Implementation strategy of Merdeka Belajar for elementary schools in Medan City: Realizing sustainable development goals for quality education

Laksamana Putra Siregar[1], Subhilhar Subhilhar[1], Heri Kusmanto[1*], Hatta Ridho[1]

[1]Doctoral Program in Development Studies, Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Indonesia
*Corresponding author: herikusmanto@usu.ac.id
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1370-7876

Abstract
Quality education is one of the main goals of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In Medan City, efforts to achieve this goal are implemented through the Merdeka Belajar program. This program was created to encourage innovation in education by allowing schools and teachers to develop more adaptable and relevant teaching methods. The methodology used in this study is qualitative; data were collected through in-depth interviews with principals, teachers, and officials from the Medan City Education Office, as well as through direct observation and document collection. Some strategies to support the program's sustainability include training and developing teachers' competencies, improving educational facilities and infrastructure, and collaborating with the private sector to provide technology. These efforts have had a positive impact, especially in improving teachers' competencies and the quality of learning in primary schools. This shows that the Medan City government's strategy has significantly contributed to improving the quality of education. However, further support is needed to achieve more equitable results across all primary schools in Medan City.

Keywords: education, elementary schools, quality, Merdeka Belajar, Sustainable Development Goals

Public Interest Statement

This research discusses Merdeka Belajar implementation strategies in primary schools in Medan City to achieve Goal 4 of the SDGs, namely quality education. While primary education plays an important role in laying the foundations for children's development, there are still significant challenges in implementing Merdeka Belajar in Medan City. This research is important because it highlights how Merdeka Belajar policy can encourage innovation in basic education while addressing inequalities in education access. By looking at the strategies and roles of local governments as well as the challenges faced, it is hoped that the results of this study can provide effective policy recommendations to improve the quality of education in Indonesia, especially in Medan City. This research is also relevant for the wider community, who are concerned about the future of children's education in Indonesia and the importance of adapting policies to cope with the times.

Introduction

Education is central to human development and improving social welfare in various countries, and Indonesia is no exception (Djuhartono et al., 2022; Nurlina et al., 2023). In line with global efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), quality education is one of the main goals promoted in SDG point 4. This includes providing inclusive, equitable, quality education for all children, including those in remote and poor areas. As part of this global initiative, the Indonesian government has taken various measures to improve access and quality of education, particularly at the primary education level (Ariyani & Nugraheni, 2024). Primary education in Indonesia is essential in forming the foundation of children's knowledge and skills. However, challenges in providing quality education still must be experienced in various regions (Patandung & Panggua, 2022). Inequalities in access to education between urban and rural areas, limited infrastructure and the low quality of teaching staff are issues that need to be addressed. The education report found that although primary school enrolment rates have increased, student learning remains uneven. This is evidenced by the phenomenon that many students need more basic skills in reading, writing and arithmetic (Hijjayati et al., 2022; Latifah & Rahmawati, 2022; Paba et al., 2021). To address this challenge, the Indonesian government introduced the Merdeka Belajar program in 2022 (ditpsd.kemdikbud.go.id, 2022). The program aims to give schools and teachers freedom in managing the learning process. The program emphasizes the importance of creativity, autonomy and flexibility in education with the hope of helping students reach their full potential.

Merdeka Belajar also seeks to reduce the pressure on students and teachers due to an overly tricky curriculum and provide room for innovation in learning (Mulyasa, 2021, 2023). Although this program brings fresh air to Indonesian education, its implementation in the field only sometimes runs smoothly (Bisri et al., 2023; Sulistyo et al., 2022). There are still many challenges to effectively implementing self-directed learning in various regions, especially primary schools (Dewi & Astuti, 2022). School readiness, resource availability and teachers' ability to adapt to curriculum changes are factors that influence the success of this program. It is essential to understand that primary education is the foundation of the entire education system (Azizah, 2024; Dewi & Astuti, 2022). Without quality primary education, existing disparities will carry over to higher levels of education, hindering the development of a child's full potential. Therefore, strategies to improve the quality of basic education, including the Merdeka Belajar program, must be a top priority in national education policy.

Although the Merdeka Belajar program is being implemented, especially at the primary school

level, it still faces significant challenges, especially in big cities such as Medan City. Medan, one of the largest metropolitan cities in Indonesia, has very diverse educational characteristics. The city faces several challenges in implementing the Merdeka Belajar program in primary schools, especially public ones. On the other hand, this program provides opportunities for teachers and students to achieve more meaningful education (Aditiya & Fatonah, 2023; Daga, 2021; Sutaga, 2022). Meanwhile, reality shows that Medan City's primary schools have yet to implement the Merdeka Belajar concept effectively. Limited infrastructure, human resources, and school willingness to adapt to curriculum changes are some of the inhibiting factors. The Medan City Government, especially the Medan City Education Office, supports Merdeka Belajar's implementation. Policies and regulations issued by the local government can influence how primary schools implement and adapt the program.

Although various efforts have been made, many elementary schools in Medan City still have not implemented Merdeka Belajar to the fullest. Many schools still need to work on traditional learning patterns, with a teacher-centred approach and minimal innovation in teaching methods. This situation is exacerbated by the lack of access to technology and the need for more training for teachers to develop learning methods that align with Merdeka Belajar's principles. Therefore, concrete strategies are needed to facilitate the implementation of this program in primary schools in Medan City so that the SDG goals of quality education can be achieved. This research focuses on how adaptation and change strategies in implementing the Merdeka Belajar program can encourage the achievement of quality education SDGs in public primary schools in Medan City. This research also seeks to explore how the role of the local government, especially the Medan City Education Office, supports the implementation of Merdeka Belajar in primary schools.

Theoritical Framework

a. **Transformative Leadership Theory**

Transformative Leadership Theory emphasizes the importance of the leader's role in driving change and transformation in organizations (Bass, 1985). Transformational leaders are believed to be able to inspire and motivate organizational members to achieve higher goals through solid vision, innovation, and empowerment (Burns, 1978). In education, transformational leadership is essential to encourage innovative policies, such as those of Merdeka Belajar at the primary school level. Change leaders in the education sector, such as principals and heads of education, play a key role in managing change, creating a positive learning culture, and enabling teachers and students to actively participate in the learning process (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005 in Davies, 2009). This theory also emphasizes the importance of cooperation and effective communication between leaders and organizational members to achieve the desired change (Nasution et al., 2024).

b. **Organizational Adaptation Theory**

Organizational Adaptation Theory explains how organizations can adapt to changes in their dynamic and complex external environment (Scott, 2003). This theory states that organizations must develop mechanisms to respond to political, technological, and social changes (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Organizational adaptation involves internal change processes such as organizational structure adjustments, strategy changes, and human resource development (Scott, 2003). This adaptation process is often complex and time-consuming, as organizations must consider local conditions, resource readiness,

and stakeholder engagement (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015). In education, schools as organizations need to adapt to changes in education policies, such as the Merdeka Belajar Program, to improve the quality of learning and achieve broader educational goals.

C. Quality education in the perspective of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Quality education is one of the main pillars of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG point 4, which aims to ensure and improve inclusive, equitable and quality education opportunities for all people (Nations, 2015). Quality education includes not only access to education but also broader aspects such as the quality of learning, student engagement and the relevance of the curriculum to the needs of an increasingly complex global society (UNESCO, 2015). In the context of primary education, quality education ensures that all children acquire basic skills such as literacy and numeracy and develop the 21st-century skills they need to participate in the global economy (GPE, 2020). Good primary education also underpins social and economic equality and is crucial for achieving other sustainable development goals, such as poverty alleviation and improved health (Bank, 2018).

Literature Review

Several studies can serve as references for researchers to enrich their research on improving education quality and supporting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Chankseliani and McCowan (2021), among others, discuss the critical role of higher education in supporting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The study highlights the importance of incorporating sustainability into university curricula and institutional frameworks to maximize social impact. Higher education institutions are encouraged to participate in global sustainable development actively. Therefore, digital transformation in higher education has become an important research topic as institutions strive to adapt to the demands of the 21st century. Mohamed Hashim et al. (2021) analyzed digital transformation strategies in higher education and highlighted the need to introduce innovative digital tools and restructure the operations of educational institutions to remain competitive. The study highlights the importance of strategic leadership and institutional policies in driving digitalization efforts.

Hardiansyah (2022) focused on implementing school-based management in primary schools to improve education quality. The study shows that school-based management can effectively improve school performance through increased community participation, autonomy and accountability at the school level. Leadership and collaboration are crucial elements to improve the quality of education. Meanwhile, Zaleniene and Pereira (2021) highlighted the importance of higher education in creating a sustainable future. They argue that higher education institutions must actively engage in sustainability initiatives by integrating them into teaching, research and community service practices. A holistic approach to sustainability in higher education is essential to address environmental and social challenges worldwide.

Indonesia, through the research of Lestari et al. (2024), discussed the application of SDGs education in the school environment to support educational well-being. This study highlights the importance of integrating SDGs education into the school environment to shape students' understanding of sustainability issues. Education is considered a vital role in achieving the SDGs by developing responsible and knowledgeable citizens in the future. Furthermore, Anggrani and Nugraheni (2024) investigated the implementation of the SDGs to achieve quality education in Indonesia. They argue that aligning education policies and practices with the SDGs is crucial to ensure that education contributes to sustainable development. Finally, Siregar et al. (2020) discuss Indonesia's "free campus" policy in the context of the Industrial Revolution 4.0. The research shows that these measures provide more

flexibility to universities and students and respond to changing labour market needs and technological advances. The study highlights the importance of preparing students with relevant skills for the digital age through innovative educational approaches (Thamrin et al., 2023).

Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of Merdeka Belajar's implementation strategy to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in primary schools in Medan City. Qualitative research allows for understanding complex social realities and focuses on a detailed description of the situation (Creswell, 2014). Data collection was conducted through three main methods: in-depth interviews, document collection, and direct observation. Interviews were conducted with school principals, teachers, and Medan City Education Office officials to obtain information on challenges and strategies for implementing Merdeka Belajar.

Results

Strategy for Implementing Merdeka Belajar Program at Elementary Schools in Medan City: Facing Various Challenges and Obstacles

Implementing the Merdeka Belajar policy in Indonesia aims to create a more adaptable, innovative education that meets the needs of the 21st century. Thus, the Merdeka Belajar Program is an initiative of the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, which aims to provide freedom and flexibility in the learning process at school. With this approach, education in Indonesia can be more relevant and fun to the needs and interests of students. The implementation of Merdeka Belajar requires a planned and holistic strategy so that this goal can be achieved well. There are several key strategies in effectively implementing Merdeka Belajar by the Medan City government.

Table 1. Medan City Government's Strategy in Implementing Merdeka Belajar Program to Elementary Schools in Medan City

Implementation Strategy of 'Merdeka Belajar' Program	Explanation	Strategy of Medan City Government
Flexible Curriculum Development	A curriculum that adapts to students' needs and interests; including thematic approaches and project-based learning.	Developing a flexible curriculum by involving the role of teachers and the education community in Medan City.
Application of Project-Based Learning Model	Learning that encourages students to engage directly in learning projects to develop problem-solving and collaboration skills.	Provide training for teachers to develop project-related learning models by adjusting teaching materials.
Use of Educational Technology	Use of digital platforms to expand access to teaching activities and learning materials.	Provision of technology devices and internet networks in each school, especially for schools that are less facilitated.
Teacher Training and Empowerment	Providing continuous training for teachers to adapt to teaching methods according to the principles of Merdeka Belajar Program.	Providing regular teacher training programs and mentoring on the implementation of educational technology in the classroom.

Holistic and Diverse Assessment	Implementation of authentic assessments that include portfolios, project-based assessments, and constructive feedback to provide a more complete picture of students' abilities.	Conducting development on the holistic assessment system in schools with guidance from the Medan City Education Office.
Facilitating Student Independence	Providing opportunities for students to choose topics and manage learning time activities independently.	Implementation of education that teaches students about time management and responsibility in learning activities.
Parent and Community Involvement	Involve the role of parents and establish partnerships with various parties in the community to provide real-world experiences that are relevant to the learning context.	Organize collaborative activities between the school and the local community, and involve parents.
Evaluation and Adaptation	Conduct periodic evaluations to ensure the effectiveness of the strategies implemented. These evaluations help identify challenges and successes in the learning process.	Conduct regular monitoring and evaluation by the Medan City Education Office on the implementation of the independent learning program in schools.

Source: managed by the author, 2024

The Medan City Government, through the Medan City Education Office, organizes activities in the form of training, workshops and other similar things to improve the competence of educators in Medan City. The Medan City Government, through the Medan City Education Office and the North Sumatra Master Teacher Center, facilitates and actively supports all educators in Medan City to join the Master Teacher Program. The Medan City Government, through the Medan City Education Office, collaborates with the North Sumatra Teacher Movement Center in preparing and planning the implementation of an independent curriculum for all levels of education.

On the other hand, this strategy is supported by a community of practitioners that has been formed to function as a place to share student problems and learning processes that might get the best solution in overcoming them. The community of practitioners that has been formed serves as a place to share student problems and learning processes that might be able to get the best solution to overcome them. In addition, students are also given freedom in the learning process in the classroom. They are more directed towards gadget technology to receive lessons according to their abilities and learning styles. Supervising students using gadgets in a positive and helpful direction refers to having the character of the Pancasila student profile so that later, students are ready to be deployed to society with good traits and characters.

In implementing Merdeka Belajar, tasks, functions, and human resources have remained the same. However, by improving and understanding the teaching staff through training, the teaching staff, in this case elementary school teachers, can increase their understanding of the Merdeka Belajar program. The strategy for implementing Merdeka Belajar in Medan City is intensively implemented, but the basis lies in each or all elements and stakeholders. The existence of programs carried out in the city of Medan fosters the spirit of leaders and learners even more, so that the achievement of the essence of

independent learning in students can be conveyed.

However, the challenges primary schools face in Medan City show that the policy needs to be implemented optimally and effectively. One of the biggest challenges is whether schools are willing to implement the changes brought about by this policy. Most schools in Medan City, especially in the peri-urban areas, still need more infrastructure and resources. The inequality of educational facilities, lack of educational resources, and limited access to technology hinder the optimization of Merdeka Belajar implementation. This is the theory of organizational adaptation, which emphasizes that the ability of an organization (in this case, schools) to adapt to policy changes is highly dependent on its resources and infrastructure (Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985).

The role of the local government, especially the Medan City Education Office, is also vital in supporting the implementation of Merdeka Belajar. However, local government policies often need to be supported by an adequate budget or equitable distribution of resources. As a result, schools will identify gaps in policy implementation in certain areas. Schools near the city centre may receive more attention and have access to better resources, while schools in the suburbs often need to catch up. In addition, the training and guidance programs provided by the local government are often inconsistent, so many schools need to receive the guidance they need to implement the policy effectively. However, this can still be addressed by identifying existing assets such as human resources and social, legal, and environmental assets.

The curriculum structure changes based on the school's choice by looking at the characteristics of the school community. Schools implement independent learning according to their own choices. Related technology that is increasingly developing cannot be avoided but makes changes in better learning, such as making it easier for teachers to develop more varied learning media according to student characteristics and making it easier for teachers students. Human resources that are increasingly diverse in characteristics according to the nature of nature in their respective environments influence changes in the application of independent learning.

In addition, the formation of a community of practitioners within the school as a learning forum for teachers, the appointment of community mobilizers for teachers willing to mobilize the community, and the use of social media as a student learning forum. They are increasing collaboration between schools and parents/guardians through meetings between parents and schools to discuss school programs, appointing school principals from the driving teacher elements, and providing various trainings related to the Merdeka Belajar program by various parties, both schools, education offices and even communities. The implementation of Merdeka Belajar in Medan City has begun to advance and has experienced significant changes, as evidenced by many teachers' interest in selecting a mobilizing teacher or a mobilizing school. The changes, such as managing human resources, have significantly changed their teaching patterns.

Strategies in Learning Planning at Elementary Schools in Medan City in Facing Merdeka Belajar Program
Various strategies are used in learning with an independent curriculum. This study shows that learning strategies have a close relationship with the guidance and development of learning activities, which indicates that learning strategies have an essential relevance in every stage of the learning process, starting from planning and implementation. Reinforced by the opinion of Yantoro (2020), the success of the learning process is highly dependent on the willingness to innovate, both in learning planning and learning implementation.

Strategies carried out in learning planning include analyzing learning outcomes used as a basis for determining relevant learning methods and models. As stated by Wati (2023), learning planning is a step to plan a learning activity by analyzing competency standards, learning objectives, and student abilities.

The goal is to determine the proper methods, strategies, media, and instruments in the learning process. In planning effective learning, steps are needed that teachers must apply before learning activities are carried out.

Furthermore, empowering teachers and school leaders is one of the keys to the successful implementation of Merdeka Belajar. Teachers need more intensive training to improve their ability to apply innovative and adaptive learning methods. Continuous training programs and guidance from education experts will help improve teachers' capacity and prepare them for the challenges of implementing this policy. This strategy relates to analyzing Learning Outcomes (CP), formulating Learning Objectives (TP) and compiling the Flow of Learning Objectives (ATP). Based on the Minister of Education and Culture Decree number 56/M/2022 on the guidelines for implementing the independent curriculum in the context of learning recovery, it states that learning outcomes (CP) are learning competencies that students must achieve at each phase. The initial stage of learning planning is to analyze the Learning Outcomes (CP) and adjust them to the material being taught to determine the Learning Objectives (TP) and the Flow of Learning Objectives (ATP).

Table 2. Learning Planning Strategy through the Merdeka Curriculum Component of Merdeka Belajar Program and the Medan City Government's Efforts in implementing it

Component	Explanation	Medan City Government's Efforts
Learning Outcomes (CP)	CP are learning competencies that must be achieved by students in each learning phase. CP is analyzed to understand the level of mastery of student material and becomes the basis for determining TP and ATP.	1. Conduct training for teachers to improve their ability to analyze CP. 2. Develop a technology-based assessment system to facilitate the measurement of student learning outcomes.
Learning Objective (TP)	TP is a description of the competency aspects that students will achieve in learning activities. The TP is formulated based on the CP results and adjusted to the material being taught so that it is relevant to the desired competencies.	1. Develop guidelines and modules to help teachers formulate TP in line with CP. 2. Increase teachers' capacity through workshops and technical guidance for lesson planning. 3. Encourage the application of innovative methods such as Problem Based Learning (PBL) and Project Based Learning (PJBL).
Flow of Learning Objectives (ATP)	ATP is a series of TPs that are organized based on CP analysis. ATP provides guidance in learning so that the process has a clear and sequential structure and is tailored to the needs of students.	1. Encourage collaboration between schools to share best practices in developing ATP that is appropriate to the characteristics of students. 2. Conduct regular monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the implementation of ATP in each school is in line with the independent curriculum guidelines.

Source: managed by the author, 2024

Schools, through Teaching Personnel or Teachers, can utilize guidelines and discuss with peers to develop ATPs that suit student needs and learning strategies; it is essential to ensure learning objectives are achieved effectively by considering the appropriate time allocation. This is in line with what was stated by Kusniawati (2023) stated, which is that CP analysis needs to be carried out by teachers to describe TP and compile ATP. CP is analyzed so that a learning objective can be formulated. Learning objectives are a description of the competency aspects that students will achieve. In line with the opinion of Sufyadi et al. (2021), learning objectives describe the competencies that students will acquire in one or more learning activities. Monitoring and evaluating the implementation of Merdeka Belajar is also an important step that needs to be taken to ensure this policy runs effectively. The Medan City Government must implement a continuous monitoring system to evaluate the success of this program in each primary school.

Communicating Between Implementers of Merdeka Belajar Program Activities in Medan City

In implementing a policy program, support and coordination with other related agencies are needed to achieve the policy objectives properly. Van Meter & Van Horn (in Winarno & Ismawan, 2005) reveal that inter-organizational communication and implementation activities Implementation will run effectively if the measures and objectives can be understood by the individuals responsible for achieving the policy. In implementing the independent learning program policy in Medan City Elementary Schools, several stakeholders are supporting this program's success, namely the Medan City Education Office and elementary school education units in Medan City.

Based on observations made by researchers, the Medan City Education Office routinely coordinates and holds meetings with the education unit to evaluate and discuss matters related to implementing independent learning in primary schools. Coordination in the form of regular meetings is carried out with the education unit and all teaching staff or teachers. This is done to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the independent learning program. The education unit has quite an important role because it is the tip of the success of independent learning programs. Education units also routinely communicate with teaching staff regarding the quality of learning and the implementation of independent learning. This is by Permendikbudristek No. 12 of 2024, which states that in implementing independent learning, education units are responsible for reflecting and evaluating to improve the quality of learning.

The same thing was also expressed by the head of a primary school in Medan city, who said:

> "*As a Head of UPT Primary School, I always communicate with all the teachers in the UPT that I lead. We also often hold meetings to discuss the implementation of independent learning and the readiness to implement it. I have established communication with all relevant parties, including parents, communities and other parties who play a role in improving education. Because I am responsible for evaluating the implementation of the program and its results*".

Based on this statement, the Head of UPT Primary School has communicated with all teachers and often holds meetings to discuss the implementation of independent learning. In addition, he has established communication with all related parties, including parents, communities, and other parties who play a role in improving education. Transformational leadership theory is relevant in this context because the success of change in the education system depends on leadership that motivates teachers and school staff and enables them to adapt to change (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Transformational leadership at the school level is necessary to drive change, but unfortunately, this practice is still unevenly practised in every

primary school in Medan City.

According to Van Meter and Van Horn (in Subarsono, 2005), the characteristics of implementing agents include bureaucratic structures, norms and patterns of relationships that occur in the bureaucracy. All of these will affect the implementation of a policy. Based on observations made by researchers, the Medan City Education Office already has a clear organizational structure, as researchers have attached. An organizational structure is needed to divide the tasks and functions of each member to facilitate the running of an organization. The Medan City Government has divided each member into several sections, each with its main tasks and functions. This is by Medan Mayor Regulation No 51/2018. A clear organizational structure will prevent overlapping decision-making and can run more effectively and efficiently.

Apart from being related to the organizational structure, Agustino (2006) revealed that knowledge can affect the characteristics of the implementing agent, which is knowledge, where knowledge is a somewhat important element because the high knowledge possessed by the apparatus can help the implementation. The Head of the Medan City Office, regarding the ability of the employees to implement this policy, said that:

> "*for the ability of employees who handle the implementation of the independent learning program in primary schools, I think they are capable, although this policy is a policy that slightly changes the understanding of stakeholders in viewing learning. However, all employees are considered to have the ability to make a maximum contribution to the successful implementation of the independent learning program*".

Based on interviews conducted by researchers, it can be explained that all implementing agents have been able to implement this policy by their respective tasks and functions. The independent learning program is also a familiar policy any more. Therefore, stakeholders must understand very well how to run it properly. On the other hand, so that policy implementation can run well, it is essential to pay attention to the attitude of the implementers. The attitude of implementers in the Van Meter and Van Horn implementation model is how implementers respond to an existing policy and the extent to which implementers understand the policy. In this case, the stakeholders who coordinate the implementation of the independent learning program at this elementary school play a vital role. Obstacles and obstacles in the field will only be adequately overcome if the implementers are responsive in carrying out their duties. In this regard, the Head of the Medan City Education Office revealed that at the beginning of the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Program in elementary schools in Medan City, it was found that there were still elementary schools that did not have adequate facilities to support more innovative and flexible learning and still limited access to technological equipment or educational resources needed to implement modern learning methods.

In addition, some teachers still need to receive sufficient training to understand the application of Merdeka Belajar principles and improve their use of innovative learning methods or new technologies. There still needs to be coordination between teachers, principals, and related parties in implementing the program, as well as difficulties in actively involving parents in the education process and implementation of Merdeka Belajar. However, the Medan City Education Office is swiftly optimizing the use of existing facilities and equipment, prioritizing the purchase of tools that support learning and building partnerships to get assistance in the form of teaching tools or materials. Meanwhile, to overcome the limitations of teachers' competence, they regularly organize workshops and training on innovative learning methods and the use of technology in learning and hold regular meetings with the school team, parents and related parties to discuss developments and problems faced and encourage parents to be

actively involved in the education process.

To achieve high-quality education in line with the SDGs, these strategies must be implemented comprehensively and coordinated. Quality education depends on good policies, practical implementation, and continuous support from all stakeholders. The implementation of Merdeka Belajar in Medan City must be accompanied by a strong commitment from the local government, principals, teachers and the community to achieve better and inclusive education goals.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that Merdeka Belajar implementation in primary schools in Medan City still faces several challenges, including limited infrastructure, lack of resources, and schools' willingness to adapt to curriculum changes. In the context of organisational adaptation theory, schools' ability to adapt to policy changes is highly dependent on the availability of resources and infrastructure (Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985). The Medan City Government has made various efforts such as training and mentoring teachers and building a professional community to support Merdeka Belajar implementation. However, the implementation of the programme in the field has not been optimal. The main obstacles faced are unequal classroom facilities and limited access to technology, especially in suburban schools. In addition, local government support is often not accompanied by adequate budgeting and equitable resource allocation, resulting in gaps in policy implementation in schools.

Transformational leadership theory is also relevant in this context because successful change in the education system relies heavily on leadership that can motivate teachers and school staff and facilitate adaptation to change (Bass & Avolio, 1994). However, the practice of transformational leadership in primary schools in Medan City is still uneven, which means that Merdeka Belajar implementation occurs with varying degrees of success. Overall, this study highlights the need for a more coordinated strategy and greater support from the local government in the implementation of Merdeka Belajar, especially in terms of providing resources, in-service teacher training, and improving educational conditions in underdeveloped schools. Effective implementation of the Merdeka Belajar program will not only contribute to the achievement of MDGs in terms of quality education but will also address the basic education deficit that still occurs in Medan City.

Conclusion

The Medan City government has implemented several strategies to improve the quality of education in primary schools, primarily through implementing the Merdeka Belajar program. The strategies include training and developing teachers' skills, improving lesson planning through the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, and improving educational facilities and access to technology. In addition, the government collaborates with the private sector and educational institutions to provide ongoing support for better facilities and infrastructure. Although implementing this program has been challenging due to limited infrastructure and gaps in access to technology, these strategies have had a positive impact on some schools in Medan City. The government's efforts to strengthen teachers' capacity and increase the participation of the education community are necessary steps to realizing quality education by the SDGs. Consistent and targeted support will be vital to expanding the positive impact of this program in the future.

Biographies

Laksamana Putra Siregar is a Doctoral Student in Development Studies, at the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Indonesia.

Subhilhar is a Professor in Development Studies, at the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Indonesia.

Heri Kusmanto is a Lecturer in Development Studies, Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Indonesia.

Hatta Ridho is a Lecturer in Development Studies, Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Indonesia.

Authorship and Contribution Level

Laksamana Putra Siregar contributed to the conceptualization and design of the study and collected data through in-depth interviews and observations.

Subhilhar was responsible for conducting focus group discussions (FGDs) and analyzing the qualitative data obtained.

Heri Kusmanto contributed to the development of the research framework and interpretation of findings related to the social and economic impacts of street begging exploitation.

Hatta Ridho was instrumental in reviewing the existing literature and writing the methodology section of the study.

References

Aditiya, N., & Fatonah, S. (2023). Upaya Mengembangkan Kompetensi Guru Penggerak di Sekolah Dasar Pada Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar. *Scholaria: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Kebudayaan*, *13*(2), 108–116. https://doi.org/10.24246/j.js.2023.v13.i2.p108-116

Agustino, L. (2006). *Dasar-Dasar Kebijakan Publik*. Bandung : Alfabeta.

Anggraini, D., & Nugraheni, S. (2024). Menuju Pendidikan Berkelanjutan: Implementasi Tujuan Pembangunan Berkelanjutan (Sdgs) Dalam Mewujudkan Pendidikan Berkualitas Di Indonesia. *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Indonesia (JPPI)*, *1*(3), 189–197. https://doi.org/10.62017/jppi.v1i3.1028

Ariyani, D., & Nugraheni, N. (2024). Menuju Pendidikan Berkualitas: Kontribusi Indonesia dalam Pencapaian Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Indonesia (JPPI)*, *1*(3), 198–205. https://doi.org/10.62017/jppi.v1i3.1037

Azizah, W. A. (2024). *Program Inovatif untuk Meningkatkan Kualitas Pendidikan dan Pengembangan Karakter Siswa SD*. Reativ Publisher.

Bank, W. (2018). World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise. In *World Bank*. https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2018

Bass, B. M. (1985). *Leadership and Performance beyond Expectations*. Free Press PP - New York.

Bass, B. M., & Avolio, B. J. (1994). *Improving Organizational Effectiveness Through Transformational leadership*. Sage PP - Thousand Oaks, California.

Bisri, A. M., Muid, A., & Khamim, N. (2023). Hambatan Utama Implementasi Merdeka Belajar pada Perguruan Tinggi Swasta. *Attadrib Jurnal Pendidikan Guru Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*, *6*(2), 409–416. https://doi.org/10.54069/attadrib.v6i2.629

Burns, J. M. (1978). *Leadership*. New York : Harper & Row.

Chankseliani, M., & McCowan, T. (2021). Higher education and the Sustainable Development Goals. *Higher Education*, *81*(1), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-020-00652-w

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Studyguide for Research design : qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Content Technologies PP - United Kingdom.

Daga, A. T. (2021). Makna Merdeka Belajar dan Penguatan Peran Guru di Sekolah Dasar. *Jurnal Educatio FKIP UNMA*, *7*(3), 1075–1090. https://doi.org/10.31949/educatio.v7i3.1279

Davies, B. (2009). *The Essentials of School Leadership*. SAGE.

Dewi, L. M. A. W., & Astuti, N. P. E. (2022). Hambatan Kurikulum Merdeka Di Kelas Iv Sdn 3 Apuan. *Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar Rare Pustaka*, *4*(2), 31–39. https://doi.org/10.59789/rarepustaka.v4i2.128

ditpsd.kemdikbud.go.id. (2022). Luncurkan Kurikulum Merdeka, Mendikbudristek: Ini Lebih Fleksibel! In *ditpsd.kemdikbud.go.id*. https://ditpsd.kemdikbud.go.id/artikel/detail/luncurkan-kurikulum-merdeka-mendikbudristek-ini-lebih-fleksibel

Djuhartono, T., Ariwibowo, P., & Anggresta, V. (2022). Determinasi Tingkat Pendidikan terhadap Indeks Pembangunan Manusia (IPM) Di Karangasem - Kabupaten Bogor. *Jurnal Mirai Management*, *7*(3), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.37531/mirai.v7i2.2486

GPE. (2020). Education: A Foundation for Sustainable Development. In *The Global Partnership for Education*. https://www.globalpartnership.org/

Hardiansyah, F. (2022). The Implementation of School-Based Management in Improving Quality of

Education in Primary School. *Kelola: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan*, *9*(2). https://doi.org/oai:ejournal.uksw.edu:article/6853

Hijjayati, Z., Makki, M., & Oktaviyanti, I. (2022). Analisis Faktor Penyebab Rendahnya Kemampuan Literasi Baca-Tulis Siswa Kelas 3 di SDN Sapit. *Jurnal Ilmiah Profesi Pendidikan*, *7*(3b), 1435–1443. https://doi.org/10.29303/jipp.v7i3b.774

Hrebiniak, L. G., & Joyce, W. (1985). Organizational Adaptation: Strategic Choice and Environmental Determinism. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *30*(3), 336–349. https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Organizational-Adaptation%3A-Strategic-Choice-and-Hrebiniak-Joyce/4d3726b6fd7993c6ce6b88cea09a5914ee294fda

Latifah, L., & Rahmawati, F. P. (2022). Penerapan Program CALISTUNG untuk Meningkatkan Literasi Numerasi Siswa Kelas Rendah di Sekolah Dasar. *Jurnal Basicedu*, *6*(3), 5021–5029. https://doi.org/10.31004/basicedu.v6i3.3003

Lestari, B. B., Nugraheni, N., & Husain A, F. (2024). Penerapan Edukasi SDGS di Lingkungan Sekolah Guna Mendukung Terwujudnya Kesejahteraan Pendidikan. *Socius: Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial*, *1*(10), 67–72. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11128176

Mohamed Hashim, M. A., Tlemsani, I., & Matthews, R. (2021). Higher Education Strategy in Digital Transformation. *Education and Information Technologies*, *27*(3), 3171–3195. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-021-10739-1

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

Mulyasa, H. E. (2023). *Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka*. Bumi Aksara.

Nasution, I. K., Kusmanto, H., Ardian, M., Nasution, F. A., & Indainanto, Y. I. (2024). Executive Political Communication in Drafting Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budgets in North Sumatra Province, Indonesia. WSEAS Transactions On Environment And Development, 20, 76–86. https://doi.org/10.37394/232015.2024.20.9

Nations, U. (2015). Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In *United Nations*. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld/publication

Nurlina, N., Ridha, A., & Asnidar, A. (2023). Analisis Determinan Indeks Pembangunan Manusia di Indonesia Tahun 1990-2021. *Jurnal Samudra Ekonomi Dan Bisnis*, *14*(2), 239–250. https://doi.org/10.33059/jseb.v14i2.7287

Paba, E., Noge, M. D., & Wau, M. P. (2021). Analisis Faktor-Faktor Kesulitan Membaca Menulis Dan Berhitung Siswa Kelas 1 Sdi Bobawa Kecamatan Golewa Selatan Kabupaten Ngada Tahun 2020. *Jurnal Citra Pendidikan*, *1*(2), 265–276. https://doi.org/10.38048/jcp.v1i2.246

Patandung, Y., & Panggua, S. (2022). Analisis Masalah-Masalah Pendidikan dan Tantangan Pendidikan Nasional. *Jurnal Sinestesia*, *12*(2), 794–805. https://sinestesia.pustaka.my.id/journal/article/view/277

Scott, W. R. (2003). *Organizations: Rational, Natural, and Open Systems* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Siregar, N., Sahirah, R., & Harahap, A. A. (2020). Konsep Kampus Merdeka Belajar di Era Revolusi Industri 4.0. *Fitrah: Journal of Islamic Education*, *1*(1), 141–157. https://doi.org/10.53802/fitrah.v1i1.13

Subarsono, A. G. (2005). *Analisis kebijakan publik*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.

Sufyadi, S., Lambas, L., Rosdiana, T., Amin, F., Novrika, S., Iswoyo, S., Hartini, Y., Primadonna, M.,

& Mahardhika, R. L. (2021). Pembelajaran paradigma baru - Repositori Institusi Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan. *Kemdikbud.Go.Id*. https://doi.org/http://repositori.kemdikbud.go.id/24963/1/PPB_2021.pdf

Sulistyo, T., Liskinasih, A., & Purnawati, M. (2022). Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka: Tantangan Atau Hambatan Ditinjau Dari Tuntutan Pembelajaran Abad 21? *Jurnal Ilmiah Mandala Education*, 8(3). https://doi.org/10.58258/jime.v8i3.2841

Sutaga, I. W. (2022). Tingkatkan Kompetensi Guru Melalui Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi. *Inovasi Jurnal Guru*, 8(9), 58–65. http://jurnalinovasi.org/index.php/IJG/article/view/324

Thamrin, M. H., Eriza, F., Nasution, F. A., Yusuf, M., & Indainanto, Y. I. (2023). Digital Marketing of Handicraft SMEs in Medan City: Learning Evaluation. *Studies in Media and Communication*, 11(6), 188–196. https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v11i6.5967

UNESCO. (2015). *Incheon Declaration Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4 Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/education-2030-incheon-framework-for-action-implementation-of-sdg4-2016-en_2.pdf

Wati, R. (2023). Perencanaan Pembelajaran (Meningkatkan Mutu Pendidik): Learning Planning (Improving The Quality Of Educators). *Journal of Basic Education*, 1(2), 47–62. https://ejournal.stitmiftahulmidad.ac.id/index.php/joedu/article/view/25

Weick, K. E., & Quinn, R. E. (1999). Organizational Change And Development. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 50(1), 361–386. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.50.1.361

Weick, K. E., & Sutcliffe, K. M. (2015). *Managing the unexpected: Sustained performance in a complex world*. Wiley PP - Hoboken, New Jersey.

Winarno, B., & Ismawan, I. (2005). *Teori dan proses kebijakan publik*. Yogyakarta: Media Pressindo.

Yantoro, Y. (2020). Analisis Kemampuan Guru Menerapkan Unsur Mikir Dalam Pembelajaran Aktif Pada Kelas Tinggi Di Sekolah Dasar. *Jurnal Pajar (Pendidikan Dan Pengajaran)*, 4(2). https://doi.org/10.33578/pjr.v4i2.7963

Žalėnienė, I., & Pereira, P. (2021). Higher education for sustainability: A global perspective. *Geography and Sustainability*, 2(2), 99–106. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geosus.2021.05.001