

The Contribution of Physical Education and Health Teachers to the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Sei Menggaris Subdistrict

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to identify the contribution of physical education teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, explore the obstacles they face, and formulate recommendations to improve the quality of learning. The study was conducted using a descriptive qualitative approach in junior high schools and high schools in Sei Menggaris District, using questionnaires, interviews, and observations as instruments. Data analysis involved reduction, presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of the study indicate that PJOK teachers act as facilitators in the development of students' physical, social, and emotional skills, as well as in character building through the values of sportsmanship, discipline, and cooperation. The main challenges faced include limited understanding of flexible and project-based learning, insufficient facilities, limited time, and the perception that PE is less essential than academic subjects. The Merdeka Curriculum promotes a shift in focus from outcomes to the learning process, the use of technology, and collaboration between teachers, parents, and the community. Recommendations include: ongoing training from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, collaboration among teachers and schedule adjustments by schools, and the development of creative teaching methods by PE teachers.

KEYWORDS: Contribution, Physical Education, Sports, and Health Teacher, Independent Curriculum Learning

I. INTRODUCTION

Education in Indonesia continues to evolve, one example being the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which aims to improve the quality of learning. This curriculum is flexible, allowing teachers to tailor their methods to the needs of their students, and emphasizes adaptive learning, project-based learning, and the development of competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication. The Merdeka Curriculum is designed to provide greater flexibility for teachers and students, with a focus on independence, creativity, and character development (Anggreana et al., 2022). This curriculum emphasizes that every student has unique potential that needs to be developed, with teachers acting as facilitators who accommodate diverse learning needs. (Mahlo, 2017); (Samsudi et al., 2024); & (Ledwaba & Sefotho, 2024) The Merdeka Curriculum is an approach that aims to reduce students' workload, develop creativity and diverse intelligence, and build strong character.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has brought about major changes in education, including in PJOK learning. Compared to the previous curriculum, the Merdeka Curriculum requires PJOK teachers to be more active in designing learning that focuses on students. In the Merdeka Curriculum, the contribution of PJOK teachers has become more complex, including roles as facilitators, motivators, and drivers of contextual and enjoyable project-based learning, rather than merely delivering material (Halim et al., 2024); & (Wasehudin et al., 2023). However, in practice, many PJOK teachers face obstacles, such as a lack of understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum concept, limited resources, and difficulties in adapting to flexible teaching tools and differentiated learning (Nurdiyanti et al., 2024); (Sofiana et al., 2024); (Nurfuadi et al., 2024); & (Jasiah et al., 2024). This gap poses a challenge in realizing independent and meaningful learning.

After the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, PJOK learning underwent changes, with an approach that emphasized the holistic development of student competencies (Houser & Kriellaars, 2023), improvement in physical literacy (Rutkauskaitė et al., 2024), as well as the freedom of teachers to adapt teaching materials to the needs and characteristics of participants (Jess et al., 2016). Unlike the previous curriculum, which was rigid and focused on uniform achievement of material, the Merdeka Curriculum offers flexibility. However, the gap between ideal expectations and reality in the field is a crucial aspect that needs to

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be evaluated in order for the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the field of PJOK to be successful (Yafie et al., 2024); (Zaenab et al., 2024); & (Jasiah et al., 2024).

As facilitators in the Merdeka Curriculum, PJOK teachers are responsible for developing adaptive, learner-centered learning. (Kuzior et al., 2023). Effective learning requires active student involvement, so teachers need to create an environment that supports the development of their potential (Ustilaite et al., 2023). This is particularly relevant in physical education, where physical activity promotes a positive understanding of the values of cooperation and competition (Linsqvist et al., 2018); (Kokkonen et al., 2020); & (Sandford et al., 2022). The knowledge gained in PJOK learning is expected to be practical, not just theoretical, so that students can apply it in their daily lives. Issues related to the Merdeka Curriculum are still a hot topic because this curriculum is relatively new, so there has not been much in-depth research conducted.

II. METHOD

A. Research Design and Sample

This study uses a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the contribution of physical education teachers in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This approach was chosen because it is capable of exploring the meaning, understanding, and subjective experiences of physical education teachers. The focus is not on numbers, but on a detailed description of phenomena, events, and social contexts in the learning process. This type of research is descriptive qualitative, aiming to systematically and factually describe the contributions of physical education teachers without manipulating variables (Harrison, 2019); (Coco et al., 2020); & (Chai et al., 2021). This research approach also incorporates elements of phenomenology, which aims to explore and understand the life experiences of PJOK teachers as the main actors in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Phenomenology is used to reveal the essence of teachers' subjective experiences in carrying out their duties under the new curriculum. The subjects of this study are PJOK teachers, with supporting informants in the form of school principals, curriculum representatives, students, and parents.

B. Data Collection Techniques and Research Instrument

The data sources in this study are divided into primary and secondary data. Primary data is data collected directly by the author through interviews with parties related to the study (Bartůněk & Marek, 2025); (Mendlowitz et al., 2020); & (Halcomb, 2016). In addition to interviews, researchers also used questionnaires as supporting and supplementary data after the interview process. Secondary data was obtained through literature studies from journals, the internet, reference books, school documents or reports, and other relevant sources. In addition, secondary data was also obtained from relevant agencies in city and provincial education offices.

C. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis is the process of processing and organizing data by breaking it down into small units, then systematically arranging the results of data collection to interpret and generate new thoughts, theories, or ideas. (Kirkwood, 2018); (Popenoe et al., 2021); & (Aaltonen et al., 2021). Qualitative data analysis is conducted interactively and continuously until data saturation is reached, which is when no new information is obtained. Analysis activities include data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing as the main stages.

III. RESULT

A. Description Of Location, Subject, and Time of Research Implementation

The research locations were junior high schools and senior high schools in Sei Menggaris Subdistrict that had implemented the Merdeka Curriculum, namely SMP Negeri 1, SMP Negeri 2, SMP Negeri 3, SMP Fangiono II, and SMA Negeri 1 Sei Menggaris. This study involved five PJOK teachers from junior high schools and senior high schools in Sei Menggaris Subdistrict as subjects, who were tasked with teaching PJOK.

B. Description of Questionnaire Results

The results of the questionnaire description from 5 PJOK teachers show that 4 teachers teach at junior high schools and 1 teacher at senior high schools. Most of the subjects work at the junior high school level. In terms of teaching experience, 3 teachers have 1-5 years of experience, while the other 2 teachers have 6-10 years of experience, so the majority have between 1-5 years of service.

Training on the Merdeka Curriculum is conducted by both the government and schools. Of the five physical education teachers who were the subjects of the study, all answered “yes,” indicating that the government is serious about helping teachers, especially physical education teachers, in improving their knowledge related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

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The five physical education teachers agreed that the Merdeka Curriculum should be implemented despite challenges. Four felt they had freedom in designing lessons, and four also believed the curriculum improved the quality of learning. The most commonly used methods were problem-based learning (3 teachers) and activities (2 teachers).

In terms of technology use, two PJOK teachers answered “sometimes” and three answered “rarely.” Regarding physical skill development, three teachers rated the Merdeka Curriculum as very helpful, while two teachers answered “fairly helpful.” Three PJOK teachers rated student character development as very good in the Merdeka Curriculum, while two teachers answered “fairly good.” All teachers agreed that learning is now student-centered. Four teachers stated that more training is needed, while one teacher answered no.

When asked about the greatest contribution of PJOK teachers in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, one teacher responded that they fully supported it but with limitations, such as the use of technology. Another teacher stated that they were more active in fostering students' creativity. Regarding suggestions for improving the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Physical Education, one teacher suggested full support but tailored to field conditions, such as in T3 areas. Another teacher emphasized the importance of a deeper understanding of students' characteristics to enhance learning outcomes.

C. Description of Interview Results

Interviews with five physical education teachers showed that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum had a positive impact on teaching methods and student engagement. Teachers feel more flexibility in designing materials, have more activity options for students, and adopt a more holistic approach to physical education instruction. The interviews concluded that the primary motivation for teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is to create flexible, enjoyable, and student-centered physical education learning experiences. This curriculum is seen as enhancing participation, fostering awareness of the importance of health, and providing teachers with greater creative freedom.

Physical Education teachers generally have a good understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum and view it as a positive change because it is more flexible, innovative, and tailored to students' needs. However, challenges remain, particularly in terms of facilities, differentiated instruction, and assessment adaptation. Support in the form of training, improved resources, and the provision of learning materials is needed to ensure the optimal implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Physical Education. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has brought significant changes for Physical Education teachers, who now have greater freedom to choose teaching methods, implement experience-based learning, and utilize technology to enhance the effectiveness of instruction.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in PJOK faces challenges such as a lack of sports facilities, teacher readiness, assessment difficulties, varying student motivation, and technology integration. Although this curriculum offers flexibility and opportunities for innovation, these challenges must be addressed. Support in the form of training, improved facilities, and the development of adaptive assessment tools is essential to ensure the success of its implementation. Interviews with five Physical Education teachers revealed that the flexibility of the Merdeka Curriculum allows them to choose methods that align with students' characteristics and school conditions, thereby making learning more effective and meaningful.

Interviews with five physical education teachers revealed two main approaches in the Merdeka Curriculum. The flexibility of the curriculum gives teachers the freedom to choose the approach that best suits the characteristics of their students and the learning conditions at their schools. The interviews showed that the use of technology in Merdeka Curriculum-based physical education learning varies, but has a significant positive impact. Technology facilitates access, enhances flexibility, and supports self-directed learning, thereby making PJOK learning more integrated, engaging, and beneficial for students.

Interviews with five PJOK teachers showed that despite the challenges, they remained flexible and innovative in overcoming them, ensuring that learning was effective and beneficial for students. Overall, the Merdeka Curriculum provides more space for students to be active in planning and implementing PJOK learning, making them more responsible and motivated to achieve their learning goals. The Merdeka Curriculum promotes PJOK learning that focuses on physical skills while strengthening students' character to face challenges both inside and outside of school. With the right strategies, PJOK learning within the Merdeka Curriculum can serve as an effective platform for maximizing students' physical potential.

By understanding and fulfilling their roles, physical education teachers can contribute maximally to creating effective, engaging, and principled learning experiences aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum. These changes make PJOK assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum era more meaningful, encourage active student participation, and align with individual needs and development. By improving these aspects, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in PJOK education can run more optimally and provide greater benefits for students.

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D. Description Of Observation Results

Based on observations of five physical education teachers, in general they have demonstrated good preparedness in planning and implementing learning, including formulating objectives, mastering the material, motivating students, and providing effective reinforcement and conclusions. However, there are several obstacles, such as a lack of application of apperception, provision of reading materials, asking questions, and optimal application of enrichment and remedial measures by some teachers. All teachers have conducted initial, formative, and summative assessments effectively, demonstrating their commitment to supporting the PJOK learning process in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum.

IV. DISCUSSION

A. The contribution of physical education teachers to the implementation of the independent curriculum

Physical Education, Sports, and Health (PJOK) teachers play an important role in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in shaping students' character through social values such as cooperation, discipline, responsibility, and respect, which are integrated into PJOK learning (Suherman et al., 2019); (Rusilowati et al., 2024); & (Fizi et al., 2023). Physical education teachers use sports and team games to teach values such as cooperation, conflict management, and leadership to students. (Dely-Palinkas et al., 2023). Based on questionnaires, interviews, and observations, teachers fully support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, but limit the use of technology, especially cell phones, in learning. Meanwhile, other PJOK teachers place more emphasis on developing students' creativity. Character development is also a key objective of this curriculum.

Specifically, the contribution of PJOK teachers in the Merdeka Curriculum is realized through the development of students' physical potential using an experience-based approach (Nurdiyanti et al., 2024). Teachers not only teach sports skills such as soccer or basketball, but also involve students in fun and challenging physical activities, such as group gymnastics and outdoor activities, which also support physical endurance and emotional intelligence (Olive et al., 2021); (Trigueros et al., 2019). Hal This makes the learning process more varied and enjoyable for students (Holmes, 2018). In addition, the contribution of PJOK teachers is also evident in learning evaluations that emphasize process over results (Hult & Edström, 2016). In the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers focus on the individual development of students, not only on physical skills, but also on social and emotional aspects, such as teamwork and sportsmanship in competition (Yafie et al., 2024).

It is concluded that physical education teachers have made a significant contribution to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in the development of students' character and physical potential, as well as education on nutrition, personal and environmental hygiene, and the importance of regular physical activity. Additionally, their contributions are reflected in learning evaluations that emphasize the process rather than just the outcomes, with assessments covering aspects such as skills, social, and emotional development, including teamwork and sportsmanship. Physical Education activities enable students to learn and internalize character values such as discipline, responsibility, and cooperation, which are then reflected in their daily behavior.

Findings from questionnaires, interviews, and observations indicate that one of the main obstacles in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is the lack of adequate training, particularly in relation to project-based learning and character development. Many physical education teachers are still accustomed to traditional approaches that focus on measurable physical skills, and therefore do not fully understand or are unable to apply the more holistic learning concepts outlined in the Merdeka Curriculum. In addition to the lack of training, limited facilities are also a major obstacle in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum for PJOK. Many schools, especially in rural areas or with limited budgets, do not have adequate sports fields or equipment. This limits teachers in designing varied and creative learning activities, such as outdoor activities or team games, so that learning objectives cannot be achieved optimally.

Another challenge faced is time management. Although the Merdeka Curriculum provides freedom in designing learning according to student needs, the time available for PJOK lessons is often limited. A busy schedule and priority given to other subjects mean that teachers must be careful in managing their time so that all important aspects, such as character development, physical skills, and social values, can be implemented in a balanced manner. Social and cultural issues also pose significant challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in the field of physical education. In some areas, there is still a perception that physical education is less important than subjects like math or language. The lack of appreciation and support from the community and parents makes it difficult for physical education teachers to conduct comprehensive and student-centered learning. Without such support, teachers' efforts to develop holistic physical education learning become less optimal.

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the main obstacles faced by PJOK teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum include: lack of adequate training, particularly related to project-based learning and character development; limited supporting facilities in schools; limited PJOK learning time in the school schedule; and social and cultural barriers that still consider PJOK as a less important subject compared to other academic subjects.

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B. Changes that have occurred in the PJOK learning process after the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

Following the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, PJOK learning has undergone significant changes, with the focus shifting from merely mastering physical skills to character development and collaboration. PJOK teachers now not only teach sports techniques but also encourage students to build social skills such as cooperation, communication, and conflict resolution through sports activities (Smith et al., 2021); (Cronin et al., 2018); & (Lenzen et al., 2023). Another change that has taken place is the implementation of more flexible learning methods that are oriented towards the needs of students. Unlike conventional curricula, which tend to be standard and uniform, the Merdeka Curriculum gives teachers the freedom to design varied and interesting activities, such as creative gymnastics, traditional games, or extracurricular sports, so that learning becomes more enjoyable and suited to the interests and talents of students.

The evaluation process in the Merdeka Curriculum has also undergone significant changes, with a greater focus on the overall physical, social, and emotional development of students rather than just technical skills. For example, teachers provide feedback not only on athletic ability but also on how students interact with their peers, manage their emotions during competition, and demonstrate responsibility and discipline. This underscores that PJOK assessment is now holistic, as the primary goal of PJOK education is to develop character alongside students' physical aspects (Burhaein et al., 2025). There has been an increase in the involvement of parents and the community in PJOK learning. Through a project-based approach and more flexible methods, PJOK teachers actively encourage parents to participate in activities such as joint sports or helping to provide facilities (Mbiza & Nkambule, 2022). This has had a positive impact on support for the PJOK program while strengthening cooperation between schools, parents, and the community.

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that after the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, there have been significant changes in PJOK learning, namely a shift in focus from mastering physical skills alone to learning that emphasizes character and collaboration, the application of more flexible learning methods tailored to students' needs, evaluations that now place greater emphasis on the process and physical, social, and emotional development of students, and increased involvement of parents and the community in supporting the PJOK learning process.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Physical Education teachers play an important role in supporting the Merdeka Curriculum by acting as facilitators who encourage students to be active, independent, and creative. They also help shape character through sportsmanship, discipline, and cooperation. Despite the challenges, Physical Education teachers continue to make a significant contribution to realizing flexible, student-centered learning. Physical Education teachers face several obstacles in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, such as a lack of understanding of flexible project-based learning approaches, limited sports facilities, especially in remote areas, limited learning time, and societal perceptions that view Physical Education as less important than academic subjects.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has brought significant changes to PJOK learning, with a shift in focus from results to the learning process and student experience. Teachers have begun to use project-based learning methods and formative assessment, as well as utilizing technology such as fitness apps and video tutorials to make learning more engaging. In addition, this curriculum encourages collaboration between teachers, parents, and the community in supporting students' physical education.

Policy recommendations and actions that can be taken include: The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology needs to provide learning modules and ongoing training for PJOK teachers on innovative methods according to the Merdeka Curriculum and allocate special funds for the procurement of sports facilities in schools that lack facilities. Schools and principals are expected to encourage collaboration between PJOK teachers and other subject teachers to implement integrative project-based learning and arrange more flexible PJOK schedules by adding extracurricular activities that support students' physical and character development. Meanwhile, PJOK teachers must develop creative and experience-based teaching methods, utilize technology such as fitness applications and video tutorials, and use various formative assessments to measure students' overall development, not only physical but also social and emotional aspects.

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