

# Principal decision-making in implementing Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools: a review

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## ABSTRACT

This research uses a literature review that examines current articles on principals' decision-making in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools. The literature review method is assisted by Open Knowledge Maps (OKM) and literature searches using Google Scholar, ERIC, ScienceDirect, and PubMed databases. The findings of this research suggest that principals' decision-making in curriculum implementation has a significant impact on the quality of education in schools. By considering these aspects, principals can ensure that the curriculum implemented in their schools meets the needs of students and contributes to the achievement of broader educational goals. Principals' decision-making in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum requires a deep understanding of education, leadership skills, and the ability to collaborate. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is a significant change in Indonesia's education system that aims to tailor education to local needs better, develop students' character, and promote competency-based learning. However, successful implementation requires adequate support, training, and resources for schools and educators. This research is limited to a literature review only. So, in the future, it is necessary to carry out field research in order to reveal the principal's decision-making in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum with various new methods and adapted to current issues.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

There have been many studies on decision-making and principals' decision-making. However, there are still few that systematically examine the decision-making of elementary school principals in the implementation of an independent curriculum in a systematic literature review [1]. Research trends over the past five years focus on the relationship of decision-making in improving cognitive abilities [2], principal decision-making in California with local control [3], a model of principal decision-making in Lorestan Province, Iran, based on ethics [4], principal decision making in the era of decentralization and re-centralization [5], and research on decision making among school administrators [6]. Meanwhile, research with a review of studies was found to examine only the leadership style of secondary school principals in making decisions [7]. There are still very few studies that explore decision-making in the independent curriculum in elementary schools, which still need to be minimally carried out by researchers in the world with literature review studies.

Research exploring decision-making in the independent curriculum in elementary schools is urgent. In addition to producing quality education, the birth of professional elementary school teachers is also

determined by good decision-making by school principals [8]. On the other hand, there are still few articles that present results on the concept of decision-making, decision-making styles, and the implementation of principals' decision-making in the independent curriculum in elementary schools. Principal decision-making is critical to the success of curriculum implementation [9], [10]. Principals monitor and evaluate teachers and students to minimize deviations from the planned work program and also involve members by conducting joint deliberations in decision-making [11].

The principal's ability to make decisions is designed according to the needs of an independent curriculum in the digital age. Principals must always keep abreast of developments and advances in their field of work in order to be able to meet the demands of society and technology and be able to see the relationship between their field of work and other fields that affect it [12], [13]. Therefore, principals need to be adaptive to implement things related to technology in an independent curriculum. Without proper decision-making, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum will experience many problems, especially for teachers. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is an initiative that aims to give more authority to schools and educators in designing their curriculum. The concept emerged as an attempt to improve the education system and increase the relevance of the curriculum to local needs and contexts. However, like all changes in the education system, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum also has a number of issues and challenges, including limited resources, teacher competencies, stakeholder engagement, and principal leadership [14]. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is a significant step towards improving the education system. However, these issues must be addressed appropriately to ensure its success and provide quality education to future generations [15]. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum with the concept of "Merdeka Belajar" in elementary schools provides "independence" for education implementers, especially teachers and principals, in compiling, developing, and implementing the curriculum based on the potential and needs of students and schools. Merdeka Belajar frees teachers to arrange learning that emphasizes essential material by considering characteristics so that learning outcomes will be achieved more meaningfully, enjoyably, and sincerely [16].

The principal's style of decision-making plays an urgent role in the implementation of the independent curriculum. The decision-making process is seen from the impact of violations on educators and students, namely the principal sees the types of violations and the consequences or impacts of these violations, both on students and teachers; supervision for educators when carrying out the teaching and learning process in the classroom; supervision of students; establishing communication and socializing with students so that they can pay more attention and maintain cleanliness [17]. The principal's decision-making method is through the creation of an open and democratic environment, where school members (teachers, students, employees, parents, and community leaders) are encouraged to be directly involved in the decision-making process that can contribute to the achievement of school goals [18], [19]. How important it is to study the principal's decision-making in implementing an independent curriculum through a literature review. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to uncover the current literature that presents principals' decision-making in the implementation of the independent curriculum. To help achieve this goal, the researcher asked three research questions:

- i) What is the concept of principal decision-making in implementing a Merdeka Curriculum?
- ii) What are the steps of principal decision-making in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools?
- iii) How is the implementation of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools?

## 2. METHOD

The systematic literature review in this article refers to the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analysis (PRISMA) technique which is a reference in identifying, filtering, testing feasibility, including data for analysis and presentation [20]. The research describes the data as it is. It explains the data or events with qualitative explanatory sentences about the principal's decision-making in implementing the independent curriculum from the study of books, literature, notes, and reports related to the problem being solved. This research is also deepened by using a descriptive analysis approach in accordance with the data obtained about the principal's decision-making in implementing the independent curriculum.

The descriptive analysis approach is related to literature studies on principal decision-making in implementing an independent curriculum. The objectives to be achieved in this study provide an overview of the principal's decision-making in implementing the independent curriculum. It becomes the basis for how principals carry out principal decision-making in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The literature search technique in this research is limited to articles published in scientific journals in the last 10 years that reveal the theme of principal decision-making in implementing the independent curriculum. To get an initial mapping, researchers employed the Open Knowledge Maps (OKM) application by typing four keywords.

There are “principal decision making”, “principal decision making in elementary school”, “implementation Merdeka curriculum”, and “principal decision making in implementation in implementation Merdeka curriculum”. From these keywords, “principal decision making” is the keyword most appears.

From the initial mapping through the OKM application, 100 articles were obtained with 14 major themes and a number of keywords found: i) Bayesian persuasion, incentive design, logic objective; ii) principal’s decision, principal’s decision-making, and effectiveness; iii) algorithmic decision, elementary school, ethnic policy; iv) Indonesian school context, job satisfaction, and decision-making styles; v) organizational behavior and human resource management, alternative education, school-community partnerships, quality of education, and college principals; vi) husband and wife, the leadership of the school principal, in decision making; vii) organizational commitment, school climate, and strategic decision-making; viii) analysis Pareto; ix) decision performance, fuzzy decision, integrated evaluation; x) criteria decision, decision support systems, anxious managers; xi) crisis management; xii) school decisions through, in secondary schools, school decision-making; xiii) value-based decision-making, adaptive decision-making, clinical psychology; xiv) principal agent theory, data infrastructure, decision-making criteria. By the keyword “principal decision making in elementary school”, we got 80 articles. By typing keyword “implementation Merdeka curriculum we got 98 articles and the keywords “principal decision making in implementation Merdeka curriculum” got 11 articles. The keywords “principal decision making,” got 102 articles with the initial visualization in Figure 1.

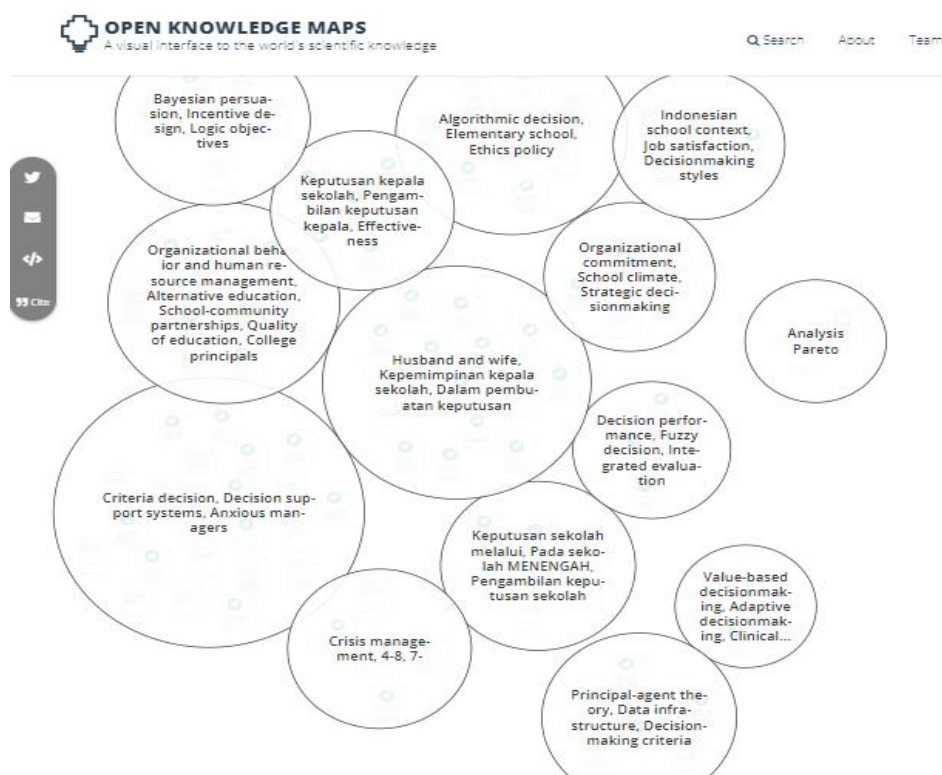


Figure 1. Visualization of articles on OKM with the keywords “principal decision making” [21]

From the initial mapping through the OKM application, 11 articles were obtained with four major themes and a number of keywords found: i) Ahmad Yani, Bandongmakodsaitong school, is school-based; ii) Certification Program, Curriculum, Education; iii) Smart Factory, Latin America; and iv) the principle of improving MUTU is improving education MUTU. From the few themes found in the OKM application and only 10 articles that appear, it shows that the initial mapping of the theme of principal decision-making in implementing an independent curriculum still needs to be studied. After mapping and producing this initial mapping, the next researcher searched for relevant literature through Google Scholar, ERIC, ScienceDirect, and PubMed databases. From the findings of the article, then read the whole, not only tit-abs-key but the entire content of the article. The results of the analysis and reading were then presented in narrative form to answer the research questions. The search process using the PRISMA flow diagram can be seen in Figure 2.

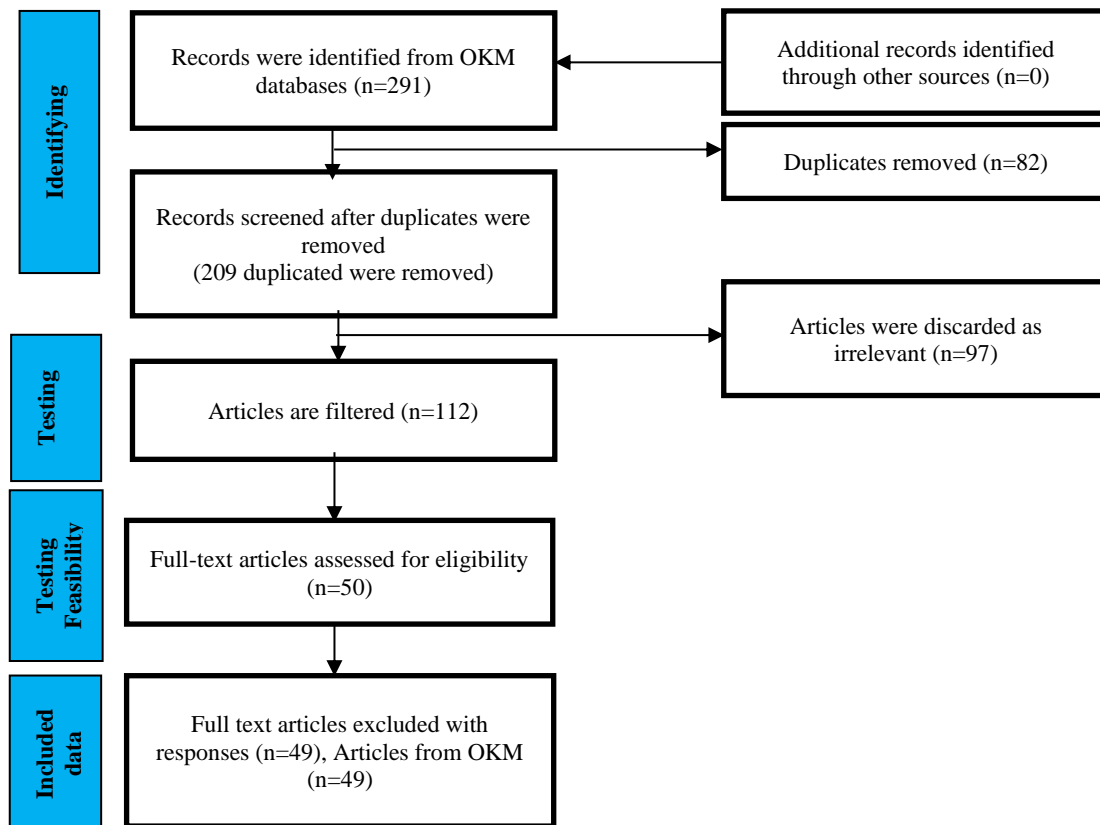


Figure 2. PRISMA flow diagram for systematic review [22]

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. The concept of principal decision-making in curriculum implementation

Principal decision-making in curriculum implementation is a critical step in ensuring that the educational process runs according to the set goals and standards [23], [24]. From the literature findings, there are several essential concepts in principals' decision-making in a number of aspects [25]. First is adherence to national guidelines. The principal must understand and comply with the national guidelines governing the curriculum. In many countries, the government sets national standards for the curriculum that all schools must follow [26]. The principal must ensure that the curriculum implemented in his/her school complies with these guidelines [27]. Second, evaluation and monitoring. Principals' decision-making should be based on regular evaluation and monitoring of curriculum implementation. This involves assessing student achievement, teaching effectiveness, and teachers' understanding of the curriculum [28], [29]. Third, the participation of teaching and education personnel. Principals should involve staff and teachers in curriculum-related decision-making. Discussion and consultation with professionals in the school will help design, revise, and implement a more effective curriculum [30], [31]. Fourth, resources where the school principals should consider the availability of physical, human, and financial resources in curriculum-related decision-making. They need to allocate resources wisely to support successful curriculum implementation [32]. The fifth is innovation adoption. Principals need to be progressive leaders in adopting innovations in the curriculum. They should be ready to implement new approaches, teaching methods, and technologies that support more effective learning [33].

Sixth, long-term planning. Principals' decision-making should involve long-term planning. They need to design a curriculum that is in line with the school's vision and mission, as well as sustainable over a long period [34]. Seventh, students' needs and characteristics. Principals' decision-making should consider the needs and characteristics of students in their school. This includes individual differences, learning styles, and special needs [35]. Principals should ensure that the curriculum is designed to meet the diverse needs of students [36], [37]. Eighth, responsive to development. The curriculum should be dynamic and responsive to changes in education and society. Principals should be ready to adjust the curriculum according to the latest developments in science, technology, and job demands [38].

The principal's decision-making in curriculum implementation has a significant impact on the quality of education in the school. By considering these aspects, principals can ensure that the curriculum implemented in their school meets the needs of students and contributes to the achievement of broader educational goals. In the context of an independent curriculum, this is very different, as the curriculum is still new in the Indonesian context and must be adjusted by the school principal.

### **3.2. Principal decision-making in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools**

The principal's decision-making in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is critical to ensure the success and effectiveness of the curriculum. In this context, school principals must first know the concept of the Merdeka Curriculum, which the government has regulated. The Merdeka Curriculum is an educational approach that aims to give schools the freedom to design the curriculum according to their own needs and context [39], [40]. A number of aspects need to be considered by school principals in making decisions regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum [41]. They first had to understand the concept of the Merdeka Curriculum. School principals need to have a deep understanding of the concept of the Merdeka Curriculum, including its principles that underlie the freedom to design the curriculum. This involves an understanding of flexibility, contextualization, and diverse learning approaches [42]. Second, analyze the needs of the school. Principals should identify the specific needs and characteristics of their school. This includes understanding the student profile, available resources, challenges faced, and the school's educational goals [43], [44].

Third, consultation with stakeholders; it is important to discuss designing the curriculum with teachers, parents, students, and the school community. Involving all these parties in the decision-making process can ensure that the designed curriculum meets their needs and expectations [45]. Fourth, curriculum and materials development; after understanding the needs and listening to inputs from various parties, the principal should work with the team of teachers in designing an appropriate curriculum. This includes the selection of learning methods, subject matter, assessment, and evaluation methods. Fifth, monitoring and evaluation. Decision-making continues even after the curriculum is launched. Principals need to continue to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the curriculum. If some problems or changes need to be made, then changes should be made in line with the development of the situation [46], [47]. Sixth, promoting innovation and professional development. Principals also need to support innovation in the learning process and teachers' professional development. Encouraging collaboration, training, and exchange of ideas are important in improving the quality of education [48]. Seventh, compliance with education policy. School principals also need to ensure that the implementation of the curriculum complies with the education policies that apply in their area. This includes national guidelines and related regulations-eighth, synergy, and communication with all parties. Principals must carry out effective communication with all relevant parties, both internally and externally, to ensure understanding and support for the Merdeka Curriculum [49].

The principals' decision-making in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum requires a deep understanding of education, leadership skills, and the ability to collaborate. By involving all parties and ensuring proper implementation, schools can achieve better educational goals according to their individual needs and conditions. However, this decision-making is not just a matter of school administration but also relates to the principal's leadership pattern in determining policies for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

### **3.3. Implementation of the independent curriculum implementation in primary schools**

The government through the Decree of the Head of the Education Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 033/H/Kr/2023, regarding the Second Amendment to the Decree of the Head of the Education Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 008/H/Kr/2022, regarding learning outcomes in Early Childhood Education, Primary Education Level, and Secondary Education Level in the Merdeka Curriculum has encouraged schools in Indonesia to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. In detail, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology has made three stages of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum that school principals must understand, namely independent learning, independent change, and independent sharing. However, the reality is that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum still depends on the management and leadership aspects of the school principal [50], [51]. The success and failure of the curriculum implementation depend on the principal's decision-making [52].

Technically, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in schools involves a series of steps and efforts taken by the school, teachers, and students. The Merdeka Curriculum is an educational concept that gives schools and teachers more freedom in designing and managing the curriculum and places more emphasis on developing student competencies. There are a number of steps in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at school. First, understand the concept of the Merdeka Curriculum; principals, teachers, and

school staff must understand the basic concept of the Merdeka Curriculum, which includes giving teachers more freedom in designing the curriculum according to student needs. Second, educational goals should be identified [53]. Schools need to formulate the educational goals they want to achieve with the Merdeka Curriculum. This could include developing critical skills, problem-solving, and improving literacy [54], [55]. Third, the principal needs to organize the curriculum team. Form a curriculum team consisting of teachers, school staff, and education experts to design and oversee the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum [56]. Fourth, principals need to evaluate students' needs. Identify the needs and interests of students individually and in groups to ensure that the curriculum is built according to the students' characteristics [57]. Fifth, principals need to organize project-based learning; need to encourage the use of project-based learning approaches, where students engage in relevant and authentic learning projects [58], [59].

Sixth, monitoring and evaluation; school principals need to conduct regular monitoring and evaluation of student's progress and the effectiveness of the curriculum. Changes and adjustments need to be made based on the evaluation results, which also need to be assisted by school supervisors through supervision activities [60]. Seventh, school principals need to initiate parental and community involvement. Involve parents and the community in the education process so that they can support and participate in children's development. Eighth, principals need to organize teacher training. Conduct teacher training and professional development in designing, managing, and evaluating a curriculum that is in accordance with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum through seminars, workshops, workshops, in-house training, and others [61]. Ninth, technology support. Principals need to utilize educational technology to facilitate learning that is more interactive and connected to the real world [62], [63]. Tenth, school principals conduct outcome measurement of Merdeka Curriculum implementation. A variety of outcome measurement methods, such as student portfolios, project-based exams, and formative assessments, are used to assess student progress [64]. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum requires the cooperation and involvement of all parties involved in education [65]. It is an approach that aims to provide more relevant education, focuses on the development of student competencies, and gives teachers more freedom in designing appropriate learning experiences. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is a significant change in Indonesia's education system that aims to tailor education to local needs better, develop student character, and encourage competency-based learning. However, successful implementation requires adequate support, training, and resources for schools and educators.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The principal's decision-making in implementing the curriculum has a significant impact on the quality of education in schools. By considering these aspects, school principals can ensure that the curriculum implemented in their school meets students' needs and contributes to achieving broader educational goals. School principals' decision-making in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum requires a deep understanding of education, leadership abilities, and the ability to collaborate. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is a significant change in the Indonesian education system, which aims to adapt education to local needs better, develop student character, and encourage competency-based learning. However, successful implementation requires adequate support, training, and resources for schools and educators. The novelty of this research reveals new findings regarding school principals' decision-making in implementing the curriculum, which has a significant impact on the quality of education in schools. This research is limited to a literature review only. So, in the future, field research needs to be carried out in order to reveal the decision-making of school principals in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum using various new methods and adapting to current issues.

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