



JURNAL BIKOTETIK (Bimbingan dan Konseling: Teori dan Praktik)

Volume 09 Number 1, 2025, pp 41- 61

ISSN: Online 2580-5827

Open Access

<https://journal.unesa.ac.id/index.php/jbk>

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF DEVELOPMENTAL GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING IN THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM

Riza Amalia¹, Lutfatulatifah², Rudi Haryadi³

Universitas Negeri Malang¹, IAIN Syekh Nurjati Cirebon²

Universitas Islam Kalimantan Muhammad Arsyad Al-Banjari³

Corresponding E-Mail: rz.amaliya@gmail.com

Received December 02, 2024;
Revised March 27, 2025;
Accepted May 10, 2025;
Published Online May 12, 2025

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi penerapan bimbingan dan konseling perkembangan dalam konteks Kurikulum Merdeka di tingkat Sekolah Menengah Atas di Provinsi Kalimantan Tengah. Pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif digunakan, yang melibatkan tiga guru bimbingan dan konseling dari sekolah yang berbeda. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam, dan data dianalisis menggunakan model Miles dan Huberman. Temuan penelitian menyoroti dua tema utama: (1) penerapan program bimbingan dan konseling perkembangan, yang meliputi penilaian gaya belajar siswa, pemetaan subjek berbasis minat, dan dukungan untuk jalur pendidikan tinggi, dan (2) tantangan dan kendala, seperti kesiapan guru yang terbatas, kesulitan adaptasi siswa, dan fasilitas yang tidak memadai. Penelitian ini menggarisbawahi peran bimbingan dan konseling perkembangan dalam membina pertumbuhan pribadi dan akademis siswa dalam kerangka belajar mandiri. Implikasinya menekankan perlunya dukungan pemerintah yang lebih baik, kolaborasi sekolah-masyarakat yang lebih kuat, dan jam konseling yang lebih terstruktur dalam kurikulum. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada fokusnya pada penerapan praktis bimbingan dan konseling perkembangan dalam Kurikulum Merdeka, yang memberikan wawasan untuk mengoptimalkan implementasinya di sekolah-sekolah Indonesia.

Kata kunci: Bimbingan dan konseling perkembangan, Kurikulum Merdeka, Sekolah Menengah Atas

Abstract

This study aims to explore the implementation of developmental guidance and counseling within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum at the Senior High School level in Central Kalimantan Province. A qualitative case study approach was employed, involving three guidance

The Bikotetik Journal is a Guidance and Counseling journal published by the Department of Guidance and Counseling, Faculty of Education, State University of Surabaya in collaboration with the Asosiasi

Bimbingan dan Konseling
Indonesia (ABKIN)

and counseling teachers from different schools. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, and the data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model. The findings highlight two key themes: (1) the implementation of developmental guidance and counseling programs, which include assessments of students' learning styles, interest-based subject mapping, and support for higher education pathways, and (2) the challenges and constraints, such as limited teacher readiness, students' adaptation difficulties, and inadequate facilities. The study underscores the role of developmental guidance and counseling in fostering students' personal and academic growth within the independent learning framework. The implications emphasize the need for enhanced governmental support, stronger school-community collaboration, and more structured counseling hours within the curriculum. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the practical application of developmental guidance and counseling within the Merdeka Curriculum, contributing insights into optimizing its implementation in Indonesian schools.

Keywords: Developmental guidance and counselling, Merdeka Curriculum, High School

How to Cite:

Author 1, Author 2. (Year). Title Manuscript. *Jurnal Bikotetik (Bimbingan Dan Konseling: Teori Dan Praktik)* , Vol (No): pp xx-xx

INTRODUCTION

The launch of the Merdeka Curriculum in 2022 represents a strategic response to the evolving technological landscape impacting education in Indonesia. The inception of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0) was initially introduced in 2011, signifying a paradigmatic shift in the global arena (Fedotova et al., 2020). Termed as the era of disruption, Industry 4.0 is characterized by VOCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity), denoting a period marked by instability, unpredictability, complexity, and ambiguity due to industrial transformations driven by globalization and advancements in information technology (Soemitra et al., 2023). The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum also extends to the realm of guidance and counseling services within educational institutions. Consequently, counseling services within schools are compelled to adapt to these changes, as school counselors encounter diverse challenges stemming from students' engagements with the evolving digital landscape (Nursalim, 2020a)(Nursalim, 2020a). Notably, contemporary and proactive guidance and counseling services, congruent with the present era, are those employing developmental approaches, fostering optimal individual growth (Liati, 2022; Maula et al., 2021).

The developmental approach in guidance and counseling, often referred to as Developmental Guidance and Counseling, focuses on an educational, growth-oriented, and proactive method of providing support counseling (Yusuf, 2019). This paradigm serves as a foundational framework for implementing guidance and counseling programs both internationally and in Indonesia. According to Myrick, the developmental guidance and counseling model is based on several key principles: it is designed to support all students, is systematically organized and

integrated into the curriculum, remains adaptable and exemplary, and is an essential component of the overall educational process. Additionally, this approach engages all school personnel, enhances students' learning efficiency, and includes specialized counseling services and interventions provided by trained counselors (Myrick, 2011).

Hence, it can be stated that developmental guidance and counseling encompasses the following aspects: (1) Serving as a form of support and companionship, (2) Providing assistance in the form of knowledge or skills, (3) Aiming to aid individuals in achieving a healthy life, (4) Implementation carried out with care, management, and proper cultivation of individuals' potentials, and (5) Assistance can be provided on an individual basis (individual counseling) or in group formats such as group counseling or group guidance (Liati, 2022).

According to Myrick, through the developmental approach, counselors assist students in having the opportunity to learn about themselves and others, enabling them to develop positive and constructive social interactions. Students also acquire interpersonal skills, thus avoiding interpersonal crises. This approach emphasizes the importance of creating a conducive learning environment for students, namely a school learning atmosphere that facilitates the development of students' personal, social, academic, and career aspects. As this developmental guidance program is based on students' outcomes, counselors need to design a guidance program where appropriate activities for development are present and provide information and practice so that students have the opportunity to acquire/master these skills. Intervention techniques used in this approach include teaching and sharing information, role-playing, training, tutorials, and counselling (Myrick, 2011).

The Merdeka Curriculum, introduced by the Government of the Republic of Indonesia, was developed to bridge the gap between technological advancements and the country's education system. Initiated in 2019 by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (KEMENDIKBUDRISTEK), this curriculum aimed to reform and modernize the national education framework (Yamin & Syahrir, 2020). The transition from the 2013 Revised Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum was formalized through Ministerial Decree No. 56/M/2022, issued on February 10, 2022, outlining guidelines for its implementation as part of a learning recovery strategy (Cholilah et al., 2023). Despite being recognized as a significant innovation in the education sector, the Merdeka Belajar policy is not without challenges. Common issues include misunderstandings regarding its implementation, educators' lack of preparedness, and financial constraints affecting both students and parents in adapting to technology-based learning (Ahid & Sufirmansyah, 2022).

The introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum in the millennial era presents several advantages, including fostering students' cognitive development, accelerating educational innovation, and enhancing overall intelligence (Ahmad et al., 2021). The Merdeka Belajar policy is also regarded as a means to optimize students' potential, empower teachers to innovate, improve access to school-related information, and enhance public satisfaction with school performance (Tabroni et al., 2022). Moreover, this policy has contributed positively to the quality of education by strengthening students' competencies and character, reducing teachers' administrative workload, and increasing student engagement and motivation (Lembong et al., 2023). By offering greater flexibility, the policy enables both students and teachers to engage in independent learning, allowing them to explore interrelated subjects and modules without being restricted by spatial or temporal limitations. Additionally, advancements in educational services, driven by technological

progress, contribute to a more enriched and higher-quality learning experience (Rawati et al., 2022).

The Merdeka Curriculum aligns with the principles of humanistic philosophy, as its programs are designed to cultivate individuals' personal growth. Merdeka Belajar promotes individualized learning, enabling students to progress at their own pace and in a manner that best suits their learning objectives. Teachers and students share the freedom to determine instructional methods, learning goals, content, and assessment strategies, provided they align with the curriculum's established guidelines. This approach grants teachers the flexibility to interpret and implement the curriculum creatively, fostering a collaborative learning environment where both educators and students can maximize their potential. Recognizing and accommodating individual differences among students ensures a highly personalized learning process tailored to their unique needs (Juita & M, 2021).

Nursalim (2020b) emphasizes that guidance and counseling teachers in the Merdeka Belajar era must fulfill several essential roles, including serving as change agents, prevention agents, counselors or therapists, consultants, coordinators, assessors, and effective career developers for students (Nursalim, 2020b). Consequently, prospective guidance and counseling teachers are expected to possess the ability to apply diverse strategies and techniques to ensure that guidance and counseling services are optimally delivered. These services should comprehensively address students' personal, social, academic, and career-related needs. Moreover, the required competencies extend beyond subject-specific expertise to include interdisciplinary skills (Haryadi et al., 2022).

Several previous studies have explored the role of guidance and counseling within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum at the high school level. One such study, conducted by Jelly Maria Lembong et al., employed a qualitative literature review method to examine the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* policy in Indonesia, highlighting both its application and the challenges encountered (Lembong et al., 2023). Another study by Nur Ahid and Sufirmansyah utilized a case study approach to investigate the planning, execution, obstacles, and solutions related to the *Merdeka Belajar* policy in East Java. Their findings indicated that the planning process occurred in two phases, the implementation was carried out in three phases, and two major challenges were identified (Ahid & Sufirmansyah, 2022). A third study by Esty Rokhyani, using a library research method, concluded that the *Merdeka Belajar* program allows counselors to maximize their roles as change agents, prevention agents, counselors or therapists, consultants, coordinators, assessors, and career developers. The study further outlined key steps that guidance counselors can take to strengthen their roles, including gaining a comprehensive understanding of regulatory frameworks, the core principles of *Merdeka Belajar*, guidelines for its implementation, and identifying as well as analyzing emerging challenges. To effectively support the success of the Merdeka Curriculum, guidance counselors must continuously enhance their professional competencies (Rokhyani, 2022).

Building on the previous research and background, the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum has been implemented since its introduction in 2022, particularly in relation to guidance and counseling programs. Existing studies have primarily examined policy aspects of the curriculum's implementation and its integration into school-based guidance and counseling initiatives. The distinct contribution of this research lies in its thematic exploration of the implementation of developmental guidance and counseling within the *Merdeka Curriculum* in Central Kalimantan

Province. This study employs a Case Study approach, which has not yet been extensively investigated in this specific context.

The primary objective of this research is to examine how developmental guidance and counseling are implemented within the framework of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. Through this investigation, the study aims to provide insights into the execution of guidance and counseling activities in schools, particularly at the Senior High School (*SMA*) level, within the structure of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Merdeka Curriculum).

METHOD

This research employs a case study method, which falls under the qualitative approach (Gumilang, 2016; Moleong, 2018). A case study is a research method where the researcher investigates a particular phenomenon (case) within a specific time frame and activity (program, event, process, institution, or social group) and gathers detailed and in-depth information using various data collection procedures over a specified period (Burkholder, 2020; Hancock et al., 2021; Takahashi & Araujo, 2020). This study involves three different Senior High Schools (*SMA*) in Central Kalimantan with the aim of obtaining an overview of the implementation of developmental guidance and counseling within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum in *SMA* in Central Kalimantan. Criteria for determining research subjects:

- (1) Having the status as a Guidance and Counseling Coordinator/Teacher with a civil servant or PPPK (Civil Servant with Work Agreement) position,
- (2) School status as a "Sekolah Penggerak" (Leading School) under the Central Kalimantan Provincial Education Office,
- (3) Implementing developmental guidance and counseling programs for a minimum period of 1 year or more.

This research use interview for obtain primer data, consists of descriptions obtained through in-depth interviews with three Guidance and Counseling teachers in Senior High Schools designated as "Sekolah Penggerak" Central Kalimantan. In case study research, the number of participants/informants can vary according to the needs of in-depth analysis (Alam, 2021; Errida & Lotfi, 2021). Interviews were conducted in both formal and informal settings, allowing the researcher to have interview guidelines that enable asking questions beyond the guidelines as long as they are still relevant to the research objectives. The instruments used in this research are interview guidelines, which consist of two main themes were identified as research findings: 1) Implementation of developmental Guidance and Counseling programs in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, and 2) Challenges and constraints in the implementation of developmental Guidance and Counseling programs within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The data analysis in this study follows the qualitative data analysis framework developed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of four key stages (Lester et al., 2020; Mezmir, 2020; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The first stage involves data collection. The second stage, data reduction, entails selecting relevant information while eliminating extraneous data. The third stage, data display, involves organizing the collected data into a structured manuscript, forming a semi-finished product. The final stage is conclusion drawing and verification, where findings are synthesized and validated.

This study identified two overarching and interrelated themes: first, the implementation of guidance and counseling programs within the framework of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, and second,

the challenges and obstacles encountered in executing these programs. To ensure data accuracy, validation is conducted through member checking, wherein participants review and confirm the researcher's (Erdmann & Potthoff, 2023; López-Zerón et al., 2021; Zairul, 2021). Additionally, data validity is assessed using triangulation techniques.

Some of the questions posed during the interview process with respondents, aimed at gathering data related to the research objectives, include: (1) What do you know about the Merdeka Curriculum? (2) Does your school implement the Merdeka Curriculum? (3) How is the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum manifested in your school? (4) What is the overview of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the guidance and counseling program at your school? (5) Are there differences between the implementation of guidance and counseling services using the KTSP (2013) curriculum compared to the Merdeka Curriculum?

Table 1. Theme, Topic and Interview Question

Theme	No	Topic	Question
1). Implementation of Developmental Guidance and Counseling Program in the Context of the Merdeka Curriculum	1	Knowledge about the Merdeka Curriculum	What do you know about the Merdeka Curriculum?
	2	Forms of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum	How is the Merdeka Curriculum implemented in your school?
	3	Overview of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Guidance and Counseling programs at schools	What is the overview of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in the Guidance and Counseling program at your school?
	4	Differences between the K-13 curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum	Are there any differences between implementing counseling services using the K-13 curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum?
	5	Utilization of Guidance and Counseling programs in schools with a developmental counseling approach	Does the Guidance and Counseling program at your school utilize a developmental counseling approach?
	6	Most frequently used services utilizing the developmental counseling approach	Explain the most frequently conducted services using the developmental counseling approach
2). Challenges, constraints, and efforts in implementing the developmental guidance and	7	Causes of difficulties in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum	According to you, what are the factors that cause difficulties in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum?

counseling program in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum.	8	Supporting factors in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum	In your opinion, what are the supporting factors in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at your school?
	9	Aspects that need improvement in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum	Explain the aspects that need improvement in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at your school.
	10	Efforts made in addressing challenges in implementing developmental counseling within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum.	What efforts do you make in facing challenges in implementing counseling within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum?

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Based on in-depth interviews with 3 Guidance and Counseling teachers from 3 schools located in Central Kalimantan Province, two main themes were identified as research findings: 1) Implementation of developmental Guidance and Counseling programs in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, and 2) Challenges and constraints in the implementation of developmental Guidance and Counseling programs within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Tabel 2. Research data supporting analysis

Theme	Data Prove	Result
1) Implementation of Developmental Guidance and Counseling Program in the Context of the Merdeka Curriculum	1 <i>"Curriculum that focuses on students, adjusting to their needs... there are phases to it, the phases must align with the developmental tasks of the child" (Subject 1)</i> <i>"The Merdeka Curriculum is learner-centered... lifelong learning" (Subject 2)</i> <i>"The intracurricular curriculum centers on the student... it must align with the characteristics of the school environment. Then there are phases to it. Learning with diverse content. The goal is..."</i>	The Merdeka Curriculum is an intracurricular curriculum where learning centers on the student. It is tailored to the characteristics of the school environment and students' needs. It involves phases that must be traversed in the implementation of learning with diverse content so that students can develop optimally, delve into learning concepts, and strengthen their competencies and interests.

so that students can develop optimally, delve into learning concepts, and strengthen their competency in their interests"
(Subject 3)

- 2 *"... in accordance with its status, namely 'Mandiri Berubah' (Independent Change), we implement the Merdeka Curriculum by utilizing PMM (School Management System) in administrative tasks and the learning process. Prior to the independent learning phase, we adapted and learned with the new paradigm through IHT (In-House Training) held at the school..." (Subject 1)*
- Implementation in schools utilizing the "Merdeka Mengajar" (Independent Teaching) Platform involves following the appropriate school status stages outlined in the Merdeka Curriculum. The learning process is based on a differentiated approach where learning outcomes are grouped, allowing students to freely choose subjects according to their talents and interests. The learning process prioritizes merdeka.

"... the implementation of intracurricular learning and its content refers to differentiated learning."
(Subject 2)

"Each student is free to learn according to their interests and talents... using a differentiation approach by grouping Learning Outcomes and emphasizing merdeka in the learning process."
(Subject 3)

- 3 *"Counseling and guidance (BK) is an important part and interrelated with all school members to realize the psychological well-being of students... its implementation includes assisting subject teachers in understanding students' learning styles and potentials... also mapping subjects that students are interested in. It also facilitates students who want to pursue further studies." (Subject 1)*
- The Guidance and Counseling (BK) conducts assessments to determine students' learning styles and potentials, then maps out preferred subject specializations for students, and facilitates those who wish to pursue further education. The services provided are not significantly different from the 2013 curriculum. Essentially, BK plays an active role in guiding students to understand themselves and their environment, and to plan their future according to their interests, abilities, and community involvement through effective and efficient planning programs.

"At the beginning of the academic year, BK conducts assessments to explore students' learning styles, for

guidance services not much different from the 2013 curriculum." (Subject 2)

"BK must play an active role in accommodating students. So that they can understand themselves and their environment... have future plans according to their interests, be competent in society..." (Subject 3)

- 4 *"...there is no difference... in the Merdeka Curriculum, BK is very important, considered as the coordinator of students' psychological well-being. So, if there is a training workshop for the school's program committee that our school participates in, BK teachers are required to participate so that the message of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum can be understood by the school principal and the curriculum department..." (Subject 1)*

There is no difference between the K-13 curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum in BK services. However, in the Merdeka Curriculum, BK becomes the coordinator in students' psychological well-being. The Merdeka Curriculum focuses more on character development, morals, is more flexible, and gives teachers the freedom to develop their teaching methods.

"There is no significant difference." (Subject 2)

"Regarding K-13, the focus is on students' academic abilities in general, more structured, and the guidelines are clear. In the Merdeka Curriculum, the focus is on character development, morality, more flexible, and teachers are free in developing learning..." (Subject 3)

- 5 *"...yes, Developmental Guidance and Counseling because of the planned and continuous BK program in this year (2023/2024). Because BK has been given specific hours now, which is 1 hour per week per class. In the previous year, BK could enter during free periods." (Subject 1)*

The counseling program at the school utilizes developmental counseling because it is more structured and assists students in understanding their potential and making decisions.

		<p>"Using developmental guidance and counseling." (Subject 2)</p> <p>"Yes, because it greatly helps in directing students to realize their potential development and be able to make decisions." (Subject 3)</p>	
	6	<p>"...classical guidance services usually use PIK-R (School Health Program) or Adolescent Posyandu materials... there is also individual counseling services, in that year there were 3-4 people who willingly came to the BK room or directly chatted for counseling. Then group guidance, if there's free time, they come to the library... we discuss that male students often ask about online games, slots, e-money, and others. Female students ask about... childbirth, dating, and others..." (Subject 1)</p> <p>"Orientation services, information services, placement and counseling individual services." (Subject 2)</p> <p>"Information services, placement and distribution, learning guidance services, and individual counseling." (Subject 3)</p>	<p>Service Types: basic services (orientation services and information services), responsive services, and placement and referral services.</p> <p>Service Strategies: Classical Guidance, Group Guidance, Individual Counseling, home visits</p>
2) Challenges, constraints, and efforts in implementing the developmental guidance and counseling program in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum.	7	<p>"The difficulties in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum stem from the readiness of teachers, which is still not optimal. Many teachers are more comfortable using the old curriculum. The school environment or students are still adapting to the Merdeka Curriculum. For example, the Merdeka Curriculum should be child-friendly, but in our school, the impact is evident as students exhibit minimal</p>	<p>In general, factors that make it difficult to implement the Merdeka Curriculum are viewed from:</p> <p>Internal Factors:</p> <p>1) Teachers: Teachers are not fully prepared to implement the Merdeka Curriculum and are more comfortable using the old curriculum.</p> <p>2) Students: Students who are still adapting to the Merdeka Curriculum.</p> <p>3) Facilities and infrastructure/school environment: Limitations in school facilities and infrastructure.</p>

manners towards teachers, are reluctant to do assignments, and often skip classes with the excuse of still moving up to the next grade anyway... Since the Merdeka Curriculum exists and some parents support it, problems arise that cause us teachers to lack enthusiasm." (Subject 1)

"For Guidance and Counseling, there are no difficulties." (Subject 2)

"The internal factors of the students, external factors including the limitations of supporting facilities and infrastructure, and the understanding of parents." (Subject 3)

- 8 *"The factors supporting the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum include having 1 leading teacher in the school, and the principal also encourages and facilitates competence development, such as attending seminars... the facilities and infrastructure are also adequate for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum." (Subject 1)*

"Because there is the 'Merdeka Mengajar' platform, where there is a wealth of knowledge to be gained... then the motivation from colleagues and the principal." (Subject 2)

"...support from all policy stakeholders who always work together to create increasingly creative, innovative learning in line with the times." (Subject 3)

- 9 *"Yes... the most fundamental thing is commitment... everyone must be on the same page about the Merdeka*

External Factors:

- 1) Parental understanding.

Policy stakeholders, such as the school principal, play a crucial role in advocating for and facilitating the implementation of the new curriculum, along with the existence of the Independent Teaching platform.

There is a need to create shared commitment within the school community to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. Specific time slots should

<p><i>Curriculum, so that all members of the school community can cooperate with the principle of solidarity. Encouraging each other, sharing information, and being open." (Subject 1)</i></p> <p><i>"...it's very necessary for BK to provide in-class services, because so far BK doesn't have class service hours." (Subject 2)</i></p> <p><i>"...a deep understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum and the suitability of teaching activities in the classroom." (Subject 3)</i></p>	<p>be allocated for BK to provide services in classrooms, and there should be a deep understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum.</p>
<p>10 <i>"...firstly, we must focus on building trust from the students." (Subject 1)</i></p> <p><i>"Implicitly there are no difficulties, ... but for content services, it still cannot be done because besides the infrastructure, there is only one BK teacher for 324 students." (Subject 2)</i></p> <p><i>"...by helping to create good communication with students, being a good listener, and providing motivation." (Subject 3)</i></p>	<p>Building trust among students involves providing quick responses to students' issues and creating effective communication by being attentive listeners and providing motivation.</p>

The implementation of developmental guidance and counseling programs within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum encompasses two main areas: 1) Implementation of Developmental Guidance and Counseling programs in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, and 2) Challenges and constraints in implementing guidance and counseling programs within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum.

1) Implementation of Developmental Guidance and Counseling programs in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum

The implementation of developmental guidance and counseling programs within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum is outlined in 6 key findings: Knowledge about the Merdeka Curriculum, Forms of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, Overview of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in the Guidance and Counseling program at schools, Differences between the K-13 curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum, Utilization of guidance

and counseling programs in schools with a developmental approach, and Most frequently used services utilizing the developmental guidance and counseling approach.

The implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum* in the studied schools has been successfully carried out, aligning with its core principles. Findings from in-depth interviews with guidance and counseling teachers indicate that the learning process has been adapted to fit the school environment and meet students' needs. This adaptation is structured into specific phases, with the curriculum framework designed accordingly for the Senior High School level. Furthermore, the *Merdeka Mengajar* platform plays a significant role in supporting both teachers and students, while differentiated learning approaches are actively applied. Guidance and counseling services hold a vital role within the *Merdeka Curriculum*, as they serve as coordinators in promoting students' psychological well-being. Counselors conduct assessments to identify students' learning styles and potential, which then inform the mapping of subjects that align with students' interests.

Developmental guidance and counseling have been implemented in 3 schools. Some frequently conducted services by respondents include basic services (orientation and information services), responsive services, and system support services (placement and distribution services). Strategies used include classical guidance, group guidance, individual counseling, and home visits.

2) Challenges and constraints in implementing guidance and counseling programs within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum:

The implementation of guidance and counseling programs within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum is not without challenges and constraints in the field. The factors causing difficulties in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum include internal factors (teachers, students, facilities, and infrastructure/school environment) and external factors such as parental understanding. These inhibiting factors necessitate improvements, such as fostering collective commitment within the school to implement the Merdeka Curriculum, allocating specific hours for BK to provide in-class services, and fostering a deep understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum. On the other hand, supporting factors in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum include principals who encourage and facilitate the new curriculum and the government providing the "Merdeka Mengajar" platform.

Discussion

The advancement of information technology has served as a catalyst for the creation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This curriculum is implemented in educational institutions following the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Decree No. 56/M/2022, which provides guidelines for curriculum implementation as part of the learning recovery initiative. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (*Kemendikbudristek*) introduced the Merdeka Curriculum as an alternative option for educational institutions to support learning recovery efforts between 2022 and 2024. The policy is set to be reviewed by the government in 2024 (Barlian et al., 2022).

During the transition period from 2022 to 2024, schools were given the flexibility to continue utilizing the 2013 curriculum to manage learning amidst the recovery from the educational crisis. To facilitate the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, the government conducted data collection to identify schools that were prepared to adopt the new framework. In 2024, based on an evaluation of the curriculum's implementation, *Kemendikbudristek* will

establish the National Curriculum policy. The findings from this evaluation will serve as the foundation for further policy decisions following the completion of the learning recovery period (Ariga, 2023). The *Merdeka Curriculum* is designed as a strategic approach to developing high-quality human resources with strong competencies. It aligns with Indonesia's 2035 educational vision, which aspires to "cultivate a lifelong learning society that is excellent, continuously evolving, prosperous, and possesses noble character, while upholding cultural values and the principles of Pancasila" (Jayanti et al., 2021).

The implementation of developmental guidance and counseling encompasses facilitating the development of students in all aspects of their lives, ensuring their functioning and active participation throughout their life cycle, particularly guaranteeing their existence as dignified individuals or members of society (Suherman, 2007). The application of developmental guidance and counseling in this study covers two main topics: 1) Implementation of developmental guidance and counseling programs within the context of the *Merdeka Curriculum* and 2) Challenges and constraints in implementing guidance and counseling programs within the context of the *Merdeka Curriculum*. The implementation of developmental guidance and counseling programs within the context of the *Merdeka Curriculum* is detailed in 6 points of findings: Knowledge about the *Merdeka Curriculum*, Forms of implementing the *Merdeka Curriculum*, Overview of implementing the *Merdeka Curriculum* in Guidance and Counseling programs at schools, Differences between the K-13 curriculum and the *Merdeka Curriculum*, Utilization of Guidance and Counseling programs in schools with a developmental counseling approach, and Most frequently used services utilizing the developmental counseling approach. The challenges and constraints in implementing guidance and counseling programs within the context of the *Merdeka Curriculum* are outlined in 4 points of findings: Causes of difficulties in implementing the *Merdeka Curriculum*, Supporting factors in implementing the *Merdeka Curriculum*, Aspects that need improvement in the implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, and Efforts made in facing challenges in implementing developmental guidance and counseling within the framework of the *Merdeka Curriculum*.

The *Merdeka Curriculum* is an intracurricular framework designed to optimize content delivery, allowing students sufficient time to explore concepts in depth and enhance their competencies (Ariga, 2023). Learning is customized to align with the unique characteristics of each school environment and students' individual needs, structured into specific phases. At the high school (*SMA*) level, the *Merdeka Curriculum* is divided into two phases: Phase E for Grade X and Phase F for Grades XI and XII, encompassing both intracurricular and extracurricular learning activities (Octasari, 2023).

The implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum* is supported by the *Merdeka Mengajar* platform, which facilitates differentiated teaching methods and grants students the flexibility to select subjects based on their interests, reinforcing the principles of *Merdeka Belajar* (Independent Learning). This approach encourages students to determine their own learning pathways while still ensuring that educational institutions adhere to standardized learning achievement targets (Cholilah et al., 2023). The *Merdeka Mengajar* platform plays a crucial role in assisting teachers by providing resources and guidelines for implementing student-centered and liberating teaching methodologies. Its comprehensive features serve as valuable references for both educators and learners (Lisvian Sari et al., 2022). However, prior research by Ambawani et al. indicates that access to this platform remains relatively low due to several challenges, including time constraints, difficulties in translating theoretical concepts into practical applications, the need for sustained

concentration, as well as issues related to internet connectivity and data quotas (Ambawani et al., 2023).

In terms of guidance and counseling services, the *Merdeka Curriculum* does not introduce fundamental differences compared to the K-13 curriculum. However, it places a greater emphasis on the role of Guidance and Counseling (*BK*) as coordinators in promoting students' psychological well-being. This aligns with research findings that highlight the role of *BK* in supporting student well-being within the *Merdeka Curriculum* framework (Rahmawati, 2022). The curriculum prioritizes character and moral development, offers greater flexibility, and grants teachers the autonomy to design and implement diverse teaching strategies. Additionally, within the *Merdeka Belajar* framework, guidance and counseling services conduct assessments to identify students' learning styles and potential, assist in mapping subject specializations, and provide guidance for students planning to pursue higher education. While the core services remain similar to those in the 2013 curriculum, the *Merdeka Curriculum* encourages learning approaches that cater to students' specific learning styles—visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Once students' learning preferences are identified, educators implement tailored models, methods, and strategies to enhance learning effectiveness through differentiated instruction. This differentiation is applied across four key aspects: content, learning processes, learning products, and the learning environment (Rafiska & Susanti, 2023).

Guidance and counseling in schools adopt a developmental approach, which emphasizes a structured process aimed at supporting students across various stages of their growth. The developmental guidance and counseling model was initially introduced by the American School Counselor Association (*ASCA*) in 1997 and later revised in 2005. This approach is founded on the premise that guidance and counseling function as an integral part of students' development, addressing vocational, educational, personal, and social aspects (Yusuf, 2019). The developmental model provides a structured framework that facilitates students in recognizing their potential and making informed decisions. This aligns with the principles of developmental guidance programs, which prioritize well-organized and systematically designed curricula to support students' cognitive, emotional, and physical development. These programs emphasize individual assessments, personal strengths, motivation, and academic achievement (Myrick, 2011). Guidance counselors play a crucial role in assisting students in identifying their interests and abilities, ensuring appropriate academic and career placements, and delivering high-quality support services (Pangestuti et al., 2023).

The range of services provided under the *Merdeka Curriculum* does not differ significantly from those offered in the K-13 curriculum. These services include fundamental guidance services, specialized and individual planning support, responsive counseling services, and system-based support initiatives (Rokhyani, 2022). Among the commonly implemented services are basic support, such as orientation and informational sessions, as well as responsive and systemic support services, including placement and referral assistance. Various strategies are employed to deliver these services effectively, including classical guidance sessions, group counseling, individual counseling, and home visits. The primary goal of basic services is to equip students with essential life skills and foster the development of effective behaviors. Meanwhile, responsive services focus on addressing students' immediate and critical needs. System support services involve management activities designed to enhance, maintain, and strengthen the overall guidance and counseling framework in schools (Nurihsan, 2021).

Challenges and constraints in implementing the developmental guidance and counseling program within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum are also identified in this study. The first finding relates to the factors causing difficulties in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum:

Internal Factors:

- 1) Teachers: Teachers are not fully prepared to implement the Merdeka Curriculum and are more comfortable using the old curriculum. This finding is consistent with research by Andreas .F. Harwisaputra et al., which indicates that the lack of teacher knowledge about the Merdeka Curriculum is a hindrance to its implementation due to poor socialization of the Merdeka Curriculum (Harwisaputra et al., 2023).
- 2) Students: Students are still adapting to the Merdeka Curriculum. This observation is consistent with research conducted by Novrita Suryani et al., indicating that students' preparedness to embrace curriculum changes continues to be a challenge for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. This is largely because students still lack enthusiasm for classroom learning. (Suryani et al., 2023).
- 3) Facilities and infrastructure/school environment: Constraints in school facilities and infrastructure present obstacles to the adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum. This observation aligns with research conducted by Syaiful Mujab et al., which points out that inadequate facilities and infrastructure hinder the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The research emphasizes the importance of having spacious and comfortable classrooms, sufficient teaching tools and resources, as well as reliable internet connectivity (Mujab et al., 2023).

External Factors:

Parental Awareness: This observation is consistent with research conducted by Yunita et al., indicating that external factors like unsupportive family and community environments, coupled with insufficient socialization about the Merdeka Curriculum, impede its adoption. (Yunita et al., 2020).

Apart from the hindering factors, there are also facilitating factors that support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.:

- 1) Policy Stakeholders: School principals play a crucial role in promoting and facilitating the new curriculum. This is in line with Evy Ramadina's statement that the role of school principals in the Merdeka Curriculum is as supervisors and change leaders within their educational institutions. School principals are responsible for driving student-centered learning processes and providing freedom to educators and educational staff (Ramadina, 2021).
- 2) "Merdeka Mengajar" Platform: The utilization of the "Merdeka Mengajar" platform is said to support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This finding is supported by research by Setiariny, which suggests that the use of the "Merdeka Mengajar" platform can improve the quality of learning by as much as 87% (Setiariny, 2023).

Guidance and Counseling teachers, as central figures in implementing developmental guidance and counseling within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, have made efforts to support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and overcome existing barriers. Actions taken include building trust with students by providing quick responses to student issues and creating effective communication by being attentive listeners and providing motivation.

SUMMARY

Conclusion

The Merdeka Curriculum launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2022 marks a new breakthrough in education in Indonesia, especially in accelerating the progress of education for Indonesian children in the Industry 4.0 era. The Merdeka Curriculum, or independent learning curriculum, is implemented not only in teaching but also in providing guidance and counseling services in schools. The most comprehensive approach to guidance and counseling in this era is the developmental guidance and counseling approach. This approach is applied to all students, not just those with problems. Developmental guidance and counseling are integrated into the entire educational process in schools and involve all school personnel. It can be asserted that there is alignment between the philosophical concept of independent learning curriculum and the developmental guidance and counseling paradigm. Thus, if schools implement developmental guidance and counseling within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, it becomes a strong unity in promoting optimal student development.

A qualitative case study conducted in three schools in Central Kalimantan Province yielded several research conclusions: 1) Implementation of the developmental guidance and counseling program within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, and 2) Challenges and constraints in implementing the guidance and counseling program within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. The implementation of the developmental guidance and counseling program within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum is described in 6 points of findings, while challenges and constraints in implementation are described in 4 points of findings.

Recomendations

This study offers significant insights into the implementation of developmental guidance and counseling programs within the framework of the *Merdeka Curriculum*. These services align with the principles of independent learning by fostering student empowerment. However, several challenges must be addressed by the Ministry of Education and Culture, particularly in reinforcing collaboration between schools, the broader school community, and local stakeholders to effectively support the curriculum's implementation. Additionally, the government must take a more proactive approach in integrating guidance and counseling into school programs by ensuring adequate time allocation, as mandated by educational regulations.

Despite its contributions, this research has certain limitations. Firstly, the study was conducted on a limited scale, involving only three informants, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to a wider context. Secondly, the research focused solely on high schools in Central Kalimantan Province, meaning that results may vary if similar studies are conducted in different regions.

Future research should expand the scope of this topic by exploring the implementation of developmental guidance and counseling in other provinces across Indonesia to provide a more comprehensive understanding of its effectiveness within the *Merdeka Curriculum*. Further studies should also evaluate the impact of guidance and counseling programs in high schools and explore potential strategies for addressing challenges in their implementation.

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