





# Evaluating the Implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum at Senior High School 7 Palu City: A Case Study Using the Van Meter and Van Horn Model

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[The author informations are in the declarations section. This article is published by ETFLIN in Education and Learning, Volume 1, Issue 1, 2025, Page 16-27. DOI 10.58920/edu0101397]


**Received:** 09 July 2025

**Revised:** 03 October 2025

**Accepted:** 08 November 2025

**Published:** 19 November 2025

**Editor:** Kamaludin Yusra

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**Keywords:** Implementation, Curriculum, Policy.

**Abstract:** The rapid rollout of Indonesia's Kurikulum Merdeka has posed significant implementation challenges at the school level, particularly in areas lacking adequate resources and policy comprehension. Senior High School 7, Palu City, as one of the early adopters in Central Sulawesi, reflects this broader national trend. This study aims to examine the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka at SMA Negeri 7 Palu using Van Meter and Van Horn's policy implementation model. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, with data collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis involving 12 informants, including teachers, administrators, and local education officials. Findings reveal that while the school has formally adopted the curriculum, key indicators such as policy standards, resource availability, and inter-agency communication remain underdeveloped. Many teachers reported limited understanding of the curriculum's structure, and the learning infrastructure was found to be below the required standard. On the other hand, community and parental support were consistently strong. In conclusion, although the school exhibits foundational readiness, systemic constraints continue to hinder full implementation. Targeted capacity development and improved coordination are essential to realize the curriculum's intended goals. Additionally, the discussion section has been strengthened by incorporating international literature, such as Fullan (2015), Darling-Hammond et al. (2020), Hargreaves & O'Connor (2018), and OECD (2022), to provide a broader comparative perspective on curriculum reform and implementation practices.

## Introduction

Improving the quality of education remains a central priority in Indonesia's national development agenda (1, 2). Despite repeated curriculum reforms, ranging from the Competency-Based Curriculum to the 2013 Curriculum, many schools continue to rely on outdated pedagogical practices that fail to address students' diverse potentials and contextual realities (3, 4). The *Kurikulum Merdeka* emerged as an adaptive response to these issues, emphasizing learner autonomy, character formation, and competency-based learning (5, 6). Yet, its implementation at the school level remains uneven and context-dependent.

Globally, curriculum reform and teaching quality have long been central to educational improvement efforts. Fullan (2015) and Hargreaves & O'Connor (2018) emphasize that curriculum change succeeds when it aligns with teachers' professional capacities, contextual adaptation, and collaborative network (7, 8). Similarly, Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) and OECD (2022) stress that school leadership, pedagogical innovation, and professional learning

communities are key determinants of teaching quality (9, 10). These international insights underscore that educational policy implementation is not merely a matter of compliance but of translation within specific institutional and socio-cultural contexts. Against this backdrop, *Kurikulum Merdeka* provides a valuable case through which to explore how global principles of educational transformation interact with Indonesia's local realities.

The urgency to evaluate the implementation of this curriculum stems from national education statistics and policy shifts (11). National data underscore the need to evaluate the enactment of this policy. Around 60% of teachers report psychological unpreparedness for rapid curriculum changes (12). While in pilot Islamic elementary schools, unpreparedness arises from inadequate training (30%), unclear guidelines (21%), adaptation difficulties (18%), lack of management support (14%), and limited learning resources (24%) (13). These difficulties stem from teachers' lack of conceptual understanding of the curriculum's philosophy, its core values, and the complex learning outcome (CP) documents (12); deficiencies in

pedagogical skills to implement learner-centered approaches like Project-based Learning or integrate technology effectively; and struggles in designing and utilizing comprehensive assessment instruments, alongside other contributing factors like limited access to literacy materials (14).

In the specific context of SMA Negeri 7 Palu City, preliminary observations reveal several situational challenges. Although the school was among the first to adopt the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in Central Sulawesi, teachers initially faced confusion in interpreting the curriculum structure, particularly in developing project-based learning aligned with the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5)*. Infrastructure limitations and resource constraints further challenged implementation, although proactive school leadership initiated internal workshops and peer learning to bridge capacity gaps. This combination of institutional enthusiasm and structural limitation provides a meaningful context for examining how policy intentions are operationalized at the local level.

Despite the policy's strategic vision, its success still depends on institutional readiness and the coordinated efforts of local education authorities. In this context, the Education and Culture Office of Central Sulawesi Province plays a critical role in facilitating, guiding, and evaluating the adoption of *Kurikulum Merdeka* across senior high schools, including SMA Negeri 7 Kota Palu. However, disparities in infrastructure, teacher competence, and administrative capacity remain pressing challenges. As prior educational reforms in Indonesia have demonstrated, the absence of synchronized support mechanisms often results in partial or uneven implementation at the grassroots level, underscoring the need for empirical evaluation of localized outcomes.

Previous research highlights the promise and pitfalls of curriculum implementation nationwide. However, empirical investigations into the localized challenges faced by public high schools in remote or under-resourced regions remain limited. This study seeks to address this gap by evaluating the implementation process of *Kurikulum Merdeka* at SMA Negeri 7 Kota Palu through the lens of Van Meter and Van Horn's policy implementation model (Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975). Specifically, the study positions this case not merely as an application but as an empirical test of the model's relevance and adaptability within Indonesia's educational policy context (cf. O'Toole, 2000; Winter, 2012)(15-17). By examining how the model's six dimensions, policy standards, resource adequacy, communication, organizational characteristics, implementer attitudes, and socio-political environment, manifest in this localized setting, the research aims to contribute both practically, by identifying implementation barriers, and theoretically, by assessing and potentially extending the explanatory power of the model.

## Methodology

### Study Design and Rationale

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design, chosen for its suitability in providing a straightforward and comprehensive portrayal of how the *Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar* is implemented at Senior High School 7, Palu City. Unlike case study or ethnographic approaches, which typically emphasize deep cultural immersion or theory building, the qualitative descriptive design focuses on accurately capturing participants' perspectives and organizational realities in their natural context without imposing an interpretive or theoretical lens. This approach

was deemed most appropriate given the study's aim to describe and interpret policy implementation processes and practical challenges as experienced by stakeholders, rather than to generate new theoretical constructs. It thus provides analytic flexibility while maintaining proximity to participants' authentic accounts, ensuring findings remain directly relevant to policy evaluation and practice improvement.

### Study Site and Participants

The research was conducted at Senior High School 7, Palu City, one of the designated pilot schools for early adoption of *Kurikulum Merdeka* in Central Sulawesi. Key informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in the policy's implementation. Participants included school administrators, teachers, and officials from the Central Sulawesi Provincial Office of Education and Culture. In total, 12 informants participated: five teachers, two curriculum coordinators, three administrative personnel, and two education office supervisors.

Although the total number of participants was 12, this composition captured the full spectrum of roles directly involved in the curriculum's implementation, from policy supervisors to classroom practitioners. Data saturation was achieved when no new themes emerged during interviews, ensuring that the sample adequately represented the institutional complexity of the implementation process.

### Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. Interviews followed a guide derived from Van Meter and Van Horn's policy implementation framework and were conducted face-to-face in Bahasa Indonesia, lasting approximately 45-60 min. Observations were recorded systematically during classroom activities, curriculum planning meetings, and teacher development sessions.

Document analysis encompassed curriculum plans, teacher training modules, internal reports, and relevant policy directives, including Ministerial Decree No. 262/M/2022, to support triangulation and strengthen data validity.

### Analytical Framework and Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, involving four iterative phases: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Thematic coding was carried out manually and guided by the six key constructs from Van Meter and Van Horn's implementation model: [1] policy standards and objectives, [2] resource availability, [3] characteristics of the implementing agency, [4] inter-organizational communication, [5] disposition of implementers, and [6] socio-economic and political context.

Cross-informant validation and constant comparison techniques were employed to ensure analytic reliability, while reflexive memo-writing was used to trace decision-making and minimize interpretive bias.

## Results

Curriculum reform in education systems is inherently a complex and gradual process that requires systemic preparedness, particularly among educators and educational institutions. In Indonesia, *Kurikulum Merdeka*, as stipulated in Ministerial Decree No. 262/M/2022, represents a

**Table 1.** Stages of Merdeka Belajar curriculum implementation at Senior High School or equivalent levels.

No. Stage	Aspects
1. Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curriculum design and development of learning/assessment flow</li> <li>• Utilization and development of teaching materials</li> <li>• Project to Strengthen Pancasila Student Profile (P5) planning</li> </ul>
2. Teaching and Learning Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of P5 and student-centered learning</li> <li>• Guidance based on student interests and talents</li> <li>• Subject selection for Grades XI and XII</li> <li>• Integration of assessment and instruction</li> <li>• Teacher collaboration in curriculum and instructional planning</li> <li>• Collaboration with parents/families, communities, and industries</li> </ul>
3. Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflection and quality improvement of curriculum implementation</li> </ul>

significant policy shift aimed at promoting flexible learning models centered on character development and essential competencies. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology has outlined a phased implementation strategy to allow schools to adopt the curriculum progressively based on their institutional capacities, aligned with the broader principles of *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn).

At SMA Negeri 7 Kota Palu, stages as outlined in **Table 1** have been partially implemented. The planning phase has focused on aligning teaching materials with student needs, while implementation and evaluation stages remain constrained by limited infrastructure and uneven teacher readiness.

Analysis of the findings using Van Meter and Van Horn's framework revealed varying degrees of alignment across the six implementation variables, namely policy standards and objectives, resources, characteristics of implementing agencies, inter-organizational communication, disposition of implementers, and the socio-political environment. The results highlight both enabling and inhibiting factors that influence how the Kurikulum Merdeka is operationalized at SMA Negeri 7 Palu.

### Policy Standards and Objectives

The success of any public policy implementation depends greatly on the clarity and coherence of its goals and standards. In the context of *Kurikulum Merdeka*, these standards were designed to promote flexible, relevant, and student-centered learning, emphasizing autonomy and character development through the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5) framework.

At the policy level, Rosdiana, a representative from the Central Sulawesi Provincial Education Office, explained that: *"Kebijakan kurikulum merdeka belajar yang diterapkan di sekolah-sekolah dirancang untuk perubahan yang signifikan dalam sistem pendidikan supaya menciptakan pengalaman belajar yang lebih fleksibel, relevan dan berkualitas. Jadi, standarnya kebijakan kurikulum merdeka belajar tentunya mencakup beberapa aspek seperti: standar kompetensi yang memuat kompetensi inti dan kompetensi dasar, standar isi dan standar penilaian terhadap kurikulum ini. Dan berbicara mengenai sasaran dari kurikulum merdeka belajar, tentunya kami menginginkan peningkatan kualitas pendidikan yang baik bagi guru dan juga siswa, sehingga mengembangkan karakter yang lebih baik lagi serta unggul yang telah terintegrasikan ke dalam kurikulum merdeka belajar. Akan tetapi, sebagian sekolah belum menerapkan kurikulum merdeka belajar dikarenakan mekanisme pelaksanaannya*

*yang masih mempertimbangkan beberapa faktor sehingga penerapannya di sekolah-sekolah begitu lambat."*

This statement highlights that although the policy framework is comprehensive, its implementation across schools remains uneven due to differences in local readiness and administrative capability.

At SMA Negeri 7 Palu, local actors demonstrated varying degrees of alignment with these objectives. The principal emphasized student empowerment and local adaptation, stating: *"Sudah jelas kalau sasaran utama dari kebijakan ini adalah siswa, agar siswa ke depannya bisa bersaing secara sehat di kompetisi-kompetisi yang ada. Sekolah Menengah Atas Negeri 7 Kota Palu sudah menerapkan kurikulum Merdeka belajar selama 2 tahun berjalan, dan selama ini standar penerapan kurikulum Merdeka belajar di sekolah ini masih terus dikembangkan yang dimana dari penyusunan kurikulum yang dilakukan sendiri oleh sekolah dan menyediakan perangkat ajar sesuai dengan kebutuhan siswanya."*

Similarly, the vice principal for curriculum, Isman, added: *"Standar penerapan kebijakan kurikulum Merdeka belajar di sekolah ini mengacu pada beberapa ukuran dan prinsip seperti sekolah diberikan kebebasan untuk menyesuaikan kurikulum sesuai dengan konteks lokal dan kebutuhan spesifik siswa. Ini berarti sekolah dapat memilih dan mengadaptasi materi ajar serta metode pembelajaran yang relevan dengan kondisi dan karakter siswa disini."*

These accounts illustrate the flexibility that *Kurikulum Merdeka* intends to foster. However, gaps remain between design and execution. The vice principal for student affairs, Nurhayatin, M.Pd., acknowledged: *"Standar penerapan kurikulum merdeka belajar merupakan konsep dasar yang dilaksanakan di sekolah, jika melihat dari proses belajar mengajar standarnya belum terlaksana secara keseluruhan, hal ini dipengaruhi beberapa faktor di lapangan, contohnya saja dari siswa itu sendiri kadang belum memahami dengan baik apa yang dijelaskan oleh gurunya padahal sudah memakai konsep dari kurikulum merdeka belajar itu sendiri."*

This concern reflects a broader issue of uneven comprehension and pedagogical alignment. Teachers and students expressed similar experiences. A history teacher, Abu Joko, noted: *"Itu bisa jadi pihak Dinas Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan bekerja sama dengan pihak sekolah supaya standar penerapannya bisa berjalan dengan sesuai. Utamanya siswa, supaya siswa bisa memahami konsep yang berdasarkan dari kurikulum Merdeka belajar."*

Meanwhile, students offered mixed perspectives. The student council president, Much Fitrawan, said: *"Sasarannya untuk siswa kak, karena dengan adanya kebijakan ini*

berguna untuk meningkatkan kualitas diri kami ke depannya agar berguna demi bangsa dan negara. Selama ini berjalan dengan baik kak, hanya saja masih ada juga beberapa siswa yang belum sepenuhnya paham dengan kurikulum baru ini, yang mereka tahunya saja datang ke sekolah lalu belajar lalu pulang, jadi ketika pembelajaran di kelas mereka hanya bengong dan tidak mengerti konsep pembelajarannya." In contrast, another student, Jirani, provided a more optimistic view: "Menurut saya, standarnya sudah baik dan sudah berjalan dengan maksimal sesuai apa yang sekolah terapkan. Dan kurikulum ini bertujuan supaya pendidikan di Indonesia bisa meningkat lagi."

Together, these perspectives indicate a gap between policy ideals and local interpretation. This aligns with Van Meter and Van Horn's (1975) assertion that ambiguity in policy standards can reduce implementation performance. The variation in understanding of *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5) at SMA Negeri 7 Palu exemplifies this dynamic. Furthermore, as Lipsky's (1980) concept of *street-level bureaucracy* suggests, teachers act as interpreters of policy under conditions of limited guidance and resources. Thus, while *Kurikulum Merdeka* offers autonomy, its success ultimately depends on the capacity of schools and educators to internalize and enact the curriculum's philosophical and pedagogical intent consistently.

## Resources

The successful implementation of a public policy relies not only on the quality of its design but also on the adequacy and effective utilization of available resources, including human capital, financial support, and infrastructure. Among these, human resources constitute the most critical factor, as they serve as the primary agents translating policy into practice. Each phase of implementation requires not only sufficient personnel but also competent individuals who understand and internalize the policy's objectives.

In the context of *Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar* implementation at the senior secondary level, the readiness of teachers, students, infrastructure, and financial support determines the extent to which policy goals can be realized. Insights from multiple informants illuminate how these resource-related dynamics play out in practice.

Rosdiana, representing the Subdivision of Senior High School Development at the Central Sulawesi Provincial Education Office, explained: "Sebenarnya jika melihat fakta di lapangan, masih ada sebagian guru yang belum begitu paham dengan kurikulum merdeka belajar, terlebih lagi di daerah-daerah pelosok yang belum terjangkau, sehingga hal ini menjadi pr bagi kami untuk pemeratakan sistem kurikulum baru ini. Tidak ada anggaran khusus untuk sekolah dalam penerapan kurikulum merdeka belajar, tapi semua yang berkaitan dengan penunjang aktivitas belajar mengajar seperti sarana dan prasarana sekolah tentu ada dananya yaitu dana BOS."

Her statement underscores two critical challenges: uneven teacher understanding across regions and the absence of dedicated funding streams for *Kurikulum Merdeka*. While operational costs are partially supported through the BOS (School Operational Assistance) program, there remains a gap in resources specifically aimed at curriculum transition and capacity building.

At the institutional level, Anas Syakir, Principal of SMAN 7 Palu, provided a grounded perspective: "Sumber daya tenaga pengajar atau guru disini sudah sangat mencukupi, tapi dari keseluruhan guru yang mengajar disini ada

sebagian kecil yang belum mengerti soal mekanisme kurikulum merdeka, namun hal tersebut akan menjadi evaluasi untuk kami ke depannya agar semua guru di sekolah ini dapat mengerti dan mampu mengembangkan metode belajarnya sendiri."

This statement reflects that while the quantitative sufficiency of teaching staff is not an issue, qualitative readiness, particularly in understanding and adapting to the new curriculum, remains an ongoing challenge.

Similarly, Isman, Vice Principal for Curriculum Affairs, highlighted the interplay between various resource components: "Iya, diberlakukannya kurikulum ini tentu memperhatikan beberapa aspek, mulai dari sumber daya guru, finansial, serta sarana dan prasarana sekolah. Sumber daya guru merupakan komponen utama tapi hal ini bisa dilakukan saat kebijakan itu sementara berlangsung atau sementara dilaksanakan, jadi cukup atau tidaknya ini akan menjadi bahan evaluasi untuk ke depannya. Kalau dana khusus belum ada, tapi dana bos sendiri sudah menunjang dari penerapan kurikulum merdeka belajar."

This reinforces that resource adequacy is an evolving process, with BOS funds serving as a provisional financial backbone, while institutional evaluations continuously inform future improvements.

From a more operational standpoint, Nurhayatin, Vice Principal for Student Affairs, noted: "Kalau faktanya, jumlah tenaga pengajar di sekolah ini terbilang cukup, hanya saja penerapan kurikulum merdeka belajar ini perlu ada kesiapan yang betul-betul matang dari pihak sekolah, karena bagi kami yang seorang tenaga pengajar perlu mempersiapkan materi atau perangkat ajar sesuai dengan kebutuhan siswa, karena kurikulum baru ini banyak perubahannya dan menuntut penyesuaian yang tidak mudah dengan waktu yang singkat. Dan juga memang fasilitas sekolah ini perlu ditambahkan lagi karena bisa menjadi penghambat penerapan kurikulum terbaru ini. Setahu saya tidak ada biaya khusus untuk mendukung kebijakan ini."

Her comment emphasizes the dual challenge faced by teachers—curricular adaptation under tight timelines and inadequate infrastructure—which collectively strain the school's implementation capacity.

Echoing this perspective, Abu Joko, a history teacher, described the hands-on challenges teachers face: "Setahu saya hal itu belum ada, tapi secara langsung pihak sekolah punya dana bos untuk menunjang aktivitas belajar di sekolah. Kalau gurunya sudah cukup, namun penerapan kurikulum baru ini menjadi tantangan bagi kami sebagai guru karena kami sendiri yang merancang materi pembelajarannya di kelas, tapi sebelum itu kami mengamati kondisi kebutuhan para siswa tersebut supaya bisa menyesuaikan dengan kebutuhan dari siswa tadi."

His remarks reveal the high degree of teacher agency expected under *Kurikulum Merdeka*, where teachers are both designers and implementers of instruction tailored to student needs (see **Table 2**). However, this autonomy also imposes greater professional demands and requires sustained institutional support.

Students, as end beneficiaries, provided complementary insights. Much Fitrawan, President of the Student Council, observed: "Menurut saya cukup kak, karena guru yang mengajar punya cara untuk membuat kami paham, hanya saja untuk fasilitasnya perlu ditambah lagi karena hal tersebut menunjang dalam penerapan kurikulum merdeka belajar dan setahu saya, program ini sudah termasuk dalam dana BOS." Similarly, Jirani, another student, noted: "Yang



**Table 2.** Design of instructional content for the history subject.

No	Aspect	Description
1	Understanding Learning Outcomes and Core Competencies	Teachers interpret the learning outcomes to organize content systematically and emphasize key historical events.
2	Relating Historical Content to Students' Lives	Teachers select topics that connect with local culture, community context, and relevant contemporary issues.
3	Developing Project-Based Learning Activities	Students design and implement projects based on local historical themes aligned with the <i>Profil Pelajar Pancasila</i> (P5).
4	Utilizing Diverse Historical Sources	Teaching materials include textbooks, academic journals, archives, photographs, and documentary media.
5	Integrating Group Discussions and Historical Simulations	Teachers facilitate discussions and design historical role plays or dramas to explore multiple perspectives on past events.
6	Designing Local History Exploration Activities	Learning content integrates local historical potential through activities such as field visits to heritage or historical sites.
7	Using Digital Platforms and Technology	Digital tools and online resources are employed to enhance engagement and support history learning.
8	Designing Assessment Methods	Students' understanding is evaluated through authentic assessments, including classroom participation, project performance, and content-based evaluations.

**Table 3.** School facilities at senior high school 7, Palu city.

No	Facility	Quantity	Remarks
1	Grade X Classrooms	10	All in good condition
2	Grade XI Classrooms	10	All in good condition
3	Grade XII Classrooms	10	One classroom non-functional
4	Science Laboratories	3	All in good condition
5	Toilets	8	Two units non-functional
6	Library	1	In good condition
7	Sports Fields	3	One field non-functional
8	Mosque/Prayer Room	1	In good condition
9	Multipurpose Hall	1	In good condition

*saya tahu pendanaan untuk kebijakan Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar sudah masuk ke dalam dana BOS."*

These statements suggest that students recognize the efforts made by teachers but remain aware of the material limitations, particularly in facilities, that affect the full realization of *Kurikulum Merdeka's* goals.

From a community perspective, Moh. Agim, a member of the SikolapomorePalu education community, offered an external viewpoint: *"Jika kita melihat sumber daya guru yang dihasilkan oleh negara tentu sangat banyak, namun tidak semua bergerak di bidang pendidikan dan juga tidak semua memahami konsep kurikulum merdeka belajar, sehingga perlunya peran dinas pendidikan dalam memperhatikan dan mengevaluasi sekolah-sekolah yang telah menerapkan kurikulum merdeka belajar dan kalau pendanaan untuk kebijakan ini saya rasa sudah termasuk didalam dana BOS, tapi semoga ada pendanaan khusus untuk kedepannya."*

This reinforces the broader systemic challenge, ensuring not only adequate staffing but also continuous professional development and targeted funding that can sustain curriculum innovation over time.

Taken together, these findings indicate that while human resource availability at SMAN 7 Palu is largely sufficient, disparities in teacher understanding, infrastructural

constraints, and the lack of dedicated funding continue to limit full policy realization. The reliance on BOS funds provides a functional but insufficient mechanism for deep curricular reform. Therefore, sustainable implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* requires ongoing investment in teacher competence, pedagogical resources, and institutional infrastructure to bridge the gap between policy intent and classroom reality. **Table 3** illustrates the current physical infrastructure at SMA Negeri 7 Palu, indicating which facilities adequately support or potentially constrain the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

Classrooms are utilized by teachers to implement the *Kurikulum Merdeka* during the teaching and learning process. The multipurpose hall serves as a venue for extracurricular programs such as student council (*OSIS*) meetings, scouting activities, and collaborative learning seminars. Meanwhile, the school field accommodates various school-wide events and student projects.

Taken together, these findings show that while institutional enthusiasm for *Kurikulum Merdeka* is strong, schools interpret and operationalize the policy differently depending on their internal capacity and leadership structure. **Figure 1** illustrates how the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is integrated into both extracurricular and project-based learning activities at SMA Negeri 7 Palu.

### Organizational Characteristics

The successful implementation of educational policy at the school level is largely determined by the organizational capacity of the implementing institution. This encompasses clear structural arrangements, competent human resources, managerial effectiveness, coordination mechanisms, and sustained stakeholder support. In the case of SMA Negeri 7 Kota Palu, as one of the early implementers of *Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar*, the findings indicate several organizational adjustments designed to optimize the policy's execution and better accommodate students' diverse potentials.

Mrs. Rosdiana, a program coordinator representing the Head of the Division for High School Development at the Provincial Education Office of Central Sulawesi, explained:



**Figure 1.** Integration of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum into school activities and the learning process.

*“Untuk perubahan sebenarnya tidak seberapa dari kurikulum sebelumnya, semua sekolah yang telah menerapkan kurikulum Merdeka belajar sangat antusias ingin mencoba kurikulum baru ini, hal ini memudahkan untuk menaikkan nilai atau akreditasi dari sekolah tersebut. Hal itu menjadi kewajiban dari sekolah yang menerapkan sistem kurikulum merdeka belajar.”*

Her remarks illustrate that the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka is viewed not merely as a pedagogical reform but also as an institutional strategy to strengthen school quality and accreditation outcomes. The enthusiasm observed among schools reflects a systemic effort to adapt organizationally to the new curriculum framework.

At the school level, Principal Anas Syakir described a notable structural change in teacher workload distribution: *“Oh iya ada, jika di Kurikulum 2013 guru bisa mengampuh dua sampai tiga mata pelajaran, di Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar hal tersebut sudah dihilangkan atau setiap guru hanya bisa mengampuh satu mata pelajaran saja. Di sekolah ini kami memiliki beberapa kegiatan intrakurikuler dan ekstrakurikuler dan kegiatan tersebut dapat mawadahi bakat dan minat siswa.”*

This demonstrates a move toward greater specialization among teachers, improving subject focus and instructional quality. Simultaneously, the expansion of intra- and extracurricular activities reflects the school’s alignment with Kurikulum Merdeka’s emphasis on holistic student development.

Vice Principal for Curriculum Affairs, Mr. Isman, added: *“Iya, sekolah punya baik intrakurikuler maupun ekstrakurikuler, jadi siswa bebas memilih sesuai minatnya. Untuk perubahannya tidak terlalu terlihat jelas, namun secara mekanisme penerapannya menjadikan lebih sistematis dan terstruktur justru memudahkan bagi guru dan siswa ketika proses pembelajaran berlangsung.”*

This statement suggests that even though structural

changes may appear subtle, they have resulted in improved operational coherence and smoother teaching-learning processes. The increased organization within instructional management has enhanced both efficiency and flexibility at the classroom level.

Vice Principal for Student Affairs, Mrs. Nurhayatin, further emphasized the significance of student development within the school’s organizational structure: *“Seperti biasa, tidak ada perubahan yang signifikan, hanya saja gurunya yang bertambah. Sekolah harus berperan dalam peningkatan bakat dan minat siswa, karena bakat dan minat menjadi hal yang penting untuk diketahui oleh siswa itu sendiri apalagi di usia muda sekarang ini adalah masa mencari jati diri dan mengenal diri sendiri dengan memahami kelebihan dan kelemahannya.”*

Her reflection highlights the school’s evolving role, not only as an academic institution but also as a developmental environment fostering self-awareness, identity, and individual strengths among students.

From a teaching perspective, history teacher Mr. Abu Joko observed: *“Sekolah menjadi lebih baik dari sebelumnya karena guru bertambah untuk menyesuaikan dengan kurikulum baru ini, dan guru sudah sesuai dengan keahliannya masing-masing. Oh iya, itu diwajibkan, dan semua siswa wajib mengikutinya.”*

This indicates that the school’s organizational capacity has strengthened, particularly through the alignment of teacher assignments with their respective expertise and the introduction of mandatory participation in curricular programs that promote inclusivity and skill development.

Student perspectives reinforce these organizational insights. Much Fitrawan, President of the Student Council, shared: *“Sedikit berubah kak, yang dulunya dimana waktu kami kebanyakan menerima pelajaran di kelas, sekarang lebih fokus untuk mencari potensi yang kami miliki dan itu kami dapatkan di Pelajaran profil pelajar Pancasila dan kegiatan-kegiatan sekolah. Di sekolah ini wajib diikuti oleh semua siswa dan peran organisasi juga tidak kalah penting yang berguna sebagai wadah untuk mengembangkan minat mereka, contohnya seperti Osis dan Pramuka, kebetulan saya adalah ketua Osis.”*

Similarly, student Jirani stated: *“Kondisinya, kami sekarang lebih banyak waktu untuk mencari dan mengembangkan bakat kami. Iya wajib kak, siswa bebas memilih apa yang dia kuasai melalui organisasi atau kegiatan yang ada di sekolah.”*

These testimonies reveal that organizational adaptation at SMA Negeri 7 Kota Palu has translated into tangible opportunities for students to explore and develop their talents through structured programs and active organizational engagement.

**Table 4.** Comparative data on the implementation of the 2013 curriculum and the Merdeka Belajar curriculum.

No.	Aspect of Comparison	2013 Curriculum (K13)	Merdeka Belajar Curriculum
1	Timing of Specialization	Specialization begins in Grade 10	Subject selection begins in Grade 11
2	Program Structure / Academic Streams	Three streams: Science, Social Science, and Language	Students choose 4-5 subjects from 7 options based on interests and talents
3	Civic Education Subject	Civic Education (PKN)	Pancasila Education
4	Learning Approach	Competency-based approach	Character and skill-based approach
5	Teaching Load	Teachers may teach 1-3 subjects	Teachers only teach subjects in their area of expertise
6	School Schedule	Monday to Saturday	Monday to Friday

**Table 5.** Training content on the Merdeka Belajar curriculum for educators.

No	Aspect	Content
1	Introduction to the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum	Philosophy, objectives, and key characteristics of the curriculum
2	Learning Methodology	Strategies for implementing active learning
3	Syllabus and Lesson Plan (Module) Development	Techniques for designing lesson plans aligned with the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum
4	Authentic Assessment	Assessment techniques that support character and competency development
5	Use of Technology	Utilizing digital tools in the teaching and learning process

Overall, the findings suggest that *Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar* has driven organizational strengthening within SMA Negeri 7 Kota Palu. Teacher specialization, the expansion of intra- and extracurricular programs, and student-centered organizational practices have collectively enhanced the school's capacity to support holistic learning. However, the degree of organizational adjustment varies across functional areas, implying that sustained managerial guidance and coordination are essential to maintain the reform's momentum and ensure consistent quality of implementation.

At SMA Negeri 7 Kota Palu, these differences are reflected in the shift from a rigid subject-stream system to a flexible elective structure, allowing students to choose subjects aligned with their interests, and in reduced teacher workloads focusing on specialization (see **Table 4**).

Taken together, these findings show that while institutional enthusiasm for *Kurikulum Merdeka* is strong, schools interpret and operationalize the policy differently depending on their internal capacity and leadership structure.

### Inter-Organizational Communication

Effective communication serves as a critical mechanism for ensuring the success of public policy implementation. When inter-organizational communication flows smoothly, it minimizes misinterpretation, enhances coordination, and facilitates the alignment of policy intent with on-the-ground practice. In the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar* at SMA Negeri 7 Kota Palu, communication between the Provincial Office of Education and Culture and the school has been pivotal in maintaining coherence between administrative directives and classroom execution.

Mrs. Rosdiana, a program coordinator at the Provincial Office of Education and Culture of Central Sulawesi, explained: *"Sebelumnya kami telah melakukan pengawasan terhadap kurikulum yang diterapkan di sekolah yang berkaitan. Jadi dari kegiatan pengawasan itu, kami memastikan kalau dalam pelaksanaannya di sekolah sudah bisa dalam melaksanakan sesuai aturan yang berlaku di masing-masing sekolah. Dan juga, kami melaksanakan pelatihan salah satunya bimtek bagi guru sekota Palu sesuai jenjang sekolahnya."*

Her statement indicates that the education office's role extends beyond administrative oversight to include proactive efforts in teacher development. The provision of *bimbingan teknis* (technical training) demonstrates a hands-on approach to reinforcing curriculum understanding among educators. The training content can be seen in **Table 5**.

At the school level, Principal Anas Syakir confirmed that communication with the education office occurs routinely and constructively: *"Iya ada, biasanya dinas pendidikan dan*

*kebudayaan provinsi rutin datang untuk melakukan pengawasan dan peninjauan terkait dengan kegiatan sekolah, soalnya mereka yang menaungi sekolah tingkat sekolah menengah atas dan melihat perkembangan sekolah atau semua bentuk aktivitas yang dilakukan oleh sekolah. Dan juga ada bentuk pelatihan berupa bimtek, serta lokakarya yang diperuntukkan bagi guru supaya lebih paham akan sistem kurikulum merdeka belajar."*

This reflects a reciprocal communication dynamic where supervision is complemented by professional development initiatives, ensuring that curriculum monitoring is not merely evaluative but also capacity-building in nature.

Vice Principal for Curriculum, Mr. Isman, added: *"Jelas ada, Dinas Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Provinsi melakukan koordinasi dengan datang langsung ke sekolah dan melakukan pengawasan serta memantau perkembangan kurikulum merdeka belajar. Pelatihan ini ditujukan kepada semua guru guna meningkatkan kualitas dalam proses belajar mengajar."*

His comment highlights the practical dimension of inter-organizational coordination, emphasizing direct supervision and the continuous upgrading of teacher competencies as integral components of policy communication.

Vice Principal for Student Affairs, Mrs. Nurhayatin, similarly noted: *"Biasanya dari Dinas Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Provinsi Sulawesi Tengah datang memantau proses perkembangan segala bentuk aktivitas di sekolah. Dan wajib bagi guru di sekolah yang telah menerapkan kebijakan kurikulum merdeka belajar."*

This underscores that the communication structure is institutionalized, monitoring visits and reporting are not sporadic, but rather part of a routine accountability mechanism embedded in the provincial oversight system.

From a teacher's perspective, Mr. Abu Joko, a history teacher, emphasized the benefits of such engagement: *"Iya ada, pelatihannya diselenggarakan sama Dinas Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Provinsi Sulawesi Tengah, jadi guru biasanya mengikuti berbagai jenis pelatihan yang sangat berguna untuk pengembangan diri sebagai guru."*

This statement reinforces that communication channels between the school and the education office are not merely formal, but function as avenues for ongoing professional learning and pedagogical innovation.

Collectively, these findings suggest that inter-organizational communication between SMA Negeri 7 Kota Palu and the Provincial Office of Education and Culture of Central Sulawesi operates effectively through structured supervision, direct visits, and consistent training programs. This synergy exemplifies what Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) describe as *linkage mechanisms*, institutional connections that translate policy objectives into coordinated

actions at the operational level. While communication practices have proven functional and supportive, sustaining this consistency will require continuous reinforcement and responsiveness to evolving needs at the school level.

Overall, communication between schools and government agencies appears consistent, yet it remains predominantly top-down, suggesting that feedback from implementers still plays a limited role in shaping ongoing policy refinement.

### Implementers' Attitudes

The attitudes of policy implementers play a decisive role in determining the effectiveness of policy implementation. As Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) emphasize, the disposition of implementers, comprising their understanding, commitment, and responsiveness, directly influences how policies are translated into practice. In the context of *Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar* implementation at SMA Negeri 7 Kota Palu, the perspectives of education officials, school leaders, teachers, and students reveal a broadly positive and supportive orientation toward the reform.

Mrs. Rosdiana, a program coordinator representing the Head of the High School Development Division at the Provincial Office of Education and Culture of Central Sulawesi, stated: *"Kurikulum merdeka belajar memiliki pembelajaran intrakurikuler yang cukup banyak, jadi siswa punya cukup waktu untuk mempelajari konsep dan menguatkan kemampuan mereka dan kurikulum baru ini memberikan guru kebebasan dalam memilih metode belajar untuk menyesuaikan pembelajaran dengan kebutuhan dan minat siswa. Yah tentunya saya berharap dan menaruh ekpetasi tinggi kepada sekolah yang sudah menerapkan kurikulum baru ini bahwa semoga hal ini bisa meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan di Indonesia dan menjadi tujuan dari kebijakan itu sendiri."*

Her statement indicates that the local education authority not only understands the pedagogical rationale behind the curriculum but also places high expectations on its potential to enhance educational quality and learning flexibility.

At the school level, Principal Mr. Anas Syakir expressed similar optimism: *"Kurikulum merdeka belajar dikembangkan menjadi kurikulum yang lebih sederhana dan berfokus pada materi esensial dan pengembangan karakter yang disertai minat dan bakat siswa. Dan juga saya sangat berharap kebijakan ini berjalan dengan baik dan semoga ke depannya sekolah ini bisa melahirkan siswa-siswi yang berprestasi."*

This reflects a perception of the policy as a practical and focused reform that integrates cognitive learning with character development, an alignment that supports the broader goals of holistic education.

Vice Principal for Curriculum Affairs, Mr. Isman, added: *"Kurikulum merdeka belajar adalah perubahan dari kurikulum 13, yang dimulai pada tahun 2022. Kurikulum ini ditujukan kepada semua jenjang sekolah dan kurikulum merdeka belajar pentingnya kemandirian dan keberanian siswa dalam belajar dan memberikan guru kebebasan untuk membuat metode pembelajaran mereka sendiri. Harapan saya agar semua masyarakat dapat mendukung kebijakan yang dikeluarkan oleh pemerintah pusat ini."*

His remarks highlight the shared responsibility between schools and the wider community, emphasizing that the sustainability of educational reform depends on collective support beyond the classroom.

From a student development perspective, Vice Principal

for Student Affairs, Mrs. Nurhayatin, explained: *"Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar adalah kebijakan pengembangan yang dikeluarkan Kemendikbud untuk pembelajaran peserta didik di sekolah. Baru kurikulum merdeka belajar ini, guru memiliki keleluasaan untuk memilih berbagai perangkat ajar sehingga pembelajaran dapat disesuaikan dengan kebutuhan belajar dan minat siswa itu sendiri. Guru juga bisa membuat proyek untuk menguatkan pencapaian profil pelajar Pancasila yang dikembangkan berdasarkan tema tertentu yang ditetapkan oleh pemerintah. Dan Tentunya berharap kebijakan ini dapat berjalan secara optimal dan efektif sesuai dengan tujuannya."*

Her explanation underscores how the curriculum grants teachers pedagogical autonomy while embedding national character education through the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* framework.

From a teacher's standpoint, Mr. Abu Joko, who teaches history, observed: *"Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar adalah jenis pembelajaran yang mengacu pada pendekatan bakat dan minat siswa, jadi istilahnya kurikulum ini menekankan agar siswa bisa mengembangkan bakatnya secara optimal sehingga berguna untuk masa depan bangsa dan negara. Harapannya tentu baik, dengan adanya kebijakan ini menjadikan siswa bisa mandiri dalam segala hal yang ingin mereka capai."*

This perspective aligns with the curriculum's core intent, empowering students to cultivate autonomy, creativity, and purpose through personalized learning experiences.

Students also voiced positive perceptions. The student council president, Much Fitrawan, stated: *"Kurikulum Merdeka belajar yang dikeluarkan menteri pendidikan bisa memudahkan siswa untuk memahami selama proses belajar mengajar dan harapan saya semoga program dari pemerintah ini memperbaiki sistem pendidikan yang ada di Indonesia."*

Similarly, student Jirani remarked: *"Kurikulum merdeka belajar menjadikan siswanya agar lebih produktif lagi, dan guru bebas memilih metode belajar untuk siswa. Dan tentu harapannya dengan menerapkan kurikulum merdeka belajar, Sekolah Menengah Atas Negeri 7 Kota Palu akan lebih baik lagi, guru-guru bisa memberikan pelajaran dengan cara yang efektif."*

These views demonstrate that students perceive tangible benefits in learning engagement and teaching effectiveness, suggesting that the policy's learner-centered philosophy is beginning to take root.

Finally, from the broader educational community, Mr. Moh. Agim, a member of the education-focused group *SikolapomorePalu*, shared: *"Kurikulum Merdeka belajar atau kurikulum operasional merupakan kurikulum dimana sistem pembelajarannya mengutamakan pengembangan karakter, minat dan bakat atau keterampilan dari siswa. Tentu saya mendukung dan sangat antusias terhadap kurikulum baru ini dan tentunya saya sangat berharap baik terhadap sekolah-sekolah yang menerapkan kurikulum baru ini, dan ini merupakan pembangunan yang baik di bidang pendidikan."*

His statement reflects civil society's strong endorsement of the reform and confidence in its long-term contribution to national educational development.

Overall, communication between schools and government agencies appears consistent, yet it remains predominantly top-down, suggesting that feedback from implementers still plays a limited role in shaping ongoing policy refinement.

In conclusion, the collective responses of policy



implementers, ranging from education officials to students, demonstrate a shared commitment and positive disposition toward the *Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar*. Such alignment between understanding, enthusiasm, and action at multiple levels of implementation provides a solid foundation for achieving the curriculum's intended outcomes. Consistent with the framework of Van Meter and Van Horn, this supportive attitude among implementers constitutes a critical facilitating factor for the policy's sustained success at SMA Negeri 7 Kota Palu.

### Socio-Economic and Political Environment

The broader socio-economic and political environment forms an essential contextual variable influencing the success of policy implementation. According to Van Meter and Van Horn (1975), external conditions, such as community support, economic stability, and political commitment, can either facilitate or hinder the realization of policy objectives. For the *Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar*, the alignment among parents, schools, government institutions, and the community plays a decisive role in shaping an enabling environment for policy execution.

According to Ms. Rosdiana, who serves as a management staff member representing the Head of the Division for Senior High School Development, Institutional and Curriculum Section: *"Iya tentu ada, tidak hanya guru yang berperan akan tetapi orang tua murid turut serta untuk membantu perkembangan anaknya atau peserta didik. Dan pemerintah memiliki tanggung jawab terhadap kebijakan Kurikulum merdeka belajar dengan menyediakan sumber daya dan pelatihan yang sistematis bagi guru."*

This statement underscores the dual importance of family and government support. Parents act as active partners in students' development, while the government fulfills its responsibility through structured training and adequate resource provision.

A similar view was expressed by Mr. Anas Syakir, Principal of SMAN 7 Palu: *"Iya ada, peran orang tua sangat penting dalam pengembangan karakter siswa karena sebagai orang tua yang merupakan madrasah pertama bagi anaknya hal ini tentu mendukung kepribadian baik secara fisik maupun mental. Iya ada, yaitu pelatihan bagi guru yang dilaksanakan oleh Dinas Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Provinsi Sulawesi Tengah."*

This highlights the family as the primary agent of moral formation and character building, complemented by government initiatives to strengthen teacher competencies through ongoing professional training.

Vice Principal for Curriculum Affairs, Mr. Isman, also affirmed this collaborative dynamic: *"Iya pastinya ada peran orang tua atau wali siswa, dan ada juga bentuk tanggung jawab pemerintah terhadap kebijakan Kurikulum Merdeka untuk memastikan bahwa kebijakan tersebut dapat diimplementasikan secara efektif dan memberikan manfaat yang maksimal."*

Similarly, Vice Principal for Student Affairs, Ms. Nurhayatin, emphasized the shared educational responsibility between home and school: *"Tentu ada, justru peran orang tua adalah memberikan pemahaman dasar bagi anaknya dan guru hanya melanjutkan peran orang tua ketika berada di lingkungan sekolah. Kalau bentuk tanggung jawab dari pemerintah terhadap kebijakan Kurikulum merdeka belajar yah itu tadi dengan memberikan pelatihan yang mumpuni dan terstruktur agar guru bisa memahami konsep kurikulum merdeka belajar."*

These perspectives collectively reveal that the social fabric surrounding the school, particularly the family, serves as the foundational pillar for successful curriculum implementation, while the government reinforces these efforts through structured pedagogical support.

A teacher's perspective adds further nuance. Mr. Abu Joko, a History teacher at SMAN 7 Palu, stated: *"Tidak hanya guru, peran orang tua juga sangat mempengaruhi pola pikir dan karakter siswa. Yah pemerintah memiliki tanggung jawab besar untuk mensukseskan kebijakan Kurikulum merdeka belajar dan perlu di ingat kalau belum semua sekolah melaksanakan kebijakan ini."*

His statement reflects both optimism and caution, acknowledging the critical influence of parental engagement while pointing to disparities in the implementation of the policy across schools.

Student perspectives reinforce this narrative. Much Fitrawan, the Student Council President of SMAN 7 Palu, noted: *"Iya ada kak, orang tua juga berperan sekaligus mendukung program kurikulum merdeka belajar ini."* Likewise, another student, Jirani, remarked: *"Iya ada kak, peran orang tua juga sangat penting yang sama-sama memberikan pengembangan karakter bagi anaknya atau siswa."*

These statements indicate that students themselves recognize the role of parents as active collaborators in character formation, reflecting the integrative nature of the *Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar*.

Finally, from the perspective of the educational community, Mr. Moh. Agim, a member of the *SikolapomorePalu* education group, explained: *"peran orang tua itu sangat penting, karena orang tua memiliki tanggung jawab yang besar serta tempat utama terhadap berkembangnya moral, adab dan perilaku yang baik bagi sang anak. Kami juga sebagai komunitas yang bergerak dibidang pendidikan selain mengajarkan pelajaran, kami juga perlu melatih kemampuan anak atau siswa yang belajar bersama kami sehingga baik untuk pengembangan karakter para siswa. Tentunya ada yah, pelatihan bagi guru itu termasuk bentuk tanggung jawab dari pemerintah setempat, dalam hal ini adalah Dinas Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Provinsi Sulawesi Tengah."*

This perspective highlights that beyond families and schools, community organizations also contribute meaningfully to moral and character development, reinforcing the collaborative ecosystem necessary for policy success.

In conclusion, the findings indicate that the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar* at SMA Negeri 7 Kota Palu is supported by a favorable socio-political environment. Parents, schools, the government, and local educational communities demonstrate active participation and shared responsibility in realizing the policy's objectives. Government-led teacher training, parental involvement in student character formation, and community engagement collectively constitute the socio-economic and political foundation that enables the curriculum's effective and sustainable implementation.

### Discussion

The findings suggest that the dynamics of *Kurikulum Merdeka* implementation are not linear but emerge from continuous negotiation between policy actors. Teachers reinterpret national directives according to local realities,

principals mediate between bureaucratic demands and classroom constraints, while the education office balances accountability with flexibility. This interactional process reflects the “street-level bureaucracy” perspective (Lipsky, 1980), where implementers’ discretion determines how policy intentions are translated into everyday school practices.

This study employed Van Meter and Van Horn’s policy implementation model as a conceptual framework to critically examine the dynamics of *Kurikulum Merdeka* implementation at Senior High School 7, Palu City. The model emphasizes the interplay of six key variables: policy standards and objectives, available resources, characteristics of implementing agencies, inter-organizational communication, implementers’ dispositions, and the broader socio-economic and political environment (18). Within this framework, the study explores how centrally driven education reforms are localized and reshaped by institutional understanding, stakeholder engagement, and contextual constraints. Notably, the model enables reflective analysis of the implementation gap between national policy intent and local school practice.

The findings indicate that curriculum implementation remains suboptimal, particularly in the areas of policy comprehension and pedagogical adaptation. Many teachers lack the instructional proficiency required to deliver adaptive and differentiated learning as envisioned by the curriculum, while students often exhibit limited awareness of its core objectives, similar to what was previously reported (19). The limited comprehension of teachers toward the philosophical foundation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* suggests that top-down policy dissemination has not been accompanied by sufficient pedagogical mentoring. This confirms Van Meter and Van Horn’s notion that inadequate implementer capacity can significantly constrain policy outcomes (1975). Similar findings were reported by Darling-Hammond et al. (2020), emphasizing that without continuous professional learning, curriculum innovation tends to remain symbolic rather than transformative.

This highlights a significant shortfall in the policy socialization process at the classroom level. Moreover, infrastructural deficiencies, including the lack of adequate digital tools and learning facilities, have constrained teaching quality and widened educational disparities (20). Communication between the school and the provincial education authority remains primarily top-down, infrequent, and transactional, resulting in generalized and sporadic teacher training. This undermines implementation fidelity and restricts the professional growth needed to support such transformative reforms.

These findings echo Fullan’s (2015) argument that meaningful curriculum reform depends on systemic capacity building and sustained teacher professional learning (7). Similarly, Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018) emphasize that collaborative professionalism among educators strengthens the sustainability of curriculum implementation (8). Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) further highlight that successful curriculum adoption requires coherence between instructional practices, leadership support, and ongoing professional development (9). In line with OECD (2022), these results suggest that without aligning policy innovation with local adaptability, curriculum reform efforts risk inconsistency and limited long-term impact (10).

As emphasized by Fullan (2015), successful curriculum change depends on systemic capacity building and sustained

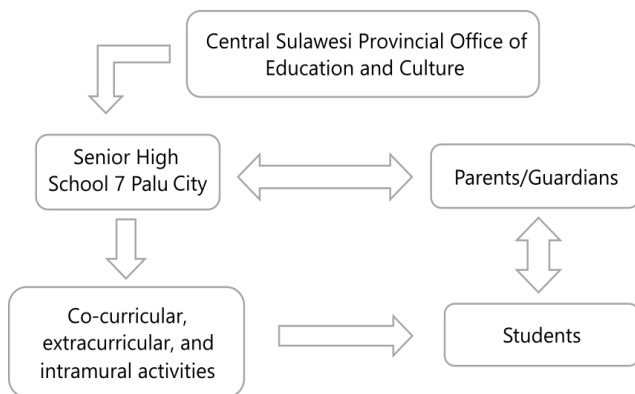
professional learning. This aligns with the findings of this study, which indicate that teachers at Senior High School 7 Palu require continuous training to optimize differentiated instruction and the implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile (P5) approach. Furthermore, in line with Darling-Hammond et al. (2020), the success of educational innovation requires strong school leadership and the development of professional learning communities. The existence of internal teacher discussion forums at Senior High School 7 Palu represents an early step toward this direction.

Despite these structural challenges, implementers, particularly teachers and school administrators, express a strong willingness to embrace the curriculum. Their positive attitudes indicate that motivational barriers are not the primary obstacle; rather, systemic limitations in capacity-building, instructional resources, and policy support are the more pressing concerns (21). Encouragingly, the school benefits from a socially supportive environment, with active parental involvement and community engagement contributing to a receptive atmosphere for policy uptake. Operational funding through the BOS (School Operational Assistance) grants also provides essential financial flexibility (22). Nonetheless, achieving the curriculum’s transformative potential will require an integrated implementation strategy, one that simultaneously strengthens human resources, modernizes infrastructure, and cultivates adaptive school leadership (23, 24). Without such a multidimensional approach, the curriculum risks being diluted during execution and failing to deliver its intended impact.

Overall, based on the six dimensions of the Van Meter and Van Horn model, the main inhibiting factors for the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* at SMA Negeri 7 Palu lie in the resources and communication dimensions. Meanwhile, the strongest supporting factors come from the disposition of the implementers (teachers and principals) and community social support. This pattern shows that although national policies are top-down, local adaptation is key to ensuring effective implementation. Therefore, strengthening teacher competence and coordination mechanisms is pivotal to bridging the policy-practice gap in the ongoing implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

While the Van Meter and Van Horn model provides a systematic framework for analyzing policy implementation, its application in the Indonesian context presents certain limitations. The model assumes relatively stable administrative structures and clear lines of authority, conditions that differ from Indonesia’s highly centralized yet locally diverse education system. Consequently, the model may not fully capture the informal dynamics, cultural norms, and bureaucratic complexities that shape how educational policies like *Kurikulum Merdeka* are interpreted and enacted in practice. Future studies could consider integrating more context-sensitive frameworks, such as Lipsky’s street-level bureaucracy or Fullan’s change theory, to better account for the adaptive and negotiated nature of implementation in decentralized settings.

This study is constrained by its single-site focus and limited number of participants, which restricts the generalizability of findings. Although multiple stakeholder perspectives were included, teachers and school administrators still dominate the data, while parents and community members are underrepresented. The study also relies heavily on self-reported accounts, which may introduce bias or overlook dissenting views. Future research could



**Figure 2.** Organizational relationship structure of educational stakeholders at senior high school 7, Palu city.

address these gaps by incorporating a broader range of voices and employing comparative or longitudinal designs to capture the evolving nature of *Kurikulum Merdeka* implementation across diverse regional contexts.

Within the Indonesian education context, the implementation of centrally designed reforms such as *Kurikulum Merdeka* must contend with a highly bureaucratic system and uneven regional capacity. While the policy promotes autonomy, schools remain dependent on hierarchical directives and limited fiscal authority. This tension between decentralization in principle and centralization in practice continues to shape how schools interpret and enact national reforms.

Overall, these reflections emphasize that the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* is not only a matter of structural alignment but also of cultural and institutional transformation.

Based on the research findings, Senior High School 7 Palu has developed a specific process for implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, which can be outlined as seen in **Figure 2**.

## Conclusion

The study concludes that the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* at Senior High School 7, Palu City, remains constrained by limited teacher comprehension, inadequate infrastructure, and weak coordination among stakeholders. These factors confirm Van Meter and Van Horn's assertion that resource adequacy, implementer disposition, and inter-organizational communication critically determine policy outcomes. However, the Indonesian case also reveals the limitations of this model when applied to a highly centralized education system, where local agency and contextual adaptation play a decisive role.

Theoretically, this study extends the application of the Van Meter and Van Horn framework by highlighting how centralized governance and cultural factors mediate policy implementation in developing contexts. Practically, the findings underscore the need for sustained teacher capacity building, decentralized decision-making, and continuous professional learning communities to ensure that *Kurikulum Merdeka* evolves from a policy mandate into meaningful pedagogical transformation. These insights may inform future educational reforms seeking to balance national coherence with local flexibility.

## Declarations

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### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicting interest.

### Data Availability

The unpublished data is available upon request to the corresponding author.

### Ethics Statement

Not applicable.

### Funding Information

The author(s) declare that no financial support was received for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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## Additional Information


### How to Cite

Moh. Wahyu, Muhammad Irfan Mufti. Evaluating the Implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum at Senior High School 7 Palu City: A Case Study Using the Van Meter and Van Horn Model. *Education and Learning*. 2025;1(1):16-27

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