

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MERDEKA BELAJAR POLICY IN EAST JAVA

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Abstract: This article aims to reveal the planning, implementation, constraints, and solutions of *Merdeka Belajar* policy in East Java. This article was written based on field research using a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through interviews, observation, and documentation. Furthermore, the data were analyzed using the Miles-Huberman version of the interactive qualitative data analysis technique. This article concludes that the planning for the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* policy in East Java is carried out through two activities. The first activity was the socialization of the four pillars of *Merdeka Belajar* from the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture. The second activity is to prepare infrastructure such as Dapodik and e-learning systems to support the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* policy. Then, *Merdeka Belajar* in East Java was implemented through three concrete steps. The first is to carry out the instructions of the Ministry of Education and Culture as optimally as possible under the capabilities of each institution. The second is to join the Motivating School program. The third is optimizing the implementation of student-centered online learning. The implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* in East Java encountered two main obstacles. The first is the uneven understanding and readiness of teachers in applying the concept of *Merdeka Belajar*. The second is the delay in the implementation of online learning due to the varied economic backgrounds of the parents of students and the uneven readiness of institutions in conducting online learning. Two solutions are carried out to overcome the obstacles faced in the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* in East Java. The first is to strengthen teachers' understanding of the concept and implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* through outreach activities and workshops. The second is conducting limited face-to-face learning while working on the implementation of blended learning.

Keywords: East Java, *Merdeka Belajar*, *Sekolah Penggerak*.

Introduction

National Education System Law is very flexible because it gives each school the flexibility and authority to hold school final exams, and also gives every school the right to graduate their students.¹ However, for reasons of National Standards and maintaining quality, the implementation of the National Examination (UN) continues to run despite various criticisms from academics and professionals. The State makes the UN as the final destiny of students' fate in passing the exam, where it is as if the three-year learning process is determined in three days.

Since the 2004-2006 curriculum or KBK-KTSP, the competencies demands of students should be in all domains, which include cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. The implementation of the exam should also evaluate the three domains. But the reality is that in the UN, only the cognitive aspects are evaluated, black and white, pencil paper.

The 2013 curriculum (K-13) is considered more comprehensive in terms of its assessment. The K-13 assessment is more holistic in measuring the competence of learners, which includes aspects of attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Therefore, if the government organizes the UN, then ideally these four competencies need to be carried out. However, in reality on the ground, the UN only tests the cognitive competence test, while other competencies are neglected.

The number of subjects that must be attended by students in school is too much, so students must learn and understand all fields of science taught. Similarly, the subject matter tested in the UN is too dense, so students and teachers are more likely to master the content, memorizing the exam material rather than reasoning.²

Things like this always burden the teacher with having to meet several material targets that must be delivered to students in preparation for exams. Even though students objected because they had to master and understand a lot of material in the form of rote memorization and a little reasoning. Parents are often bothered when their children move up to the sixth grade of SD/MI, move up to the ninth grade of SMP/MTs, or move up to the twelfth grade of SMA/MA. This is because they inevitably have to look for additional material to prepare for the UN through a series of additional lessons or private lessons. The National Examination should be used as a national measuring tool and for mapping the quality of education in

¹ Departemen Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia, "Undang-Undang Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 Tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional," Pub. L. No. UU 20/2003 (2003).

² Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia, *Merdeka Belajar* (Jakarta: Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia, 2019), 3.

Indonesia, instead of being used as a tool to assess and determine the fate of students' graduation.

So far, the teacher is busy with teaching in the classroom. On the other hand, teachers also have to make a very detailed and complicated Learning Implementation Plan (RPP), which becomes a heavy burden for the teacher. They are often required to make RPP with several pages that are not small, sometimes even up to more than 20 pages³.

Many excellent schools so far can only be attended by smart students and students from wealthy families. Meanwhile, students who are mediocre inability, especially from poor families, are very difficult to be accepted in favorite and excellent schools. This is contrary to the principle of equal distribution of education and equal rights to education in the community. It is strange if his house is close to the school, he is not accepted into the school because he is not smart or is from a poor family.

Departing from the problems that restrain schools, bind the freedom of teachers and students, and carry a heavy burden for parents, *Merdeka Belajar* is a policy breakthrough for improvement in the world of education. However, because this is a new thing, it is necessary to pay attention to all parties in implementing this *Merdeka Belajar* policy.

When this research proposal was prepared (2020), there had not been much research on *Merdeka Belajar*. Maybe that's because *Merdeka Belajar*'s policy is relatively new. Therefore, the author explores several previous studies related to *Merdeka Belajar* to confirm the novelty of this article.

First is research conducted by Rusmana. This study looks for the relevance of Ki Hajar Dewantara's thoughts with efforts to liberate students in education. This study concludes that education is not just reflection and thought, but is a form of the cultural transformation of society to change the social environment of an independent society⁴.

Second, Houtman's research on the *Merdeka Belajar* community perspective 5.0. This research analyzes *Merdeka Belajar* more conceptually than its application. This study concludes that there needs to be a more comprehensive benchmark for monitoring the progress of National Education⁵.

³ Ibid., 4.

⁴ Fattah Amal Iko Rusmana, "MEMERDEKAKAN SISWA MELALUI PENDIDIKAN: KONSEPSI PEMIKIRAN PENDIDIKAN KI HADJAR DEWANTARA (1889-1959)" (Skripsi, UNIVERSITAS NEGERI JAKARTA, 2016), <http://repository.unj.ac.id/724/>.

⁵ Houtman Houtman, "MERDEKA BELAJAR DALAM MASYARAKAT 5.0" (PROSIDING SEMINAR NASIONAL PROGRAM PASCASARJANA UNIVERSITAS PGRI PALEMBANG, Universitas PGRI Palembang: Program Pascasarjana Universitas PGRI Palembang, 2020).

Third, Mustaghfiroh's research which highlights the concept of *Merdeka Belajar* from the perspective of John Dewey's Progressivism. This study concludes that a change towards progress and improvement in the quality of education is indeed a necessity. And to get there requires concrete efforts, one of which is by liberating the learning process ⁶.

From some of these studies, it can be said that there is no research on *Merdeka Belajar* that focuses on its application in the field. To find out the attention of all parties and find out the results of *the Merdeka Belajar* policy, it is necessary to have a study.

This article is written with a qualitative approach with the type of case study. Furthermore, data were collected by interview, observation, and documentation methods ⁷. The author conducted interviews and observations with some stakeholders from various elements, ranging from officials of the East Java Provincial Education Office, several Branches of the Education Office at the City and District levels, as well as several schools in East Java. The data that has been collected is then analyzed using Miles-Huberman's qualitative data analysis technique. The flow used in interpreting this research data is collected, presented, reduced, and verified ⁸.

Planning for the Implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* in East Java

Merdeka Belajar is a new offer in the world of education. By liberating the learning process, learning achievement will also be better ⁹. To liberate the learning process, several concrete steps are needed, as the initial concept presented by the Minister of Education and Culture. To find out how the planning for the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* in East Java, the researchers collected important data from several Education Offices and also schools in East Java.

In the planning aspect, the researcher traced the facts that occurred in the field that the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* in East Java was planned through two main activities. The first activity is through the socialization of the four pillars of *Merdeka Belajar*. Socialization activities have been carried out by stakeholders in East Java Province to support the implementation of

⁶ Siti Mustaghfiroh, "Konsep 'Merdeka Belajar' Perspektif Aliran Progresivisme John Dewey," *Jurnal Studi Guru Dan Pembelajaran* 3, no. 1 (March 30, 2020): 141-47, <https://doi.org/10.30605/jsgp.3.1.2020.248>.

⁷ Norman K. Denzin, *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods* (New York: Transaction Publishers, 2017), 105.

⁸ Matthew B Miles and A Michael Huberman, *Analisis Data Kualitatif*, trans. Tjetjep Rohendi Rohidi (Jakarta: Universitas Indonesia, 1992).

⁹ Nurul Istiq'faroh, "RELEVANSI FILOSOFI KI HAJAR DEWANTARA SEBAGAI DASAR KEBIJAKAN PENDIDIKAN NASIONAL MERDEKA BELAJAR DI INDONESIA," *Lintang Songo : Jurnal Pendidikan* 3, no. 2 (August 31, 2020): 1-10.

Merdeka Belajar policy in planning aspects. The socialization activity for *the Merdeka Belajar* plan was initiated by the East Java Provincial Office and delivered to all Branches of the Education Office at the City/Regency level, then continued to all schools under their respective auspices, from PAUD to SMA levels.

The first pillar of *Merdeka Belajar* is the replacement of USBN. In East Java, USBN has been directed to be a test that is purely under the authority of the school and has been carried out since 2020. The essence of USBN is to determine student graduation at the end of the level and become the authority of the school through assessments carried out by teachers.

The UN evaluation system from time to time is always changing. Graduation criteria are more flexible coupled with an increase in the passing percentage. This increase resulted in the output of graduates who are often the subject of debate both in quality and quantity. The last policy is related to the elimination of the National Examination and is planned to be changed to a Minimum Competency Assessment and Character Survey that is adjusted to PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study). UN as a learning evaluation tool must be used for equal distribution of education quality. Therefore, the UN should not only pay attention to the standardization of results but also needs to be balanced with the standardization of processes and the standardization of inputs¹⁰.

The wider involvement of teachers in the final assessment of students should be encouraged by each school. The assessment does not have to be done in the form of a written test, because it can be done through portfolios, assignments, projects, and so on¹¹. Through a more comprehensive assessment like this, of course, student graduation becomes meaningful.

The second pillar of *Merdeka Belajar* is the replacement of the National Examination with a Minimum Competency Assessment and Character Survey. One of the main reasons for this replacement is that the UN is too cognitively oriented. All questions that appear in the UN lead to mastery of the content of the subject matter, and finally students are forced to memorize the subject matter. Though the character of students is also important to be guarded and evaluated for its internalization.

Misinterpretation of the UN indirectly not only burdens students but also burdens teachers and even parents. In society, UN scores are often used as a means of justifying whether a student is smart or not. Whereas the

¹⁰ Lutviyana Hidayah, "Asesemen Ujian Nasional Dari Masa Ke Masa Dan Solusinya: Indonesia," *Al-Mafahim: Jurnal Pendidikan Guru Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* 3, no. 2 (2020): 11–20.

¹¹ H. E. Mulyasa, *Menjadi Guru Penggerak Merdeka Belajar* (Jakarta: Bumi Aksara, 2021).

National Examination should function for mapping the quality of the national education system, not for assessing learning success, let alone determining student graduation¹².

With the abolition of the UN and the implementation of the National Minimum Competency Assessment and Character Survey, teachers have become more independent in carrying out learning as well as assessing their students. Likewise, students also become more comfortable in learning, without having to be afraid of the shadows of the UN scores. The assessment is carried out not based on the ability to master the material according to the curriculum as in the UN but is designed to map and improve the quality of education as a whole. Minimum Competency Assessment focuses on mastering the literacy and numeracy competencies that will be measured¹³.

The third pillar of *Merdeka Belajar* is the policy of simplifying lesson plans (RPP). So far, teachers have been busy with making very detailed lesson plans (RPP). This often has an impact on the non-optimal performance of teachers because it takes a long time to prepare a detailed lesson plan (RPP). So because of such demands, teachers are exhausted and cannot apply learning methods that should be more student-centered.

One sheet-RPP should be prepared while still meeting the minimum criteria that have been determined. Thus, even though it is only one sheet, the RPP can still be implemented optimally. Optimizing the lesson plans (RPP) later, of course, lies in how appropriate the learning method is used to deliver certain subject matter, and how the lesson content can be better understood by each student.¹⁴

The fourth pillar of Freedom of Learning is optimizing the zoning system in the New Student Admission (PPDB) process. The new zoning system has been socialized by the Ministry of Education and Culture through the East Java Provincial Education Office. The zoning system that has been running so far is still applied uniformly. The hope is to realize the Tricenter of Education by going to school in the neighborhood where they live. Legally

¹² H. Fajri Ismail, "Pro Kontra Ujian Nasional," *Al-Riwayah : Jurnal Kependidikan* 7, no. 2 (September 1, 2015): 301–24.

¹³ Dhina Cahya Rohim, "Konsep Asesmen Kompetensi Minimum Untuk Meningkatkan Kemampuan Literasi Numerasi Siswa Sekolah Dasar," *Jurnal VARIDIKA* 33, no. 1 (July 30, 2021): 54–62, <https://doi.org/10.23917/varidika.v33i1.14993>.

¹⁴ Zainal Arifin, "PENINGKATAN KEMAMPUAN GURU DALAM MEMBUAT RENCANA PELAKSANAAN PEMBELAJARAN (RPP) TEMATIK 1 HALAMAN MELALUI WORKSHOP DARING DENGAN VARIASI MODEL JIGSAW DI UNIT PELAKSANA TEKNIS DAERAH (UPTD) SEKOLAH DASAR (SD) NEGERI GENTENG 2 BANGKALAN," *Re-JIEM (Research Journal of Islamic Education Management)* 3, no. 2 (December 31, 2020): 201–15, <https://doi.org/10.19105/re-jiem.v3i2.4722>.

and formally, the zoning system does not accommodate differences in regional situations which certainly have their uniqueness. Moreover, the zoning system has not been implemented smoothly in all regions. Moreover, the number of teachers is also arguably not evenly distributed in each region.

The PPDB SMA/SMK zoning policy avoids the accumulation of qualified prospective students in only one particular school in a certain area, thus creating exclusivity in the field of education. The implementation of the zoning system policy ensures the availability of a quality workforce equally because students receive teaching by teachers and educational resources of the same quality. The absence of gaps in the quality of graduates will ultimately increase the distribution of quality human resources throughout East Java ¹⁵.

The second activity in the planning aspect of *Merdeka Belajar* in East Java is preparing infrastructure to support the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar*. To support the planning for the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar*, the East Java Provincial Education Office cooperates with all parties in preparing the educational infrastructure. The infrastructure in question is in the form of a *Dapodik* (*Data Pokok Pendidikan*) system and an e-learning system. The *Dapodik* system is prepared centrally so that data can be synchronized nationally. The e-learning system is the same, but schools are given full authority if they want to use other applications.

The *Dapodik* system accommodates the digitization of school operations, from PAUD to SMA levels. The procurement of infrastructure, reporting on the number of teachers and students, as well as the data needs of teachers and students are all accommodated in the *Dapodik* system. Please note that the *Dapodik* system has undergone several software updates, and currently running is the 2022 version of the *Dapodik* system.

Dapodik is a vital system in supporting the Free Learning policy. Through this *Dapodik* system, each school operator is given access to synchronize all of their respective school data to online cloud storage on a national scale. Although at the beginning of its launch, errors often occur, now everything can run for the better.

The *Dapodik* system itself is a form of Open Government Data created to support policies so that they are right on target. So it is very important to present complete, valid, integrated, and transparent open data.

¹⁵ Ahmad Mashudi, "Kebijakan PPDB Sistem Zonasi SMA/SMK Dalam Mendorong Pemerataan Kualitas Sumberdaya Manusia Di Jawa Timur," *Nidhomul Haq: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 4, no. 2 (October 5, 2019): 186–206, <https://doi.org/10.31538/ndh.v4i2.327>.

Transparent here means referring to school quality data or education quality maps by region¹⁶.

The second supporting infrastructure for the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* is the e-learning system. The Ministry of Education and Culture has prepared a learning platform namely *Belajar (dot) id* as an e-learning system that runs nationally. However, schools are given full authority in choosing other applications to support the IT-based learning process. The variety of applications chosen by each school is certainly a lot because it is tailored to the needs and desired complexity.

E-learning has a positive and significant effect on the quality of student learning. The influence is in a strong category. The more intensively e-learning is used, the quality of student learning will also increase. The utilization of web e-learning will improve learning outcomes indirectly¹⁷. The purpose of using e-learning in the learning system is to expand access to education for the wider community, as well as to improve the quality of learning¹⁸.

Implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* in East Java

In East Java, *Merdeka Belajar* is implemented in three steps. The first step, *Merdeka Belajar* is carried out according to the capabilities of each institution. The second step is to follow the Motivating School Program (*Sekolah Penggerak*) that has been initiated by the Ministry of Education and Culture. And the third step is to optimize the implementation of student-centered online learning.

Practically, *Merdeka Belajar* is implemented while still referring to the four main pillars, namely aspects related to the implementation of the National Standard School Examination (USBN), National Examination (UN), and Learning Implementation Plan (RPP), and New Student Admission (PPDB). However, what should be noted is that the implementation is very varied, depending on the capabilities of each institution.

¹⁶ Nadia Mukhlisa and Azhar Kasim, "Open Government Data : Open Data Pada Sektor Pendidikan Dalam Mendukung Kebijakan," *Kolaborasi : Jurnal Administrasi Publik* 7, no. 2 (August 31, 2021): 125–43, <https://doi.org/10.26618/kjap.v7i2.5489>.

¹⁷ Sufirmansyah Sufirmansyah et al., "Student's Preferences in Using Video-Based Learning Applications and Its Efficiency in Higher Education," *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 4, no. 2 (June 30, 2021): 272–83, <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v4i2.1474>.

¹⁸ Suharyanto Suharyanto and Adele B. L. Mailangkay, "PENERAPAN E-LEARNING SEBAGAI ALAT BANTU MENGAJAR DALAM DUNIA PENDIDIKAN," *Jurnal Ilmiah Widya* 4, no. 3 (2018): 17–21.

Regarding the first *Merdeka Belajar* pillar, namely the implementation of USBN which was replaced with examinations by their respective schools, there are still schools that prefer the written test system for reasons of ease of coordination. However, some schools have begun to accommodate teachers' wishes to conduct exams in the form of assignments, portfolios, or collaborative projects. The implementation of school exams with the written test model is usually carried out at the end of the school year. But if the teacher chooses to use an assignment model such as a portfolio or project assignment, then the school exam scores can be taken from the start of the odd semester ¹⁹.

With the flexible implementation of school exams, assessments can be carried out more comprehensively. This means that students have many opportunities and ways to demonstrate their competence. On the other hand, teachers become more independent in conducting examinations according to the needs of students and the situation in their class or school. That way, teachers will continue to develop their professional competencies, especially regarding student assessments ²⁰.

Furthermore, the second pillar of *Merdeka Belajar* is about replacing the UN with a Minimum Competency Assessment and Character Survey. The last time the UN was conducted was in 2020. And in 2021 a Minimum Competency Assessment has begun, as directed by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the East Java Provincial Education Office. UN is indeed ineffective if it is used as a means of identifying student learning needs because it is carried out at the end of the level. Precisely with the Minimum Competency Assessment carried out in the middle of the school level like this, it is more suitable to identify the needs of students in the future ²¹.

Initially, there were doubts about the content of the minimum competency assessment which only covered aspects of literacy and numeracy. Literacy and numeracy are basic competencies that must be understood by students. Maturity of language and mathematics is always related to various contexts of life, both personal and social ²². The implementation of literacy and numeracy assessments also breaks assumptions and concerns about the increasing burden of student learning. This is because the arena of literacy

¹⁹ Agus Sarifudin, "PENINGKATAN KINERJA GURU DALAM IMPLEMENTASI PENILAIAN SISTEM SKS MELALUI SUPERVISI AKADEMIK PENGAWAS SEKOLAH," *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 02 (August 29, 2019): 417–34, <https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v8i2.539>.

²⁰ A. Muri Yusuf, *Asesmen Dan Evaluasi Pendidikan* (Jakarta: Prenada Media, 2017).

²¹ Nurhikmah Nurhikmah, Isti Hidayah, and Sri Kadarwati, "Persepsi Dan Kesiapan Guru Dalam Menghadapi Asesmen Kompetensi Minimum," *Cokroaminoto Journal of Primary Education* 4, no. 1 (April 30, 2021): 78–83, <https://doi.org/10.30605/cjpe.412021.1294>.

²² Janner Simarmata et al., *Literasi Digital* (Jakarta: Yayasan Kita Menulis, 2021).

and numeracy competencies can and needs to be developed through all subjects²³.

As for the Character Survey, the Ministry of Education and Culture coordinates directly on a national scale. This survey was conducted to measure other aspects that reflect the implementation of Pancasila in schools. This includes aspects of student character, such as the character of learners and the character of cooperation, and school climates, such as a climate of diversity, bullying behavior, and quality of learning²⁴. Because its main function is as a quality mapping tool, competency assessments and Pancasila coaching surveys are not necessarily carried out every year and do not necessarily have to be followed by all students.

The third pillar of *Merdeka Belajar* is the simplification of the preparation of lesson plans (RPP). The RPP that is currently being prepared puts forward the principles of being effective, efficient, and student-oriented, while still fulfilling the core components²⁵. The core components of the RPP are still being written but in short, concise, clear language. The components that must exist include learning objectives, learning steps, and assessments. If everything is completed in one sheet, then the RPP is still recognized as valid. So, teachers can allocate more time to prepare for learning and have more opportunities to experiment with the application of various learning methods and evaluation tools²⁶.

The fourth pillar of *Merdeka Belajar* is the optimization of the zoning system in the PPDB. Previously, PPDB was determined with a distribution of at least 80% for the zoning line, a maximum of 15% for the achievement track, and a maximum of 5% for the transfer route. Now the zoning path is at least 50%, the affirmation path is at least 15%, the transfer path is at least 5%, and the achievement path is in the range of 0 to 30%, according to the conditions of each region²⁷. So the Regional Government is given the authority to determine the final proportion used and the determination of the zoning area.

²³ Ridwan Abdullah Sani, *Pembelajaran Berorientasi AKM: Asesmen Kompetensi Minimum* (Jakarta: Bumi Aksara, 2021).

²⁴ Ayang Sari et al., "Penghapusan Ujian Nasional Tahun 2021 Dalam Perspektif Guru SMA Di Kota Tebing Tinggi," in *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Pembelajaran Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia (SemNas PBSI) - 3* (FBS Unimed Press, 2021), 213–20, <http://digilib.unimed.ac.id/41244/>.

²⁵ Heppy Puspitasari, "Standar Proses Pembelajaran Sebagai Sistem Penjaminan Mutu Internal Di Sekolah," *Muslim Heritage* 2, no. 2 (January 1, 2018): 339–68, <https://doi.org/10.21154/muslimheritage.v2i2.1115>.

²⁶ Iskandar Tsani et al., "EVALUASI MODEL CIPP PADA PEMBELAJARAN PAI DAN BUDI PEKERTI DI SMA NEGERI 7 KOTA KEDIRI," *Al-Tadzkiyyah: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 12, no. 1 (July 11, 2021): 17–45, <https://doi.org/10.24042/atjpi.v12i1.8165>.

²⁷ Mulyasa, *Menjadi Guru Penggerak Merdeka Belajar*.

Affirmation pathways are provided for students who receive programs for handling poor families from the Central Government or Local Governments (for example, recipients of the Smart Indonesia Card/KIP). This pathway is a commitment from the Central Government and Regional Governments to improve access to quality education services for children from underprivileged families. Local governments can determine the proportion of students who are accepted through this route by referring to the percentage of students who receive programs for handling poor families from the Central Government or Local Governments in the area ²⁸.

Merdeka Belajar in East Java is also implemented through the Motivating School Program (*Program Sekolah Penggerak*). *Program Sekolah Penggerak* is an effort to realize the vision of Indonesian Education in realizing an advanced Indonesia that is sovereign, independent, and has personality through the creation of Pancasila Students ²⁹. *Program Sekolah Penggerak* focuses on developing student learning outcomes holistically which includes competencies (literacy and numeracy) and character, starting with superior human resources (principals and teachers).

There are several criteria that schools must meet to be able to register for the selection at the national level. In East Java, there are currently 19 cities and regencies that participate in *Program Sekolah Penggerak*. This is a collaborative program between the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Regional Government which is carried out holistically. Interventions are carried out on aspects of school human resources, learning, planning, digitization, to local government assistance. Mentoring is carried out for three years and is integrated with the ecosystem and distributed through word of mouth. Thus, *Program Sekolah Penggerak* will eliminate the status of a favorite school because all of them will be embraced to move forward together in time.

The four main targets of *Program Sekolah Penggerak* can be described as follows. First, on the aspect of learning outcomes, it is hoped that in the next three years it can exceed the target or above the expected level. Second, on the aspect of the learning environment, it is hoped that it will be safer, more comfortable, inclusive, and fun. Third, on the learning aspect, it can be more implementable in student-centered learning. And in the fourth aspect, it is expected to be able to formulate program plans and budgets based on self-reflection, teacher reflection, and improvement of learning, to make an impact on other schools.

²⁸ Masduki Duryat, "DEWA" Mengabdikan Untuk Negeri; Membangkitkan Kejemawaan Dan Konsistensi (Sleman: Deepublish, 2020).

²⁹ Wijaya Kusumah and Tuti Alawiyah, *GURU PENGGERAK: Mendorong Gerak Maju Pendidikan Nasional* (Surabaya: Penerbit Andi, 2021).

Next, the intervention of *Program Sekolah Penggerak* includes five things, namely consulting assistance, strengthening human resources, learning with a new paradigm, data-based planning, and digitizing schools. *Program Sekolah Penggerak* also has several benefits for schools. First, improve the quality of education outcomes. Second, accelerate the digitization of schools. Third, accelerate the achievement of the Pancasila student profile. Fourth, improve the competence of principals and teachers. Fifth, provide opportunities for schools to become catalysts of change for other schools. Sixth, getting intensive assistance for school transformation. And the seventh is getting an additional budget for the procurement of teaching materials for new paradigm learning. Even though it's just running we have felt some of the benefits.

Furthermore, *Program Sekolah Penggerak* will result in a pattern of educational transformation from a centralized pattern to a decentralized one with the driving teacher as the agent and the school as the leader of the transformation process. The driving teacher plays a role in bringing the transformational vision and spreading that vision to all stakeholders. The change process driven by the driving teacher is carried out using an appreciative inquiry approach to explore the potential and power of change from within the school through a dialogue process to minimize the occurrence of counterproductive resistance³⁰.

The use of IT is also one of the main factors in participating in this *Program Sekolah Penggerak*. Utilization of technology platforms for learning and school management, which aims to support the implementation of education policies that will be applied to education units as implementers of the Driving School Program. There are two kinds of technology platforms for teachers in education units. The first is a technology platform for learning, which aims to assist teachers in implementing learning with a new paradigm. The second is a technology platform for teacher profiles and competency development, which aims to assist teacher profile management activities and support teacher competency development activities carried out through digital media.

Next is a technology platform for school resources, which aims to help the head of education units, treasurers, and supervisors in managing education unit resource more precisely, easily, and efficiently. And lastly, a technology platform for education profiles and education report cards is

³⁰ Wahyu Satriawan, Iffa Dian Santika, and Amin Naim, "Guru Penggerak Dan Transformasi Sekolah Dalam Kerangka Inkuiri Apresiatif," *Al-Idarah : Jurnal Kependidikan Islam* 11, no. 1 (June 4, 2021): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.24042/alidarah.v11i1.7633>.

aimed at helping heads of education units and supervisors develop quality improvement programs that are more targeted and data-based³¹.

Learning with the new paradigm is learning that is oriented towards strengthening competence and character following the profile of Pancasila students. Learning with the new paradigm is carried out in four ways. First, is the use of a curriculum that is tailored to the purpose of developing and strengthening competencies and characters following the profile of Pancasila students. Second, is the application of learning following the stage of learning achievement of students. Third, the use of various teaching tools including textbooks and lesson plans according to the characteristics of the education unit and students. And the fourth is learning through projects to strengthen the achievement of the Pancasila Student profile³².

The learning carried out to support the *Merdeka Belajar* policy is student-centered. Because when this research was conducted the conditions were still a pandemic, so learning was carried out online. This is because some areas of East Java are still implementing PPKM with varied levels. So, online learning was chosen to suppress the spread of the coronavirus.

Facts on the ground show that there are still many parties who have problems accessing *Belajar(dot)id*. Therefore, many schools are using other applications as an alternative. In East Java, many schools have used third-party applications such as Moodle, Zoom, Google Meet, WhatsApp, and even Facebook Messenger. Indeed, every school faces different obstacles. Therefore, schools are allowed to use other applications that can accommodate student needs³³.

Obstacles in the Implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* in East Java

Teachers' understanding of the concept of *Merdeka Belajar* affects the learning process carried out in schools. In East Java, the teachers who work in *Sekolah Penggerak* on average have a better understanding of how to apply to learn under the concept of *Merdeka Belajar*. Meanwhile, in schools that are not yet included in the category of Driving Schools, teachers do not understand how to implement *Merdeka Belajar* in the learning process.

³¹ Sri Gusty et al., *Belajar Mandiri: Pembelajaran Daring di Tengah Pandemi Covid-19* (Jakarta: Yayasan Kita Menulis, 2020).

³² Anif Istanah et al., "INTEGRASI NILAI-NILAI PANCASILA UNTUK MEMBANGUN KARAKTER PELAJAR PANCASILA DI LINGKUNGAN KAMPUS," *Jurnal Gatranusantara* 19, no. 1 (April 3, 2021): 62–70.

³³ Pipit Putri Hariani and Sri Ngayomi Yudha Wastuti, "Pemanfaatan E-Learning Pada Pembelajaran Jarak Jauh di Masa Pandemi Covid-19," *Biblio Couns: Jurnal Kajian Konseling dan Pendidikan* 3, no. 2 (July 31, 2020): 41–49, <https://doi.org/10.30596/bibliocouns.v3i2.4656>.

Teacher understanding has implications for teacher readiness in implementing learning that accommodates the aims and objectives of *Merdeka Belajar* policy³⁴. Researchers found the fact that some teachers could be said to be not ready to implement learning oriented to the fulfillment of the goals of *Merdeka Belajar*. This happened mainly because of the age factor associated with a reluctance to learn IT. Some don't want to bother with variations in learning methods for reasons of other busyness.

During the current pandemic, online learning is still the main choice to suppress the spread of the Covid-19 virus. In practice, this online learning can be said to experience obstacles in several areas. After being traced, it turned out that the main cause was the varied economic background of the guardians of students and the uneven readiness of institutions in conducting online learning.

The government has indeed provided quota assistance to access learning applications. However, the problem of the guardian's economic background cannot be separated from the implementation of online learning itself³⁵. Students' devices or laptops sometimes do not meet the minimum specifications required to access e-learning applications. This will more or less hinder the online learning process.

On the other hand, geographical factors also determine internet signal access. East Java is geographically a complete province because it has urban, rural, mountainous, and even coastal areas. In urban areas, there may not be a problem. But in coastal or mountainous areas, the internet signal is difficult to find.

From some of the information above, the researcher concluded that the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* in East Java experienced two main obstacles. The first is the uneven understanding and readiness of teachers in applying the concept of *Merdeka Belajar*. The second is the delay in the implementation of online learning due to the varied economic backgrounds of the guardians of students and the uneven readiness of institutions in conducting online learning.

Solutions to Overcome Obstacles to Implementing *Merdeka Belajar* in East Java

From the various obstacles to the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* in East Java that have been described previously, the researchers found

³⁴ Kadek Ari Wisudayanti, "Kesiapan Menghadapi Perubahan Pada Guru Sekolah Dasar Terhadap Pendidikan Multikultural," *Edukasi: Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar* 2, no. 1 (July 5, 2021): 75–86.

³⁵ Asmuni Asmuni, "Problematika Pembelajaran Daring Di Masa Pandemi Covid-19 Dan Solusi Pemecahannya," *Jurnal Paedagogy* 7, no. 4 (October 1, 2020): 281–88, <https://doi.org/10.33394/jp.v7i4.2941>.

several solutions that have been attempted. The first solution is to hold several outreach activities and workshops on the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar*. This is done to strengthen teachers' understanding of the concept and practice of the *Merdeka Belajar* policy.

The East Java Provincial Education Office coordinates with all Branches of the Education Office at the Regency/City level to facilitate socialization activities and *Merdeka Belajar* workshops for teachers and school principals. This is intended to help increase teachers' understanding of the concept and practice of *Merdeka Belajar*.

The East Java Provincial Education Office has several times held socialization of *Merdeka Belajar* to all local governments. The branch of the Education Office at the City or District level then holds a series of *Merdeka Belajar* workshops through *Kelompok Kerja Kepala Sekolah* (K3S) and *Kelompok Kerja Guru* (KKG) networks on an ongoing basis. *Merdeka Belajar* workshops for teachers and school principals are regularly held, at least once a semester.

The importance of workshops like this is none other than to improve the competence of teachers as well as their understanding. A concrete example that has occurred elsewhere is an evaluation technique workshop as the basis for the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* at SMA NW Narmada, West Lombok. Through workshop activities, teachers have a better understanding of how the concept and application of evaluating the quality fulfillment implementation process is the basis for implementing *Merdeka Belajar*.³⁶

Another example is the improvement of teacher pedagogic competence through 21st-century learning tools training based on *Merdeka Belajar* in Pelalawan Regency, Riau. Through a series of workshops, teachers can improve their pedagogical competence in compiling comprehensive learning tools.³⁷

The next solution is to implement Limited Face-to-face Learning (PTMT). Because if you continue to force online learning in its entirety, there will be other, more complex obstacles. The implementation of PTMT is more or less an effort to implement blended learning. Blended learning can

³⁶ Sudirman Wilian, Nyoman Sridana, and Dadi Setiadi, "Workshop Teknik-Teknik Evaluasi Proses Pelaksanaan Pemenuhan Mutu Sebagai Dasar Pelaksanaan Merdeka Belajar di SMA NW Narmada Lombok Barat," *Jurnal Pengabdian Magister Pendidikan IPA* 4, no. 1 (February 2, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.29303/jpmpi.v4i1.610>.

³⁷ Ahmal Ahmal et al., "Peningkatan Kompetensi Pedagogik Guru Melalui Pelatihan Perangkat Pembelajaran Abad-21 Berbasis Merdeka Belajar Di Kabupaten Pelalawan Riau," *Unri Conference Series: Community Engagement 2* (December 30, 2020): 432–39, <https://doi.org/10.31258/unricsce.2.432-439>.

be used to increase the effectiveness of learning³⁸. Blended learning is also good for increasing motivation to learn amid the current pandemic conditions³⁹. Therefore, blended learning deserves to be optimized in its implementation.

Conclusion

The socialization activity of *the Merdeka Belajar* plan was initiated by the East Java Provincial Office and delivered to all Branches of the Education Office at the City/Regency level, then continued to all schools under their respective auspices, from PAUD to SMA levels. Meanwhile, to support the planning for the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar*, the East Java Provincial Education Office is collaborating with all parties in preparing the educational infrastructure. The infrastructure in question is in the form of a *Dapodik* system and an e-learning system. The *Dapodik* system is prepared centrally so that data can be synchronized nationally. The e-learning system is the same, but schools are given full authority if they want to use other applications.

Program Sekolah Penggerak is the main key in the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* in East Java. To date, there are 19 cities or regencies in East Java that have participated in the *Program Sekolah Penggerak*. With this program, teachers and school principals are expected to be able to spread their understanding of *Merdeka Belajar*, so that later all schools can implement *Merdeka Belajar* optimally.

Teacher understanding has an impact on the readiness of teachers to apply *Merdeka Belajar* in schools. Age factors, reluctance to develop themselves or learn IT, and reluctance to apply a variety of learning methods and media are the main problems. On the other hand, ownership of a standard device or laptop is also a separate obstacle to the implementation of online learning which inevitably remains the main choice during this pandemic. Geographical factors are also a separate obstacle due to the difficulty of finding signals in mountainous or coastal areas.

The socialization of the concept of *Merdeka Belajar* was provided by the East Java Provincial Education Office to all Branches of the Education Office at the City or District level. Next, each branch office held a series of *Merdeka Belajar* workshops for school principals and teachers through the

³⁸ Walib Abdullah, "Model Blended Learning Dalam Meningkatkan Efektifitas Pembelajaran," *FIKROTUNA* 7, no. 1 (July 29, 2018): 855–66, <https://doi.org/10.32806/jf.v7i1.3169>.

³⁹ Yani Fitriyani, Irfan Fauzi, and Mia Zultrianti Sari, "Motivasi Belajar Mahasiswa Pada Pembelajaran Daring Selama Pandemi Covid-19," *Jurnal Kependidikan: Jurnal Hasil Penelitian dan Kajian Kepustakaan di Bidang Pendidikan, Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran* 6, no. 2 (July 4, 2020): 165–75, <https://doi.org/10.33394/jk.v6i2.2654>.

K3S and KKG networks. This is intended to help increase understanding of the concept and practice of *Merdeka Belajar* in schools. Meanwhile, the implementation of PTMT continues to be optimized as part of the effort to realize student-centered blended learning while still implementing strict health protocols.

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