effectively applied, refinement is ongoing, and some teachers encounter challenges in assessment timing. Despite this, teachers at SMKN 10 Luwu actively engage in the implementation process.*

## INTRODUCTION

Education plays a crucial role in advancing a nation. We expect it to enlighten the younger generation, enabling them to develop their potential, think critically and dynamically, be responsible, possess noble morals, and have faith in the Almighty. Education should also produce competent human resources regarding attitude, knowledge, and skills. It involves reorganizing experiences to enhance the ability to guide education towards the future ([Prestiadi & Imron, 2020](#); [Rusmini, 2017](#)). According to Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, Article 1 (paragraph 1), education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and a learning process so that students actively develop their potential and talents, leading to spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and the necessary skills for themselves, society, nation, and state ([Indonesia, 2003](#)).

The Ministry of Education and Culture is currently widely introducing the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum to all educational institutions in Indonesia. While varying school readiness levels make simultaneous implementation not mandatory, educational authorities anticipate gradually implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum across all levels, from primary to secondary schools and higher education institutions. Progressively implemented in line with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology policies, the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum allows schools to innovate and develop learning orientations based on their specific needs ([Esteve-Mon, 2023](#); [Zidan, 2023](#)). Expectations are for schools to convey learning in line with basic and core competencies and to provide students with the skills they need for life ([Fauzan & Arifin, 2022](#); [Fauzan et al., 2023](#)).

A hadith narrated by Ibn Majah emphasizes the obligation of seeking knowledge for every Muslim, underlining its importance in pursuing happiness in this world and the hereafter ([Qazwaini, 2008](#)). The pursuit of happiness is closely tied to education, as it represents the goal of every human, signifying a

journey toward perfection. While introducing the *Merdeka belajar* curriculum in Indonesian education is a positive development, it encounters challenges and issues in its implementation due to its novelty. Teachers and other educators may require time to fully understand and adapt to this new curriculum ([Mustafiyanti et al., 2023](#)). An initial observation at SMKN 10 Luwu, with a B accreditation status, reveals that it is among the pioneer schools implementing the *Merdeka belajar* curriculum since May 2023. The flexible nature of this curriculum allows teachers to choose various teaching tools tailored to students' learning needs and interests through differentiated learning ([Prastowo et al., 2020](#)). However, despite the positive impact, implementing the *Merdeka belajar* curriculum faces challenges, such as some teachers' limited understanding of differentiated learning ([Saputra et al., 2023](#)). The vice principal for the curriculum, the implementation of the *Merdeka belajar* curriculum at SMKN 10 Luwu is not yet perfect. Teachers need to enhance their performance as they are still in the process of understanding the new curriculum. Moreover, the assessment of diagnostic tests is often overlooked.

Examining a school located in a rural setting provides an opportunity to study the impact and changes in the learning process. Students' mindsets and character in such an environment differ significantly from those in prestigious and favoured schools. The perceived lag and backwardness become apparent, and school management development becomes a factor affecting the pace of students' learning digestion ([Ingias et al., 2022](#); [Nuruddin et al., 2013](#)). The challenges and obstacles teachers face in implementing the *Merdeka belajar* curriculum, particularly in fostering creative and innovative students, make SMKN 10 Luwu an intriguing research subject. Maemunah's statement, expressing that no researcher has studied the implementation of the *Merdeka belajar* curriculum to foster creative and innovative students, further supports the need for this research. Based on the background above, this research aims to identify the *Merdeka belajar* curriculum's implementation process, the challenges encountered during the implementation, and the outcomes after the curriculum's application. The findings can serve as an evaluation and improvement framework for the future.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Management*

Management, originating from the concept of 'to manage,' revolves around organizing diverse elements, prompting questions about who organizes it, why it needs organization, and the ultimate purpose of such coordination. Generally, organizational structures embed managerial activities, directing them towards achieving organizational goals effectively ([Mahar et al., 2020](#); [Wijaya & Rifa'I, 2018](#)). According to [Larry \(1998\)](#), management is conceiving and attaining desired outcomes through collaborative group efforts, utilizing human talent and available resources. It encompasses directing and mobilizing resources, such as human resources, materials, finances, methods, and markets, to realize organizational objectives ([Larry, 1998](#); [Ratten & Jones, 2021](#)).

[Hersey and Blanchard \(1969\)](#) further elaborate that management is a dynamic process involving collaboration with individuals, groups, and resources to accomplish organizational goals. In essence, diverse organizations confine managerial activities within their frameworks, spanning businesses, governments, schools, and industries. Managers are crucial in influencing personnel, be they employees, workers, or other organization members, utilizing specific methods or activities. The goal is to guide them towards collaborative work following established procedures, job distribution, and supervised responsibilities to collectively achieve common organizational objectives ([Hersey & Blanchard, 1969](#); [Sukawati et al., 2020](#)).

Henry Fayol's management theory outlines five fundamental functions of management: planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating, and controlling. Planning takes precedence as it establishes the groundwork for subsequent actions involving decision-making on processes, execution, and responsibilities. Organizing is crucial for structuring the organization, focusing on departmentalization and the division of labour. Commanding entails providing instructions to facilitate effective collaboration and goal achievement after planning. Coordination is vital for smooth organizational activities, emphasizing formal and informal communication. Controlling addresses incomplete or untimely tasks, exceeding budget plans, and activities misaligned with plans. It involves checking, supervising, and ensuring alignment with management functions and organizational standards to achieve goals. The controlling principles include leadership involvement, clear employee evaluation

standards, and recognition of its importance for goal achievement ([Henry Fayol, 2016](#); [Wei Boon et al., 2021](#)).

### ***Merdeka Belajar Curriculum***

The *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum enhances character development and develops learners' affective, cognitive, and psychomotor abilities. ([Suryaman, 2020](#)). Furthermore, this curriculum involves diverse extracurricular learning to ensure learners have sufficient time to delve into concepts and strengthen competencies. The education system grants teachers the flexibility to choose various teaching tools, allowing them to customize learning to meet the needs and interests of learners ([Arviansyah & Shagena, 2022](#)).

Implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum grants educational institutions, including school principals, teachers, and students, freedom to determine learning topics or themes of interest. They are also free to decide on learning methods according to their needs. Although the government provides a guideline curriculum structure, it is not mandatory to be applied sequentially, as in previous curricula ([Deni Sopiansyah et al., 2021](#)). The *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum concept also emphasizes using technology as a learning tool, such as learning videos, e-books, and online learning platforms. Technology serves as a means to access a broader range of resources, ensuring that information acquired by learners is not limited to textbooks alone ([Handayani et al., 2023](#)).

The *Merdeka belajar* curriculum has positive objectives, such as providing freedom for innovation, encouraging teachers to engage in creative learning, giving students the opportunity for independent learning, and supporting the elaboration of factors that support learning ([Rahayu et al., 2022](#)). Benefits for teachers include flexibility with reduced workload, simplifying lesson plans, and creating an engaging learning environment. Its implementation shifts focus to affective and psychomotor aspects, utilizing interactive, simple, and essential teaching methods ([Arviansyah & Shagena, 2022](#)).

Challenges of the *Merdeka belajar* curriculum include stepping out of the comfort zone of the learning system, lack of experience, limited references, teaching skills, and the inadequacy of facilities and teacher quality ([Bungawati, 2022](#)). Support from various parties and teacher training are necessary to overcome these obstacles. Success indicators involve equal student participation, effective learning, and the absence of student lag through accelerated learning and reinforcement of moral values. In facing challenges and achieving success, support from the government, schools, and the community is crucial. Training and learning for teachers are essential to enhance their competence in implementing the *Merdeka belajar* curriculum ([Anridzo et al., 2022](#)).

### ***Creative and Innovative Students***

The definition of creativity involves several aspects. Firstly, creativity is the ability to imagine or create something new. It encompasses building new ideas by combining, altering, and reapplying existing ideas ([Edward, 2000](#); [Yudha et al., 2018](#)). Creativity also involves an attitude that includes a willingness to accept change and innovation, play with ideas, and possess flexibility in perspective ([Lubart et al., 2022](#)). Furthermore, individuals engage in a continuous and diligent process of creativity to make changes and improve their work ([Walia, 2019](#)). While creativity is a skill, innovation is a process that involves utilizing these skills. In various ways, innovation is employed to achieve success in creating something new ([Kwangmuang et al., 2021](#)). Creativity is the ability to create something new and different, both in the form of ideas and tangible works, by combining existing elements ([Runco & Pritzker, 2020](#)). Meanwhile, innovation involves adding value from creativity and other aspects to everything existing ([Kwangmuang et al., 2021](#)).

Indicators of creative thinking include fluency of thinking, flexibility, elaboration, and originality ([Yustina et al., 2020](#)). Fluency of thought refers to the ability to generate many ideas quickly, while flexibility involves the ability to see problems from different perspectives. Elaboration indicates the ability to develop ideas and add details to make them more interesting. Conversely, originality signifies the ability to generate unique ideas ([Kardoyo et al., 2020](#); [Yustina et al., 2020](#)). Innovation indicators involve creative thinking, innovation, adaptability, and communication skills. Creative thinking skills include generating new ideas and developing existing ones. Innovation skills include producing new beneficial products or services, developing existing products or services, and creating innovative solutions. Adaptability involves adapting to environmental changes and finding new ways to solve

problems. Communication skills include communicating effectively to present innovative ideas ([Gault et al., 2023](#); [Kwangmuang et al., 2021](#)).

## **METHODS**

### ***Research Design***

This study adopts the Narrative Analysis approach, which collects descriptions of events or occurrences and organizes them into a narrative structure ([Imam Gunawan, 2022](#)). The aim is to provide an exposition of the analysis of the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum to foster creative and innovative students at SMK Negeri 10 Luwu. As field research with a qualitative descriptive design, this study focuses on revealing the practices of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum through interactions with the school principal, curriculum deputy, PAI subject teachers, and students, concluding with guidance to enhance understanding of the curriculum.

The qualitative research design comprises four stages. In the planning stage, activities involve determining the research title, formulating the research design, specifying the research location, and preparing research instruments ([Kathleen R. Gilbert, 2001](#)). The implementation stage sees the researcher acting as the executor and human instrument, seeking information through interviews with relevant informants, including the school principal, Deputy Curriculum Coordinator, teachers, and students at SMK Negeri 10 Luwu. Moving on to the data analysis stage, the researcher analyzes the data obtained from direct interviews with those responsible for developing independent learning—namely, the school principal, deputy curriculum coordinator, and teachers at SMK Negeri 10 Luwu. Finally, the report compilation stage marks the concluding phase, where the researcher, after data analysis, prepares the research report in thesis form, followed by consultation with the advisor to ensure readiness for examination.

### ***Research Location and Time***

The location or venue for conducting this research is a State Vocational High School (SMK) in the Bajo Sub-district of Luwu Regency. The timeframe utilized for this research spans approximately 2 (two) months, commencing from the issuance date of the research permit, with 1 (one) month allocated for data collection and another 1 (one) month for data processing, encompassing the formulation in the form of a thesis and the guidance process.

### ***Research Instrument***

The instruments used to collect data in this research involve several tools relevant to the scope of the problem under investigation: interview guidelines, observation or field notes, and documentation formats. The interview guidelines guide the interview process with relevant respondents, while observation or field notes document events or incidents that occur directly in the field. Additionally, researchers use documentation formats to gather data from various documents or recordings relevant to the research. These instruments are selected based on the profound need for a comprehensive and detailed understanding of implementing the *merdeka belajar* curriculum at SMK Negeri 10 Luwu.

### ***Data Analysis***

The data analysis method follows the Miles and Huberman model, involving reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing ([Miles et al., 2011](#)). Data reduction summarises, selects key elements, and focuses on relevant aspects guided by predefined objectives. Subsequently, data presentation utilizes various formats, such as tables, graphs, or text narratives, to organize and convey information effectively. The final step involves concluding, addressing the initially formulated research problems and presenting new findings, which may include descriptions or depictions previously unclear and now clarified through research. Researchers conduct the analysis process interactively, carrying it out during and after the data collection. It ensures they thoroughly and continuously examine the data until they achieve saturation.

## RESULTS

### ***The Implementation Process of the Independent Curriculum to Foster Creative and Innovative Students at SMK Negeri 10 Luwu***

In implementing the independent curriculum, all school stakeholders, led by the Vice Principal for Curriculum, prepare the necessary elements for learning. It includes instructional tools, media, and teacher readiness for implementing lessons throughout the academic year with the Independent Curriculum concept. Preparation involves an initial analysis of the goals regarding the content or material teachers must teach students. Educators prepare teaching materials after formulating Learning Achievements (LA), Learning Objective Flow (LOF), and lesson chapters. Finally, educators perform an understanding of the principles of assessment or evaluation of Independent Curriculum learning to ensure that learning objectives are achieved and measurable.

Based on interviews with the school principal and curriculum deputy at SMKN 10 Luwu and observations at the school, there are similarities and differences in implementing the *merdeka belajar* curriculum. Technically, the implementation of the *merdeka belajar* curriculum involves two levels, namely, classes XI and XII, and takes place over five months. Implementing the *merdeka belajar* curriculum is expected to enhance the creativity and innovation of students as a preparation for entering the industrial or work field. Various aspects support the role of teachers as human resources (HR) in this process, including competency, innovation, creativity, and work ethic. These findings reflect the outcomes of the *merdeka belajar* curriculum implementation process that focuses on creating creative and innovative students at SMKN 10 Luwu.

The insights gathered from interviews regarding implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum at SMK Negeri 10 Luwu provide a comprehensive understanding of the process from various perspectives. The Head Master, Dartono, underscores the initiation steps, implementation requirements, and structural differences between the current independent curriculum and its predecessor. His leadership in promoting a student-centred approach and ensuring consistent supervision highlights the commitment to a successful implementation, further evidenced by post-implementation innovations, such as the introduction of an internet-connected boarding switch.

The Curriculum Deputy, Maemunah S. Pd., sheds light on the collaborative efforts of various stakeholders in meticulous preparation. The detailed phases, from goal analysis to the development of learning tools, showcase the thoroughness required for a curriculum with significant changes. Her emphasis on a profound understanding of assessment principles and consistent monitoring, aligned with the principal's approach, underscores the importance of leadership and evaluation in successfully executing the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum.

From the perspective of Sitti Aisyah, S. Ag., the Islamic Religious Education teacher, the preparation process involves workshops focusing on principles such as freedom and independence. It highlights the criteria for implementation and the transformative role of teachers in integrating religious values and fostering tolerance. Challenges faced during training sessions, including cost and time limitations, are acknowledged, emphasizing the need for ongoing monitoring and continuous follow-up to ensure effective implementation.

Students Nurul Fauziah and Muhammad Alwi provide valuable perspectives on the direct engagement and practical learning facilitated by the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. Their accounts underscore the positive impact on understanding and creativity, with teachers employing innovative media for a more engaging learning experience. In summary, the in-depth analysis of interview results reveals a holistic view of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum implementation, encompassing leadership commitment, collaborative efforts, teacher transformation, and the impact on students' learning experiences.

### ***Challenges Encountered in the Implementation Process of the Independent Curriculum at SMK Negeri 10 Luwu***

During the implementation process of the independent curriculum, schools, teachers, and students inevitably encounter various challenges. These challenges present significant hurdles, necessitating the search for effective solutions to overcome them. Discovering alternative solutions can be implemented demonstrates educators' responsibility and professionalism in addressing professional difficulties, particularly in efforts to enhance the quality of education for students.

The interviews conducted at SMK Negeri 10 Luwu provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges in implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. According to Dartono, the Head Master, a prominent hurdle is the necessity to transform the mindset of teachers from a traditional to a student-centred learning approach. This shift involves treating students as objects and subjects, necessitating contextualized and interactive learning patterns. The proposed solutions revolve around socialization and learning evaluations, focusing on effectively communicating classroom lessons to maximize the transformation in teachers' thinking patterns. Dartono also emphasizes the value of sharing experiences, suggesting that schools can learn from each other's challenges and successes. Additionally, involving education stakeholders, such as parents, is crucial to ensure their active participation and support in the implementation process.

Maemunah S. Pd., the Curriculum Deputy, highlights technical constraints in the implementation process, encompassing limited resources, unstable internet connections, insufficient teacher training, and constrained facilities. To address these challenges, Maemunah advocates for budget allocation to improve technical resources and infrastructure, including hardware and learning software. Collaboration with external parties, such as companies or institutions possessing the necessary technical resources, is also proposed. Maemunah underscores the importance of lessons learned from overcoming challenges, including the need for thorough planning, adequate resource provision, continuous teacher training, and robust leadership support. Success indicators, as outlined by Maemunah, span various aspects such as the availability of resources, improved teacher skills, increased student participation and motivation, and the assessment of learning outcomes. These insights highlight the intricate challenges faced during the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum implementation and propose strategic solutions and lessons for successful adaptation.

### ***Results of Applying the Independent Curriculum to Foster Creative and Innovative Students at SMK Negeri 10 Luwu***

The insights gathered from interviews regarding the results of applying the independent curriculum to foster creative and innovative students at SMK Negeri 10 Luwu offer valuable perspectives from various stakeholders. The Head Master, Dartono, underscores the overwhelmingly positive impacts of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. Students experience a transformative shift in their learning journey, exploring and expressing their interests. The curriculum promotes character development, emphasizing honesty, discipline, responsibility, and creativity while nurturing skills like critical thinking and collaboration. This emphasis extends to the broader community, increasing environmental awareness and social concern. Noteworthy changes include a shift towards student-centered learning, fostering active participation, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Collaboration with industries and internship programs enhances students' understanding of the working world. Teachers, in turn, adopt more creative and responsive approaches, elevating the overall quality of learning. The results suggest a holistic positive impact on students, teachers, and the surrounding environment.

Maemunah S. Pd., the Curriculum Deputy, highlights the positive impacts of the current curriculum, emphasizing a departure from traditional methodologies. The curriculum has increased student comfort and enthusiasm, which is evident in their active participation in various learning stages. School principals have become more flexible in tailoring curricula, enhancing their skills in managing resources and budgets, and improving leadership capabilities. Teachers exhibit increased creativity and adaptability, developing materials that cater to student characteristics. The curriculum's emphasis on freedom benefits students, stimulating individual learning interests and equipping them with essential skills for diverse work environments. The learning experience becomes more engaging and relevant, fostering collaboration among stakeholders. Active and collaborative learning, assessment flexibility, and character development create a dynamic and innovative school environment.

Sitti Aisyah, the Teacher of Islamic Religious Education, notes the positive impact of the Independent Curriculum in increasing students' activity and creativity. The curriculum allows teachers the freedom to enhance educational outcomes, prioritizing conceptual understanding over mere memorization. The emphasis on understanding concepts is considered crucial for effective learning. The Independent Curriculum extends its positive impact beyond the classroom, raising environmental

awareness and social concern in the surrounding community. Changes observed in the school benefit teachers and students, creating an environment that values a deeper understanding of subjects.

Ujang Qasim, the Productive Teacher, provides a dual perspective on the impact of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. It mandates understanding student characteristics and allows for diverse teaching approaches for teachers. The curriculum's emphasis on varied student bodies fosters a dynamic teaching environment. The curriculum introduces an innovative learning atmosphere for students, breaking away from classroom monotony. Projects conducted outside the classroom provide students with a different and engaging learning experience. The Pancasila student profile strengthening project introduces a novel aspect of education, allowing students to explore their emotional, spiritual, and intellectual capabilities.

In summary, the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum at SMK Negeri 10 Luwu has resulted in many positive impacts, transforming student learning experiences, empowering teachers with flexibility and creativity, and fostering an environment that values character development and skill acquisition. The curriculum's holistic approach extends its positive influence beyond the school, impacting the broader community and preparing students for the challenges of the evolving world.

## DISCUSSION

### ***The Process of Implementing the Merdeka belajar curriculum at SMK Negeri 10 Luwu***

Regarding the *Merdeka belajar* curriculum, there are various opinions among educators, both positive and negative. The concept of the curriculum evolves in line with the development of educational theories and practices and varies according to the underlying educational streams or theories. Several indicators of the merdeka belajar program's success include equitable student participation in Indonesian education, effective learning, and the absence of student lag. Based on the information above, this is also in line with the goals of the *merdeka belajar* curriculum, which demands an open learning process, allows for innovation and creativity, and encourages collaboration to teach students to the best of their ability ([Arviansyah & Shagena, 2022](#)).

Teachers are the main actors in school curriculum implementation, and teachers' perceptions of the *merdeka belajar* curriculum become crucial. Teachers have a positive perception and appreciation for implementing the merdeka belajar curriculum, as evidenced by integrating the characteristics of the *merdeka belajar* curriculum into classroom practices ([Prastowo et al., 2020](#)). Teachers have undergone relevant training related to the *Merdeka belajar* curriculum. Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at SMK Negeri 10 Luwu involves a student-centred learning process, allowing educators and education staff to work. Teachers are engaged in training activities for learning readiness, including online training workshops, guidance from expert trainers, and reinforcement through school-level IHT activities. In addition, the school principal continuously monitors the implementation of the Free Curriculum at SMK Negeri 10 Luwu for evaluation.

In the Merdeka Curriculum, learning is not limited to the school environment but can also occur outside the school ([Rahayu et al., 2022](#)). At SMKN 10 Luwu, we also implement it, where one form of learning innovation involves inviting students to visit institutions or offices around the school. Through this learning method, students are encouraged to observe the industrial processes around their living area firsthand ([Mustafiyanti et al., 2023](#)). Students can understand their roles as social beings who depend on each other and understand the processes of social activities ([Wanti & Chastanti, 2023](#)). Furthermore, the application of various media can make learning more innovative in implementing the free curriculum. Media in learning can make learning more lively, helping students better understand the material. Media becomes a means to convey learning materials. Various media used in learning include audio, visual, audio-visual, and multimedia. All of these media can support learning and facilitate teachers in delivering materials to students. Moreover, media use is also an adjustment of the education process to the development of the times, during the Industrial Revolution era, where all aspects of life, including learning, should use technology ([Salim et al., 2019](#)).

Learning innovation in the Merdeka Curriculum ensures that education can keep up with the times and the needs of students in an ever-changing era. The Merdeka Curriculum is a flexible approach to education that grants freedom to schools and teachers to design learning that fits local contexts, student needs, and technological advancements ([Arviansyah & Shagena, 2022](#)). In the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum, we expect students to unleash their creativity. To shape creative students, SMK Negeri 10

Luwu utilizes the Canva application as one of the learning media. In assignments, teachers use Canva as a medium for creating tasks.

In the current era, we expect students to be adept at keeping up with the times. In the free curriculum, assigning tasks no longer relies on conventional questions. Nowadays, teachers must innovate in assigning tasks. Canva becomes one option for teachers when giving project assignments to students. Canva can help students develop ideas, imagination, and creative thinking. It also provides a platform that inspires students to explore new ideas, play with designs, and produce original works. Using the Canva application in learning is needed so that students can cultivate creativity, and what the teacher conveys can be expressed in the Canva application. Educators can utilize the Canva application in the field of education. Using this application, we hope to foster students' creativity in learning. Furthermore, students can be creative without limits ([Anridzo et al., 2022](#)).

Educators must possess learning innovations to convey the material taught to students. It aligns with the research conducted by Nurrita, stating that learning media serves as a source for students to acquire messages and information from teachers, thus enhancing the learning material and shaping students' knowledge. Presenting material to students using PowerPoint is effective for students to understand better the material presented by the teacher, and students are more enthusiastic about delving into the material ([Suryaman, 2020](#)). Utilizing PowerPoint presentations is also an effective method for assessing the thorough mastery of taught concepts. It proves that the implementation of the Free Curriculum requires teachers to be able to use technology media.

### ***Challenges Encountered in the Implementation Process of Merdeka Belajar Curriculum***

Two main variables influence the success of the implementation: policy content and implementation environment ([Grindle, 2017](#); [Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1980](#)). These variables encompass the extent to which the policy content addresses the interests of the target group, the suitability of the program's location, the presence of detailed implementation plans, and the availability of adequate resources to support the program ([Grindle, 2017](#); [Prastowo et al., 2020](#)). Based on research findings at SMKN 10 Luwu, the target group and program location are considered appropriate, but the program lacks support, especially in the activities of independent curriculum learning. Independent curriculum learning involves students' and teachers' active and creative participation, aligning with the principle that new teaching methods encourage students to be more active and enthusiastic in the learning process ([Mustafiyanti et al., 2023](#)). A developed curriculum is meaningless if not implemented in schools and classrooms. This implementation requires addressing certain factors, such as resource readiness, old teaching patterns, and resource limitations ([Prastowo et al., 2020](#); [Wahyudin, 2014](#)).

The challenges school principals face in implementing the *Merdeka belajar* curriculum involve some teachers still using old teaching patterns and not understanding the concept of independent learning. It complicates applying the independent learning concept in teaching and makes some students less confident in developing their interests and talents. The challenges faced by the curriculum deputy involve limited resources in terms of hardware or software, unstable internet connections, a lack of teacher training, and limited space and facilities. These difficulties hinder teachers in implementing independent learning. Challenges faced by Islamic Education teachers involve confusion in creating teaching tools such as ATP and teaching modules due to a lack of training on the curriculum.

Additionally, limited facilities and students who are not fluent in Tajweed are challenges. It aligns with the constructivism theory that learning is built based on real experiences. Participants must think conducive and provide freedom to teachers and students in learning. Thus, students have the freedom to develop their abilities and potential.

Based on research results, some problems in implementing the Independent Curriculum in schools involve three main aspects: planning, implementation, and evaluation. Planning involves understanding rules before implementing the Independent Curriculum. Lack of understanding and difficulty applying creative and innovative teaching methods are major obstacles. Teachers need to design learning based on student needs, requiring an initial goal analysis, the preparation of Learning Achievement (CP) and the Flow of Learning Objectives (ATP), as well as an understanding of assessment principles ([Rahayu et al., 2022](#)). The implementation of the Independent Curriculum requires a holistic and contextual approach. Teachers must address individual student needs, open dialogue, and provide various learning resources. Challenges involve school environmental conditions, facilities, and the

availability of quality human resources. Evaluation in the Independent Curriculum involves ongoing formative and summative assessments. Character evaluation also becomes an essential part. Teachers face difficulties due to the abolition of KKM, which poses challenges in assessing student success. Solutions involve teacher training, increased parental support, facility improvements, and supervision.

Schools can implement several solutions to improve the implementation of the independent curriculum. First, there is a need for training and competence development for teachers and education staff to apply creative and innovative teaching methods. Second, increasing support from parents and the community is necessary to facilitate the smoother implementation of the independent curriculum. Third, improving facilities and infrastructure is crucial to creating a conducive learning environment for students. Fourth, there is a need to enhance supervision and monitoring of the independent curriculum's implementation in schools to identify challenges and find appropriate solutions. Fifth, developing collaboration among educational stakeholders, such as teachers, school principals, parents, and the community, is crucial to creating a supportive learning environment for students. Finally, encouraging teachers to participate in the teacher-mover program can be an initiative that positively impacts the quality of teaching. By implementing these solutions, we aim to enhance the effectiveness of the independent curriculum, maximize its benefits, and better support students' development.

### ***Results of Implementing the Merdeka belajar curriculum at SMKN 10 Luwu***

Curriculum is an integral part of the independent learning initiative led by teachers. The *merdeka belajar* curriculum must consistently adapt to the rapid developments in science and technology, significantly impacting various life domains. It serves as an instructional curriculum within the classroom that optimizes content, enabling students to delve deeper into concepts and reinforce competencies. The school mobilization program, which focuses on differentiation in the learning process, is a notable characteristic of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum at SMKN 10 Luwu.

A distinctive feature of the *merdeka belajar* curriculum at SMKN 10 Luwu is the implementation of full-day teaching and learning sessions from 07:00 AM to 3:15 PM. Implementing full-day sessions has several implications for students, proving to be an effective means of shaping their character. The extended time spent in school facilitates teacher control and supervision of student behaviour while providing ample time to maximize their potential across cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. However, prolonged learning periods may lead to cognitive fatigue, impacting a child's ability to absorb lessons, which has implications for the student's psychological well-being.

The *merdeka belajar* curriculum emphasizes freedom and creative thinking. The school mobilization program, presented by the Ministry of Education and Culture during the launch of independent learning, is designed to support every school in fostering lifelong learners with a strong Pancasila character. The introduction of the independent curriculum marks a reorganization within the national education system in Indonesia, aimed at anticipating societal changes and advancements. The sentiments expressed by Minister of Education Nadiem Makarim underscore the need for a cultural transformation in educational reform, aligning with the vision of creating quality individuals capable of competing in various life domains.

The flexibility in learning, highlighted in independent learning, is emphasized for teachers and students. The Ministry of Education and Culture defines independent learning as a learning process that provides freedom and authority to each educational institution, freeing it from convoluted administrative procedures. The primary assumption of independent learning is entrusting teachers with the freedom to conduct lessons. This approach fosters a more comfortable learning environment, encouraging relaxed discussions between teachers and students and extending learning beyond the classroom. It promotes courage, independence, social astuteness, cultured behaviour, politeness, and competency. Additionally, it departs from relying on ranking systems, which both students and parents have identified as sources of anxiety.

Challenges faced by teachers in implementing the independent curriculum include dedicating time to prepare creative, innovative, and challenging lessons daily ([Deni Sopiandary et al., 2021](#); [Saputra et al., 2023](#)). Teacher involvement in the curriculum development process is crucial to aligning curriculum content with the needs of students in the classroom. Another obstacle relates to Human Resources (HR), which involves persuading teachers to shift their mindset and step out of their comfort

zones. The changes implemented by school principals may be futile if teachers are resistant to change ([Handayani et al., 2023](#); [Vicente et al., 2021](#)).

## CONCLUSION

The comprehensive exploration into the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SMK Negeri 10 Luwu presents a multi-faceted approach aimed at enhancing student creativity and innovation. The initiation and execution of this curriculum involve thorough preparation, engagement of all school stakeholders, and a shift from traditional to student-centered learning methodologies. Despite the structured implementation and the positive outcomes in fostering an environment conducive to creativity, innovation, and a deeper understanding of subjects, the transition to this new curriculum paradigm introduces several challenges. These range from the need for a significant transformation in teaching methodology to the logistical hurdles of ensuring adequate resources and stable infrastructure. Critical to overcoming these challenges is the continuous professional development of teachers, enhanced parental and community involvement, and the strategic use of technology to facilitate dynamic learning experiences.

The outcomes of implementing the Independent Curriculum at SMK Negeri 10 Luwu underscore the curriculum's effectiveness in promoting a holistic educational experience that transcends conventional learning boundaries. The success of the curriculum is evident in the shift towards a more engaged, active, and participatory learning environment, where students are encouraged to explore their interests and apply their knowledge in real-world contexts. However, realizing the full potential of this innovative approach necessitates addressing the outlined challenges through collaborative efforts among educators, students, parents, and the wider community. Ultimately, the Independent Curriculum's implementation at SMK Negeri 10 Luwu offers valuable insights into the evolving landscape of education, highlighting the importance of flexibility, creativity, and a supportive learning ecosystem in preparing students for the complexities of the modern world.

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