

BETWEEN REGULATION AND REALITY: AN ANALYSIS OF GEOGRAPHY TEACHERS' ADAPTATION IN IMPLEMENTING PROJECT-BASED LEARNING UNDER THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM

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Abstract

Curriculum reform is a strategic initiative to improve the quality of education and enhance the preparedness of human resources. The Merdeka Curriculum, introduced by the Indonesian government, aims to provide students with greater autonomy in learning according to their individual potential through the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) and the strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile (P5). This study employed a literature review method to analyze how geography teachers have adapted to the implementation of PjBL within the Merdeka Curriculum. The findings indicate that teachers have made considerable efforts to integrate environment- and region-based learning projects, including disaster mapping, local potential studies, and environmental mitigation activities. However, classroom implementation continues to face challenges related to planning, execution, and the availability of supporting facilities. Teacher training, the effective use of technology, and collaboration among teachers were found to play significant roles in enhancing the effectiveness of PjBL implementation. Despite the gap between policy and practice, geography teachers have demonstrated a strong commitment to adapting to a new student-centered learning paradigm.

Keywords: Merdeka Curriculum, Project-Based Learning, Geography Teacher Adaptation

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum reform is a crucial strategy for improving the quality of education and preparing human resources to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. Effective educational reform requires a balance between government policies (top-down) and the capacity of teachers and schools (bottom-up) to ensure successful implementation (Tikkanen et al., 2020). Without adequate support for teachers' well-being and professional development, curriculum reform may instead increase teachers' workload. Therefore, teachers' active involvement is a key factor in the successful implementation of educational policies.

Curriculum reform has also been a recurring phenomenon in Indonesia, where

the curriculum has undergone several revisions to accommodate evolving social, political, and economic dynamics. These reforms have consistently aimed to improve the quality of human resources by fostering both competitiveness and strong character (Santika et al., 2022). As the primary framework guiding the entire teaching and learning process, the curriculum must be revised in a well-planned manner that addresses students' needs and responds to societal developments. In response to these changing demands, the Indonesian government introduced the Merdeka Curriculum, which provides greater flexibility for teachers and students to engage in learning based on their individual potential and interests. This curriculum emphasizes character development through the Pancasila

Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), with Project-Based Learning (PjBL) serving as its primary instructional approach (Nugrohadhi & Anwar, 2022).

However, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum continues to face significant challenges, particularly for geography teachers. Many teachers experience difficulties in designing projects, developing P5-based teaching modules, and managing instructional time and learning resources. In addition, the perception that Project-Based Learning (PjBL) requires substantial financial resources has led some teachers to revert to conventional teaching methods (Sulastini et al., 2024). Consequently, a gap persists between the intended curriculum policy and its actual implementation in classroom practice.

Therefore, it is important to examine how geography teachers adapt to the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) within the Merdeka Curriculum, as well as the challenges they encounter throughout the process. Understanding this adaptation process can provide valuable insights for improving future educational policies and teacher professional development programs (Novianty & Rohayati, 2024).

This study, entitled “Between Regulation and Reality: An Analysis of Geography Teachers’ Adaptation in Implementing Project-Based Learning under the Merdeka Curriculum,” aims to analyze how geography teachers have adapted to the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) and to identify the challenges that arise during its implementation.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a literature review method. This approach was selected to gain a comprehensive understanding of geography teachers’ adaptation to the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) within the Merdeka Curriculum. The data were collected from credible secondary sources, including scholarly journal articles, books, research

reports, and policy documents issued by the Ministry of Education. The literature was selected purposively based on its relevance to the research topic. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify patterns, issues, and emerging trends related to geography teachers’ adaptation in implementing Project-Based Learning (PjBL).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes learner autonomy while promoting character development through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5). One of its primary instructional approaches is Project-Based Learning (PjBL), which encourages students to actively engage in solving real-world problems (Permendikbud saintek, 2024). In theory, teachers serve as facilitators who guide students toward independent learning while fostering critical and creative thinking. In practice, however, the implementation of this policy continues to face significant challenges. Not all teachers possess a sufficient understanding of the principles of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) or how to integrate it effectively into their subject areas. As a result, a considerable gap exists between government policy (regulation) and its implementation in schools (practice). This challenge is also evident in geography education, a subject that inherently offers abundant opportunities for environment- and region-based project learning.

Based on the literature reviewed in this study, geography teachers’ adaptation to the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) demonstrates considerable variation. Some teachers have begun implementing PjBL by designing projects such as mapping disaster-prone areas, observing land-use changes, investigating local resource potential, and conducting environmental mitigation projects (Novianty & Rohayati, 2024). These activities are consistent with the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum, as they connect classroom learning with students’ real-life surroundings. Nevertheless, teachers

continue to encounter challenges in both planning and implementing project-based activities, including limited instructional time, inadequate facilities, and insufficient technical support. As a result, the full implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) has yet to be achieved across all schools.

Teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum is generally considered to be at a high level (85%), although its implementation remains uneven due to limitations in available resources (Hardianto et al., 2023). Technology-based teacher training has been shown to enhance teachers' ability to design Project-Based Learning (PjBL) activities (Nugrohadhi & Anwar, 2022). Furthermore, PjBL has proven effective in improving students' learning outcomes and fostering creativity (Amalda et al., 2023; Andini & Suharto, 2024). Collectively, these findings demonstrate a complementary relationship among teacher readiness, the effectiveness of professional training, and the positive impact of PjBL on student learning outcomes. Nevertheless, the literature also highlights disparities in the preparedness of geography teachers across different regions. Teachers in schools with greater access to professional development opportunities and technological resources tend to be more adaptive than those in areas with limited support (Novianty & Rohayati, 2024). This disparity creates new challenges by contributing to unequal implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) across educational institutions. Therefore, successful teacher adaptation requires not only individual readiness but also systemic support from educational institutions and local governments.

The literature analysis clearly reveals a gap between government policy and its implementation in classroom practice. Although the government has established comprehensive guidelines through Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Regulation No. 12 of 2024 (Permendikbudristek No. 12/2024), implementation remains constrained by

teachers' readiness and the varying conditions of schools. Large-scale curriculum reforms often increase teachers' workload and stress, as they are required to adapt to new educational systems and instructional practices (Tikkanen et al., 2020). This challenge is also evident among geography teachers, who face additional demands in developing new teaching modules, conducting authentic assessments, and facilitating project-based learning activities. In many schools, Project-Based Learning (PjBL) has not been implemented optimally due to limited professional training and inadequate institutional support (Amalda et al., 2023). Consequently, teachers continue to rely more frequently on traditional lecture-based instruction or conventional individual assignments rather than collaborative project-based activities. These findings suggest that the success of the Merdeka Curriculum depends not only on well-designed educational policies but also on teachers' preparedness and the availability of adequate institutional support systems within schools.

Despite these challenges, geography teachers continue to make significant efforts to adapt to the new curriculum policy. Based on the literature reviewed, several adaptation strategies have been identified (Novianty & Rohayati, 2024). These include designing simple projects based on local potential, such as digital village mapping, investigations of the school's surrounding environment, and land-use analysis. Teachers also strengthen their professional capacity by sharing experiences through Subject Teacher Working Groups (MGMP) and professional learning communities, participating in Merdeka Curriculum training programs and workshops, and utilizing digital tools such as Google Earth, Canva, and interactive maps to support project implementation.

These findings suggest that geography teachers have actively responded to the demands of the Merdeka Curriculum by adopting various instructional and professional development strategies. However, the literature also indicates that the

implementation of these strategies has not yet been fully optimized across all educational settings due to differences in school resources, institutional support, and teachers' readiness. This demonstrates that successful adaptation depends not only on individual teacher initiatives but also on the availability of sustained support systems that enable Project-Based Learning (PjBL) to be implemented more effectively.

Overall, the findings of this literature review indicate that the effectiveness of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in geography education is primarily determined by three key factors: (a) teachers' readiness to understand and design project-based activities, (b) institutional support in the form of professional training and adequate learning facilities, and (c) collaboration among teacher communities and alignment with educational policies. Strengthening these three factors in a consistent and sustainable manner can help minimize the gap between curriculum policy and its implementation under the Merdeka Curriculum. This adaptation process reflects a broader transformation in educational practice—from a teacher-centered approach to a student-centered learning paradigm—which is consistent with the fundamental principles of the Merdeka Curriculum.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) within the Merdeka Curriculum in geography education reveals a noticeable gap between curriculum policy and its implementation in practice. Geography teachers have made considerable efforts to adapt to the new policy through various strategies, including designing simple projects based on local potential, participating in professional development programs, and utilizing digital learning tools. However, challenges such as limited instructional time, inadequate facilities, and insufficient institutional support remain the primary obstacles to effective implementation. Overall, geography teachers' adaptation to Project-Based Learning (PjBL) has

progressed gradually and reflects a broader shift from a teacher-centered to a student-centered learning approach, in line with the core principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. To optimize the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PjBL), systematic support from multiple stakeholders is essential. The government should expand opportunities for continuous teacher training and mentoring, particularly in the development of project-based instructional modules. Schools are expected to provide adequate facilities and sufficient instructional time to ensure the effective implementation of project-based activities. In addition, professional communities of geography teachers, such as the Subject Teacher Working Group (MGMP), should continue to strengthen collaboration and promote the sharing of best practices in implementing Project-Based Learning (PjBL). Through such collaborative efforts, the gap between educational policy and classroom practice can be minimized, enabling the Merdeka Curriculum to achieve its goal of developing independent, critical, and creative learners.

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