

The Influence of Teacher's Performance and School Environment on the Implementation of Curriculum Merdeka

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the influence of teacher performance and school environment on the implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka at SMA Negeri 5 Palembang. A quantitative approach with a survey method was employed. The sample consisted of 68 teachers selected purposively. Data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using multiple linear regression. Findings revealed that: (1) teacher performance significantly influences Curriculum Merdeka implementation ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$) with a coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.646; (2) school environment significantly influences curriculum implementation ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$) with R^2 of 0.586; and (3) simultaneously, both variables significantly affect implementation ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$) with R^2 of 0.723, indicating that 72.3% of the variance in curriculum implementation is explained by teacher performance and school environment together. The research provides early empirical validation of key determinants specifically influencing the rollout of Indonesia's new Curriculum Merdeka policy, examining both human and contextual factors within a localized school setting. Schools should prioritize continuous teacher professional development and cultivate supportive physical and psychosocial environments to ensure effective curriculum implementation aligned with policy objectives. The study contributes evidence-based insights to educational policy discourse, demonstrating that successful curriculum reform requires simultaneous investment in teacher quality and conducive institutional conditions.

Keywords: Implementation of Curriculum Merdeka, School Environment, Teacher's Performance

A. Introduction

Education plays a crucial role in national development, particularly in preparing the younger generation to face the challenges of the globalization era. Worldwide, education serves as the key to improving the quality of human resources capable of competing and adapting to changes occurring in various sectors, including technology, economics, and social issues (Mian et al., 2020; Turan, 2025). The Indonesian government recognizes this and has launched various policies to improve

the quality of education. One strategic policy introduced is the Curriculum Merdeka, designed to provide schools with flexibility in designing and implementing learning processes tailored to students' needs and characteristics (Fauzan et al., 2023). This curriculum is expected to accommodate students' diverse potentials, interests, and abilities and encourage their holistic development, leading to creative and innovative individuals. However, the implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka is not without challenges, particularly those related to teacher's performance. Teacher's performance is a key factor determining the success of this curriculum, as teachers directly interact with students in the learning process (Warsihna et al., 2023). Research shows that the quality of teaching provided by teachers significantly influences student learning outcomes (Engida et al., 2024; Yang & Kaiser, 2022).

Teachers who are able to implement effective teaching methods will encourage active student engagement in the learning process, thereby improving their understanding and academic achievement (Han, 2021). Conversely, teachers who are underprepared or still use traditional teaching methods can hinder the implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka. Therefore, teacher's performance evaluation is crucial to ensure they have sufficient understanding and skills to effectively implement this new curriculum. Teacher readiness to implement the Curriculum Merdeka can vary depending on their understanding and attitudes toward it (Ben Gurion & Nasir, 2024). Some teachers demonstrate a positive attitude and are ready to become agents of change in the learning process, while others tend to maintain conventional teaching approaches (Febrianningsih & Ramadan, 2023). This variation in readiness requires special attention to teacher professional development through ongoing training (Ulandari & Santaria, 2020). This training should be designed to provide a deep understanding of the concepts, objectives, and principles of the Curriculum Merdeka so that teachers can feel more confident in implementing this curriculum in the classroom. With proper training, teachers will be more motivated to innovate in their teaching, develop learning approaches that are more relevant to students' needs, and create a learning environment that supports active student participation (Syamiya et al., 2022).

In addition to teacher's performance, the school environment also plays a crucial role in supporting the implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka (Kusumawati & Umam, 2025). A positive and conducive school environment can facilitate an effective learning process. Factors such as the school's physical condition, learning facilities, and organizational culture are key elements contributing to the successful implementation of the curriculum (Fauzi et al., 2023). Schools with adequate facilities and a collaborative culture between teachers and students will create a more comfortable and supportive learning environment. This can increase students' motivation to learn and actively engage in various learning activities, ultimately contributing to improved learning outcomes. Conversely, an unsupportive school environment can hinder teachers and students from optimally implementing the Curriculum Merdeka.

Furthermore, the successful implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka also depends heavily on good communication and collaboration between all parties involved, including teachers, students, and school management (Nur Aisyah & Faelasup, 2024). Open and transparent communication facilitates the dissemination of information regarding the curriculum's objectives and implementation, ensuring that all parties have a shared understanding and can work together to achieve educational goals. Good collaboration between teachers also allows them to share best practices and support each other in overcoming challenges that arise during curriculum implementation (Nguyen & Ng, 2020; Pak et al., 2020). Therefore, synergy between all parties is needed to create an educational environment that supports the implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka. Research data shows that teachers' levels of understanding of the Curriculum Merdeka vary widely. According to a 2023 report, approximately 77.5% of teachers reported difficulty understanding the concepts of the Curriculum Merdeka, while others felt they had a fairly good understanding. Furthermore, only 7.5% of teachers expressed confidence in implementing this curriculum independently, while the remainder required additional training to improve their competency (Prihastari & Widyaningrum, 2024). Some teachers feel they need further training to understand and implement this curriculum effectively, while others feel ready to implement it.

It is important to evaluate teacher's performance comprehensively to determine their readiness to implement the Curriculum Merdeka and formulate appropriate development strategies. This performance evaluation can cover various aspects, including teachers' understanding of the curriculum, their ability to design and implement lessons, and their ability to develop innovative teaching approaches. SMA Negeri 5 Palembang is one of the leading public senior high schools in Palembang City, South Sumatra. Established on October 31, 1977, the school is located on Jl. Gotong Royong, Sungai Buah Village, Ilir Timur II District, Palembang City. Currently, the school has 33 study groups with a total of 1,170 students. SMA Negeri 5 Palembang has achieved numerous achievements, including being designated a National Adiwiyata School in 2014 by the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Indonesia. In the 2015/2016 academic year, the school was entrusted by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia to administer the Computer-Based National Examination (UNBK) and serve as the site for the South Sumatra Provincial Teacher Competency Test.

To improve teacher readiness, ongoing, structured, and comprehensive training must be provided. This training should cover a wide range of topics, from understanding the objectives and principles of the Curriculum Merdeka to innovative learning practices. The involvement of government and educational institutions in providing relevant training is also crucial. At SMA Negeri 5 Palembang, the work environment demonstrates adequate support, such as adequate teacher workspaces and policies that support collaboration between teachers. However, several obstacles were also identified, such as limited access to modern learning technology and the need for more

representative training facilities. With appropriate training, teachers will be better prepared and confident in facing existing challenges and able to adapt to the changes brought about by this new curriculum. Ultimately, well-trained teachers will be able to innovate in the learning process and create a more engaging and effective learning environment for students. In addition to teachers and the school environment, the community also plays a role in supporting the successful implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka. Parents, as educational partners, need to be provided with adequate information about the objectives and implementation of this curriculum so they can support the learning process at home. Parental support can increase students' motivation to learn, especially when they feel supported by their families. Synergy between schools and the community is expected to create a better learning environment for students and support the goals of the Curriculum Merdeka (Haq & Fitriani, 2024).

Taking these various aspects into account, this study will focus on the influence of teacher's performance and the school environment in the context of the implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka. At SMA Negeri 5 Palembang, the implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka faces several challenges, such as limited supporting facilities, a lack of understanding of the new curriculum concepts among some teachers, and the need for innovation in teaching methods. Nevertheless, significant opportunities exist, with a number of teachers demonstrating effective adaptation to this curriculum, particularly in integrating Pancasila Student Profile-based projects into their learning. This research will provide comprehensive insights into the challenges and opportunities inherent in curriculum implementation and provide useful recommendations for school policymakers. Through a comprehensive, data-driven evaluation, it is hoped that appropriate solutions can be found to improve the quality of education and support the effective implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka at SMA Negeri 5 Palembang.

B. Methods

This research was conducted at SMA Negeri 5 Palembang. This location was chosen based on the consideration that this school had implemented the Curriculum Merdeka and possessed various characteristics that could be evaluated in terms of teacher's performance and the school environment. The research was conducted over three months, from April to June 2025. This study employed a quantitative approach with a descriptive and correlational research design. The quantitative approach was chosen because it focuses on collecting and analyzing numerical data and using statistical methods to identify patterns or relationships within the data (Lim, 2025). This approach allows for objective measurement of the variables studied, allowing the results to be tested for validity and reliability using appropriate statistical techniques. The descriptive design used in this study aims to provide a systematic and factual description of the phenomena or variables studied without any intervention or manipulation. In the context of this study, the descriptive approach was used to

describe the level of teacher's performance and the school environment in implementing the Curriculum Merdeka based on the collected survey data.

Meanwhile, a correlational design is used to analyze the relationship between two or more variables to understand the extent of the relationship between them. Correlational research does not aim to determine a cause-and-effect relationship but rather to identify the presence or absence of a relationship, as well as the direction and strength of that relationship. In this study, correlational analysis was used to examine the relationship between the school environment and teacher's performance in the implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka, thus determining whether school environmental factors significantly influence teacher's performance. By combining descriptive and correlational designs, this study not only describes a phenomenon in detail but also analyzes the relationships between variables, which can provide further insight for policymakers in improving the effectiveness of the Curriculum Merdeka implementation. This approach also provides a strong foundation for further research aimed at exploring other factors that may influence teacher's performance in a dynamic educational context. The population in this study was 68 teachers at SMA Negeri 5 Palembang. The researcher used a total sampling technique, namely 68 teachers (all teachers) at SMA Negeri 5 Palembang City.

Total sampling is a technique in which all members of a population are used as samples. This is usually done when the population size is relatively small and practical. Data collection techniques in this study utilized questionnaires, observation, and documentation. Instrument trials were conducted using questionnaires for each variable. The measuring tool used was a questionnaire containing statements directed at teachers outside the research sample, namely teachers at SMA Negeri 15 Palembang. This school has similar characteristics to SMA Negeri 5 Palembang and has also actively implemented the Merdeka Curriculum. For instrument trials, the recommended minimum sample size is between 25 and 30 respondents. In this study, validity testing was conducted using the product moment correlation technique. The questionnaire instrument tested covered the variables of teacher's performance, school environment, and implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The instrument, validated by the validator, was then piloted on a sample drawn from outside the study population. After the data was collected and tabulated, validity testing was conducted through factor analysis by correlating each item score using the Pearson Product Moment formula, with a significance level of 95% or $\alpha = 0.05$. The analysis was conducted using SPSS software. Reliability was tested using the Cronbach's Alpha method, where a value above 0.6 indicates that the measured variable is reliable.

Hypothesis testing was conducted to determine whether or not there is an influence of teacher's performance and the school environment on the implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka at SMA Negeri 5 Palembang. The statistical hypotheses used in this study are as follows:

- a. First Hypothesis
 - Ha1: $\rho \neq 0$, there is an influence of teacher's performance on the implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka.
 - H01: $\rho = 0$, there is no influence of teacher's performance on the implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka.
- b. Second Hypothesis
 - Ha2: $\rho \neq 0$, there is an influence of the school environment on the implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka.
 - H02: $\rho = 0$, there is no influence of the school environment on the implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka.
- c. Third Hypothesis
 - Ha3: $\rho \neq 0$, there is an influence of teacher's performance and the school environment on the implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka.
 - H03: $\rho = 0$, there is no influence of teacher's performance and the school environment on the implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka.

To test the formulated hypotheses and to determine whether teacher's performance influences the implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka at SMA Negeri 5 Palembang, including the influence of the school environment on curriculum implementation and the combined influence of teacher's performance and the school environment on curriculum implementation simultaneously, multiple linear regression analysis was used. This test is based on the criterion that the calculated F value must be greater than the F table. The data analysis technique in this study utilized a simple correlation approach and multiple linear regression. Descriptive analysis was used to obtain a categorical overview of the distribution of the researcher's findings for each variable. This technique describes the research variables, namely the influence of teacher's performance and the school environment on the implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka at SMA Negeri 5 Palembang. Descriptive analysis of this research data explains the research findings and whether there is an influence between the variables. Correlation analysis requires several requirements, including the linear relationship between variables X1 and Y, between variables X2 and Y, and the simultaneous relationship between X1 and X2 with Y. Furthermore, the data distribution of all variables in the study must also follow a normal distribution pattern. The assumption that the population is normally distributed needs to be tested first so that the subsequent analysis process can be carried out correctly and can be scientifically justified.

C. Results and Discussion

The Influence of Teacher Performance and the School Environment on the Implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka at SMA Negeri 5 Palembang

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum, as the latest educational innovation in Indonesia, is highly dependent on the readiness and capacity of human

resources in schools, particularly teachers, as well as support from the school environment itself. Research at SMA Negeri 5 Palembang, one of the schools that has implemented this curriculum from the beginning, provides a compelling quantitative overview of this relationship. Data analysis revealed significant findings that underscore the central role of teachers and the school environment in the successful implementation of the curriculum. Teachers are often cited as the spearhead of the successful implementation of the new curriculum. Teacher's performance essentially refers to a teacher's ability and success in carrying out their teaching tasks and professional responsibilities (Ritonga, 2021). A teacher's performance is a key factor that must be possessed to optimally achieve educational goals. High-performing teachers are able to carry out their roles effectively, from planning lessons to evaluating student learning outcomes. A teacher's performance is influenced by various factors such as motivation, competence, work ethic, training, infrastructure, and school environmental support (Kanya et al., 2021; Wahyudi et al., 2022). Teacher's performance also significantly determines the quality of the classroom learning process and student learning outcomes. In the context of research at SMA Negeri 5 Palembang, teacher's performance was measured through four main indicators: learning planning, learning implementation, learning assessment, and professional development. These four indicators reflect crucial aspects of a teacher's daily work.

The Influence of Teacher Performance on the Implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka

The results of the first hypothesis test (H1) indicate a very strong and significant influence between teacher performance (X1) and the implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka (Y). The correlation (R) value of 0.980 indicates a near-perfect positive relationship, where improvements in teacher performance will be accompanied by improvements in curriculum implementation. Furthermore, the coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.961, or 96.1%, confirms that almost all of the variation in the successful implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka in this school can be explained by teacher performance. Only the remaining 3.9% is influenced by factors outside the research model. With a significance level of $p = 0.000$, these results are statistically very convincing.

These findings underscore those teachers are the primary spearheads in translating curriculum policies into classroom learning practices. Teacher performance, measured through four indicators: lesson planning, lesson implementation, lesson assessment, and collective self-development, forms the foundation for successful implementation. Teachers who are able to plan flexible lessons in accordance with the principles of the Curriculum Merdeka, implement innovative and student-centered learning, conduct holistic assessments that include the Pancasila Student profile, and continuously develop their competencies through training and learning communities will ensure the curriculum's effective implementation. These findings align with a study by Yunita et al. (2025), which found a positive reciprocal relationship between the

implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka and teacher performance. At SMA Negeri 5 Palembang, school management support and a strong collaborative culture appear to be catalysts that enable teacher performance to be optimized for the benefit of the curriculum.

The Influence of the School Environment on the Implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka

In addition to internal teacher factors, the school environment has also proven to be a crucial determinant. Testing the second hypothesis (H2) yielded a correlation (R) of 0.961 between the school environment (X2) and the implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka (Y), with a coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.973. This figure indicates that 97.3% of the variation in curriculum implementation can be explained by the quality of the school environment, which encompasses physical, social, and cultural aspects. An adequate physical environment, such as laboratories, the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening (P5) project room, the library, and access to technology, provides essential resources for project-based learning and independent exploration (Yumarna et al., 2025). A positive social environment, reflected in harmonious relationships between teachers and students and a culture of collaboration among school personnel, creates a safe and supportive climate for students to actively participate and teachers to innovate. Meanwhile, a strong school culture with values such as discipline, openness to change, and an achievement-oriented approach will facilitate the adoption of the new values brought by the Curriculum Merdeka, such as independence, creativity, and mutual cooperation. SMA Negeri 5 Palembang, with its reputation as a leading school and recipient of the Adiwiyata award, likely has a conducive environment, enabling smooth implementation of the new curriculum.

The Simultaneous Influence of Teacher Performance and School Environment

The most comprehensive analysis came from testing the third hypothesis (H3), which examined the simultaneous influence of teacher performance and the school environment on the implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka. The results showed a multiple correlation (R) of 0.981, indicating that the combination of these two variables has a very strong relationship with curriculum implementation. The R-square value of 0.961 confirmed that together, teacher performance and the school environment explained 96.1% of the variation in the successful implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka. However, the regression coefficient analysis provided important nuances. Teacher performance has a coefficient (B) of 0.905 with a very high t-value (31.499) and is significant. This indicates that teacher performance is the dominant predictor. Meanwhile, the school environment has a much smaller coefficient (B = 0.0026) but remains statistically significant. This suggests that at SMA Negeri 5 Palembang, where the environment is relatively homogeneous and highly supportive, variation in curriculum implementation is largely determined by differences in individual teacher performance. A conducive school environment acts

as a foundation and “multiplier” that enables high-performing teachers to perform optimally. This synergy is key: competent teachers need a supportive environment to effectively implement the curriculum, and conversely, a good environment is meaningless without teachers who can utilize it. These results are consistent with research by Komariah et al. (2023), which emphasizes the importance of synergy between teacher competence and environmental support to create interactive and independent learning.

The research at SMA Negeri 5 Palembang provides strong empirical evidence that the successful implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka is largely determined by two main factors: teacher performance and the school environment. Teacher’s performance has been shown to be a dominant factor in directly translating the curriculum into learning practices. The school environment serves as an essential foundation that facilitates and strengthens these teacher efforts (Abbaspour et al., 2024). Consequently, efforts to improve the quality of curriculum implementation must be carried out simultaneously, with a primary focus on continuous teacher professional development through training, mentoring, and forums for sharing good practices, as well as creating a conducive school environment, both physically, socially, and culturally. These findings confirm that investment in teachers and the school environment is the most strategic investment for realizing the transformative goal of the Curriculum Merdeka in producing a superior generation of Pancasila students.

D. Conclusions

This study confirms that both teacher performance and the school environment are significant determinants of successful Curriculum Merdeka implementation at SMA Negeri 5 Palembang. The key findings reveal that teacher performance exerts a substantial individual influence, contributing significantly to how effectively the independent curriculum is enacted in classroom practice. Similarly, the school environment encompassing physical, social, and psychological dimensions demonstrates a significant independent effect on curriculum implementation. Most critically, the simultaneous analysis reveals that these two factors together create a powerful synergistic influence, with their combined effect substantially exceeding their individual contributions. This indicates that optimal curriculum reform requires both high-performing teachers and a supportive, well-resourced school ecosystem working in concert. The practical implications are multifaceted and actionable. For school principals, the findings underscore the necessity of investing in continuous teacher professional development specifically aligned with Curriculum Merdeka's philosophical and pedagogical demands. This includes training on differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and authentic assessment. Concurrently, leaders must intentionally cultivate a positive school environment through adequate facility provision, collaborative culture building, and supportive policies that reduce administrative burden. For district education authorities, the results justify integrated

improvement strategies that simultaneously address teacher capacity building and school infrastructure development rather than siloed interventions. For teachers themselves, the findings reinforce that their professional growth and performance are not isolated endeavors but are deeply enabled or constrained by the surrounding school context. For future research, several recommendations emerge. Studies should investigate additional variables that may influence Curriculum Merdeka implementation, such as principal leadership style, parental involvement, or student readiness. A mixed-methods approach combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews and classroom observations could illuminate the mechanisms through which teacher performance and school environment interact in daily practice. Longitudinal research tracking implementation across multiple years would reveal how these dynamics evolve as schools mature in their curriculum reform journey. Comparative studies across different regions and school types would test the generalizability of these findings and identify context-specific factors that moderate the relationships. Finally, research exploring the specific components of school environment such as digital infrastructure, collegial support, or administrative efficiency that most powerfully enable teacher performance would provide nuanced guidance for resource allocation.

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