

## **Analysis of Student Development in Improving Learning Effectiveness Based on The Merdeka Curriculum At Sd Negeri 18 Tungkal Ilir**

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**Abstract:** This study aims to analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in improving student development and learning effectiveness at SD Negeri 18 Tungkal Ilir. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed involving the principal, teachers, students, and parents as research participants. Data were collected through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, documentation, and learning outcome records, and analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman. The findings reveal that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has enhanced students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development by promoting active, student-centered, and differentiated learning. Students demonstrated higher learning motivation, improved critical thinking, stronger collaboration, and greater learning independence. However, several challenges remain, including limited educational facilities, variations in students' learning readiness, and teachers' adaptation to differentiated instruction. Continuous collaboration among teachers, parents, and school management has become an important strategy for overcoming these challenges. This study contributes to educational management by providing empirical evidence on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in supporting holistic student development and improving learning effectiveness in elementary schools.

**Keywords:** student development, learning effectiveness, Merdeka Curriculum, elementary school, qualitative study.

### **A. Introduction**

Provide Education plays a fundamental role in developing high-quality human resources who are capable of adapting to the rapid changes brought about by globalization and technological advancement (Kim & Park, 2020). As one of the essential pillars of national development, education is expected to equip students with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary to face future challenges. In Indonesia, educational reform has been continuously implemented to improve the quality of learning and to prepare students who are independent, creative, and competitive (Permatasari & Tandiyuk, 2023).

One of the most significant reforms introduced by the government is the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes flexible, student-centered learning and provides opportunities for students to develop according to their interests, talents, and individual characteristics. Although many studies have examined the implementation of

the Merdeka Curriculum, most focus primarily on curriculum policy or students' academic achievement. Limited studies comprehensively analyze how the curriculum simultaneously influences students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development while improving learning effectiveness at the elementary school level. Moreover, empirical evidence from rural elementary schools remains relatively limited. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by examining the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum from the perspective of holistic student development and learning effectiveness. The novelty of this study lies in integrating student development dimensions with learning effectiveness to provide a comprehensive understanding of Merdeka Curriculum implementation in elementary education.

The Merdeka Curriculum aims to create meaningful learning experiences that encourage students to think critically, communicate effectively, collaborate with others, and develop creativity. It also promotes the realization of the Pancasila Student Profile, which includes faith, independence, cooperation, critical reasoning, creativity, and global diversity (Hang, 2021). Through this curriculum, teachers are given greater autonomy to design learning activities that suit the needs and developmental stages of their students. Therefore, the success of curriculum implementation depends not only on instructional strategies but also on the developmental characteristics and learning readiness of students themselves (Sima et al., 2020).

SD Negeri 18 Tungkal Ilir has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum since the beginning of the 2023 academic year with the expectation of improving the quality and effectiveness of learning. The curriculum encourages more active and participatory learning processes in which students are expected to become the center of learning activities. However, initial evaluations indicate that students exhibit varying levels of adaptation and achievement. Some students demonstrate increased motivation and better academic performance, while others experience difficulties in adapting to the more flexible and independent learning environment. Internal school data show that approximately 35% of students still have low participation in classroom activities, and around 45% encounter difficulties in understanding learning materials without structured guidance from teachers.

These conditions indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has not yet produced uniform outcomes among students and that differences in students' development may influence learning effectiveness. The existence of these disparities highlights a gap between the expectations of the Merdeka Curriculum and the realities encountered in schools. Although the curriculum provides opportunities for teachers to implement innovative learning approaches, not all students are equally prepared to benefit from such approaches (Zaakiyyah, 2024). Differences in cognitive abilities, motivation, learning styles, and social-emotional development may affect students' capacity to participate actively in the learning process. Consequently, understanding students' developmental characteristics becomes an essential aspect of ensuring that learning activities are effective and responsive to students' needs.

Learning effectiveness is influenced by various internal and external factors. Internal factors include motivation, interests, talents, physical conditions, and psychological

aspects of students. External factors comprise family environment, school environment, teacher competence, curriculum implementation, and the availability of facilities and infrastructure (Mamanazarov et al., 2025). Effective learning can be achieved when these factors interact harmoniously to support students' academic and personal development. In addition, the use of interactive learning methods and varied instructional strategies can enhance students' engagement and improve their understanding of learning materials. Creating a conducive and enjoyable classroom atmosphere and providing positive reinforcement are also important in increasing students' motivation and participation.

Previous studies have demonstrated that students' development plays a significant role in improving learning outcomes and that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum contributes positively to academic achievement. Nevertheless, the implementation of this curriculum also presents several challenges. Some studies have reported that while the Merdeka Curriculum reduces academic pressure and allows teachers greater flexibility in designing instruction, it may also decrease students' competitiveness if not accompanied by appropriate guidance and support (Marszowski et al., 2020). Other challenges include limited educational facilities, diverse student abilities, adaptation to new teaching methods, and limited instructional time. These challenges suggest that the effectiveness of curriculum implementation is influenced not only by the curriculum itself but also by contextual factors within schools and communities (Tri, 2022).

From a developmental perspective, students' growth and development encompass physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and moral aspects. According to Santrock (2011), child development involves patterns of change that begin at conception and continue throughout life, including biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional dimensions. Each student possesses unique developmental characteristics influenced by both internal factors, such as genetics and biological conditions, and external factors, including family background, social environment, and educational experiences. Therefore, teachers need to understand these developmental differences to provide learning experiences that correspond to students' abilities and needs (Shi, 2025). Considering that the Merdeka Curriculum has become a national policy implemented across Indonesian schools, research regarding its effectiveness at the elementary school level is highly relevant.

This study focuses on analyzing students' development in improving learning effectiveness based on the Merdeka Curriculum at SD Negeri 18 Tungkal Ilir. The novelty of this study lies in its integration of students' developmental aspects with curriculum implementation and learning effectiveness. Unlike previous studies that mainly focus on curriculum implementation or instructional quality, this research examines how students' developmental characteristics influence the success of the Merdeka Curriculum. Furthermore, it considers contextual factors such as educational resources, parental support, and teachers' roles in facilitating learning. The findings of this study are expected to provide practical recommendations for teachers and schools in optimizing learning processes and supporting students in achieving their full potential, thereby contributing to the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and the improvement of educational quality in elementary schools.

## **B. Methods**

Present This study employed a mixed-methods approach by integrating qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' development in improving learning effectiveness based on the Merdeka Curriculum at SD Negeri 18 Tungkal Ilir. The use of a mixed-methods design was considered appropriate because the phenomenon under investigation required not only numerical evidence regarding learning outcomes but also in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and responses to the implementation of the curriculum.

Through the integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches, the study was expected to provide a holistic description of how students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development contributed to the effectiveness of learning activities. The qualitative approach enabled the researchers to understand the experiences and perspectives of students, teachers, and parents regarding curriculum implementation, while the quantitative approach was utilized to support the findings through measurable indicators of students' learning outcomes and participation (Alinsunurin, 2020). Participants were selected purposively because they were directly involved in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, including the principal, classroom teachers, students, and parents.

This sampling technique enabled the researchers to obtain comprehensive information regarding curriculum implementation from multiple perspectives. The research was conducted at SD Negeri 18 Tungkal Ilir, which is located in Keluang Village, Tungkal Ilir District, Banyuasin Regency, South Sumatra Province, Indonesia. The school was selected as the research site because it has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum since the beginning of the 2023 academic year and provides a relevant context for examining students' development and learning effectiveness under the new curriculum framework. The study was carried out over a period of six months, beginning in December 2025 and ending in May 2026. This period allowed the researchers to obtain comprehensive data regarding the implementation process and the impact of the curriculum on students' development throughout one semester of learning activities (Aizawa et al., 2024).

The participants in this study consisted of seventeen informants selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was chosen because it allowed the researchers to identify participants who possessed adequate knowledge and direct experience related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Salarzai et al., 2025). The participants included six students from Grades I to III, four teachers, and seven parents. Students were selected because they directly experienced the learning process and could provide information about their motivation, learning experiences, and difficulties encountered during classroom activities.

Teachers were involved because they played a central role in designing and implementing learning activities and were responsible for monitoring students' development. Meanwhile, parents were included because they were able to observe students' development and learning habits outside the school environment. The criteria for selecting participants included their residence within the research area, their understanding of the issues being studied, their ability to provide information and explanations clearly, their direct involvement in the learning process, and their

experiences related to the impact of learning strategies implemented under the Merdeka Curriculum (Kusmawan et al., 2025).

This study utilized both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were obtained directly from participants through interviews, observations, and students' learning evaluations. The primary data provided information regarding students' development, motivation, learning effectiveness, challenges faced during the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, and strategies adopted to overcome those challenges. Secondary data were collected from various sources, including curriculum documents, teaching modules, lesson plans, records of learning outcomes, books, journal articles, and other relevant literature. These secondary data supported the primary findings and contributed to a broader understanding of the context of the study (Arero et al., 2025).

Several data collection techniques were employed to ensure comprehensive and credible findings. Participatory observation was conducted to obtain direct information regarding classroom learning activities and the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. During the observation process, the researchers actively participated in the school environment to understand the interactions occurring among teachers and students. Particular attention was given to students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development (Ireru et al., 2020).

Observations focused on students' active participation, learning independence, problem-solving abilities, critical thinking skills, communication skills, creativity, and responses to various instructional methods. In addition, the researchers observed the strategies used by teachers, classroom management practices, differentiated instruction, and the utilization of learning media and educational facilities to support student-centered learning (Aloizou et al., 2025). Another important data collection technique used in this study was in-depth interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers, students, and parents to obtain detailed information regarding their experiences and perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The interview questions explored several aspects, including students' academic and social development, the effects of the curriculum on students' motivation and learning outcomes, obstacles encountered during implementation, and solutions adopted by teachers and schools to address these problems. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they provided flexibility for participants to express their opinions freely while ensuring that all relevant topics were discussed systematically. Interviews with teachers focused on changes in instructional practices, students' development, and challenges in implementing differentiated learning. Interviews with students explored their feelings, motivation, learning experiences, and difficulties in adapting to the new curriculum (Belhaj et al., 2025).

Meanwhile, interviews with parents were intended to gather information regarding changes in students' behavior, independence, and learning achievement after the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Documentation was also employed as an additional technique for collecting data and validating findings obtained through

observations and interviews. Documents reviewed in this study included curriculum documents, lesson plans, teaching modules, students' assessment reports, teachers' professional development records, photographs, and documents related to parental involvement in supporting students' learning. These documents provided factual evidence regarding the implementation process and enabled researchers to compare documentary information with participants' statements and observational findings (Fathurrochman et al., 2025).

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the data, several strategies were applied. Prolonged engagement was carried out by spending sufficient time in the research setting to establish trust with participants and gain a deeper understanding of the context. Persistent observation was conducted to identify important characteristics and ensure the consistency of information obtained from participants (Amin et al., 2020). Triangulation techniques were used to enhance the credibility of the findings. Source triangulation involved comparing information collected from students, teachers, and parents, while methodological triangulation was performed by comparing findings obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation.

Time triangulation was also employed by collecting information at different times and situations to verify data consistency. In addition, member checking was conducted by presenting preliminary findings to participants and asking them to confirm whether the interpretations accurately represented their experiences and perspectives. These procedures were intended to minimize bias and improve the reliability of the findings (Lim, 2025). Data analysis in this study followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of four interconnected stages: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Motulsky, 2021).

During the data collection stage, information from observations, interviews, documentation, and learning evaluations was systematically gathered and organized. Since qualitative data were often extensive and complex, the data reduction process was carried out to simplify and focus on information relevant to the research objectives. In this stage, unnecessary information was eliminated, while important themes and categories were identified. The reduced data were subsequently organized and presented in the form of descriptive narratives, tables, and matrices to facilitate interpretation and identify relationships among variables (Ahmed, 2024).

The data display process enabled researchers to understand patterns, themes, and trends emerging from the findings. Through systematic data presentation, it became easier to compare information from different sources and identify similarities and differences among participants' perspectives. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the interpretation of the data and were continuously verified throughout the research process (Coleman, 2022). The conclusions were not established immediately but were developed gradually as additional evidence and information were obtained. This iterative process ensured that the findings accurately reflected the reality experienced by participants and were supported by sufficient evidence (Shufutinsky, 2020).

The integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches in this study enabled researchers to obtain a comprehensive understanding of students' development in improving learning effectiveness under the Merdeka Curriculum. The use of multiple data collection techniques, diverse participants, and rigorous procedures for ensuring data validity contributed to the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Chand, 2025). Furthermore, the study provided insights into the influence of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development on learning effectiveness and highlighted the role of teachers, parents, and school environments in supporting the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Therefore, the methodological framework adopted in this study was expected to generate meaningful findings and practical recommendations for improving learning quality and supporting students' holistic development in elementary education.

### C. Results and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SD Negeri 18 Tungkal Ilir has contributed positively to students' development and learning effectiveness. The curriculum has encouraged student-centered learning that emphasizes creativity, independence, critical thinking, and active participation. Based on observations and interviews with teachers, students, and parents, it was found that the learning process has become more interactive and flexible compared to the previous curriculum. Teachers are given greater autonomy to adapt learning materials and methods according to students' characteristics and needs, thereby creating a more meaningful learning experience.

Tabel 1 Table 1. Summary of the Main Findings and Educational Impact of Merdeka Curriculum Implementation

Aspect	Main Findings	Educational Impact
Student Motivation	Increased participation and enthusiasm	More active learning
Cognitive Development	Better conceptual understanding and critical thinking	Improved learning effectiveness
Affective Development	Greater confidence and responsibility	Positive classroom behavior
Psychomotor Development	More active project participation	Improved practical skills
Challenges	Limited facilities, student diversity, teacher adaptation	Need for continuous support
Solutions	Teacher training, collaboration, remedial programs	Better curriculum implementation

The findings indicate that the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum depends not only on curriculum design but also on teachers' ability to implement differentiated instruction and create meaningful learning experiences. Students' holistic development was achieved through active participation, contextual learning, collaborative activities, and continuous support from teachers and parents. These findings strengthen constructivist learning

theory, which emphasizes that meaningful learning occurs when students actively construct knowledge through interaction with their environment.

One of the significant findings of this study is the improvement in students' motivation to learn. Students showed greater enthusiasm during classroom activities and were more willing to participate in discussions, group work, and project-based learning. Teachers reported that students became more confident in expressing their opinions and asking questions. This condition reflects the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasize active learning and encourage students to become independent learners. Parents also observed positive changes in their children's attitudes toward learning. Many students demonstrated greater responsibility in completing assignments and showed increased curiosity toward various learning topics. These findings support previous studies suggesting that student-centered learning can enhance learning motivation and academic achievement.

Furthermore, the results indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has positively influenced students' cognitive development. Students were able to understand concepts more effectively through contextual learning activities and differentiated instruction. Teachers employed various instructional strategies, such as discussions, collaborative learning, and interactive media, to facilitate students with different learning abilities. These approaches enabled students to develop critical thinking skills and problem-solving abilities. In addition, students' affective and social development also improved. They became more cooperative, communicative, and respectful of their peers' opinions during classroom activities. Such findings demonstrate that learning effectiveness is not limited to academic achievement but also encompasses the development of social and emotional competencies.

Despite these positive outcomes, several challenges were identified during the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. One of the major obstacles was the limited availability of educational facilities and learning resources. Teachers stated that inadequate teaching media and infrastructure often hindered the implementation of innovative and technology-based learning activities. In addition, differences in students' abilities posed another challenge. Some students adapted quickly to independent learning approaches, while others required more structured guidance and assistance. This condition resulted in unequal learning progress among students. Observations revealed that approximately one-third of students still exhibited low participation in classroom activities, while several students experienced difficulties understanding learning materials without direct teacher assistance.

Another challenge encountered was the adaptation to new learning methods. Both teachers and students required time to adjust to the characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers had to modify their instructional practices and develop differentiated learning strategies to accommodate diverse student needs. Similarly, students who were accustomed to teacher-centered learning initially found it difficult to become active and independent learners. Limited instructional time also became a concern, as teachers needed additional time to prepare learning materials and provide individual assistance to students who experienced learning difficulties. These findings are

consistent with previous studies indicating that curriculum changes often require continuous adjustment and support from various stakeholders.

The findings also highlight the importance of understanding students' developmental characteristics in improving learning effectiveness. Students possess different cognitive, emotional, and social characteristics that influence their learning processes. Teachers emphasized that recognizing these differences enabled them to design more appropriate learning activities and provide individualized support. Students who received adequate assistance and encouragement demonstrated better learning outcomes and greater self-confidence. This finding is in line with Santrock's theory, which states that child development involves biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional dimensions influenced by both internal and environmental factors. Therefore, effective learning should consider students' developmental stages and individual characteristics.

To overcome the challenges encountered, various efforts have been implemented by the school. Teacher competency development through training and professional discussions has been continuously conducted to improve instructional quality. Teachers also maximize the use of available facilities and learning media to support classroom activities. Collaboration among teachers, parents, and the school has become an essential strategy in supporting students' learning development. Parents play a significant role in providing learning assistance at home and maintaining communication with teachers regarding students' progress. Intensive mentoring and remedial programs have also been implemented for students who require additional support. These efforts have helped students adapt to the learning process and improve their academic performance.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SD Negeri 18 Tungkal Ilir has successfully enhanced learning effectiveness and supported students' holistic development. Although several obstacles remain, continuous collaboration among teachers, parents, and the school has enabled these challenges to be addressed effectively. The results emphasize that successful curriculum implementation requires not only innovative learning approaches but also adequate support systems that consider students' diverse developmental characteristics. Therefore, strengthening teacher competencies, improving educational facilities, and enhancing cooperation among stakeholders are essential to achieving the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum and improving the quality of elementary education.

#### **D. Conclusions**

This study concludes that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SD Negeri 18 Tungkal Ilir has positively contributed to students' holistic development and learning effectiveness. Student-centered and differentiated learning approaches successfully enhanced students' motivation, critical thinking, collaboration, confidence, and learning independence. Despite challenges related to facilities, diverse student characteristics, and teacher adaptation, continuous collaboration among teachers, parents, and school management has supported successful curriculum implementation. This study contributes to educational management by providing empirical evidence that effective curriculum implementation requires instructional innovation, teacher professional

development, and strong stakeholder collaboration. Future research is recommended to involve schools from different regions and apply mixed-method approaches to obtain broader evidence regarding the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum.

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