



EVALUATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM IN THE ASPECT OF LEARNING METHODS USING THE ILLUMINATIVE MODEL AT BRILLIANT SCHOOL MAKASSAR

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Keywords:	Abstract
Merdeka Curriculum; Illuminative Model; Keyword 3; STEAM; Homeschooling; Curriculum	<i>(1) Background: This study evaluates the implementation of learning methods within the Merdeka Curriculum at Brilliant Homeschooling Makassar using the Illuminative Evaluation Model.; (2) Methods: A qualitative approach was employed through observations, interviews, and documentation to explore context, process, and learning experiences. (3) Results: Findings show the use of project-based learning, contextual learning, and STEAM approaches aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers act as facilitators and provide flexibility for students to learn according to their interests and needs. Supporting factors include parental involvement, homeschooling flexibility, and teacher creativity, while challenges arise from limited formal guidelines, teacher workload, and coordination issues.; (4) Implications: The study recommends clearer curricular guidelines, enhanced teacher training, and strengthened authentic project-based assessments.</i>

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Homeschooling in Indonesia continues to gain momentum as an alternative model for families seeking personalized learning pathways that differ from conventional schooling. The rise of digital learning tools, the growing demand for flexible educational structures, and diverse student needs have contributed to increased public interest in homeschooling. Alongside this development, Indonesia introduced the Merdeka Curriculum—an educational reform aimed at restoring learning autonomy, fostering contextual understanding, and supporting student-centered pedagogical practices.

Given that the Merdeka Curriculum was conceptualized primarily for formal schools, its adaptation in homeschooling environments is both complex and intriguing. Formal schools operate within institutional frameworks supported by policy guidelines, standardized assessments, and structured teacher training. Homeschooling, however, functions through varied organizational models, often involving small learning communities, mixed-age groups, and individualized instruction. These fundamental differences create a unique scenario where the curriculum is not merely implemented but reinterpreted and reshaped according to contextual needs.

The flexibility inherent in homeschooling potentially aligns well with the philosophy of the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers and facilitators have the autonomy to design learning experiences that emphasize exploration, inquiry, and authentic problem-solving. Yet, this same flexibility may pose challenges. Without clear guidelines,

educators may experience uncertainty in translating curriculum expectations into daily learning activities. Understanding how the curriculum operates within such flexible structures is crucial, not only for improving homeschooling practices but also for enriching the broader discourse on curriculum implementation in alternative education settings.

Problem of The Study

While the Merdeka Curriculum encourages innovation, autonomy, and contextualization, homeschooling institutions often lack formalized structures that typically support curriculum implementation. Teachers and facilitators may struggle to interpret competency standards, adapt project-based activities, or align instruction with assessment expectations. Moreover, there is limited empirical research documenting how curriculum principles manifest within homeschooling environments. Therefore, this study focuses on understanding how learning methods are implemented, how students and teachers experience the learning process, and what contextual factors influence the effectiveness of curriculum enactment.

Research's State of the Art

Research on curriculum implementation in Indonesia predominantly examines traditional school contexts. Studies highlight teacher readiness, student engagement, and the effectiveness of innovative pedagogical approaches such as project-based learning and STEAM. Other studies emphasize barriers related to teacher workload, resource limitations, and the need for professional development. However, there remains a lack of empirical work on curriculum adaptation within homeschooling communities. Most literature on homeschooling focuses on parental involvement, student motivation, or learning autonomy. Only a handful address curriculum frameworks, and even fewer use systematic evaluation models such as the Illuminative Model.

This research contributes to existing literature by applying the Illuminative Evaluation Model in a homeschooling environment. This model enables evaluators to understand not only what happens during learning but also the reasoning behind decisions, the contextual influences, and the lived experiences of participants. By integrating this model with the Merdeka Curriculum's framework, this study provides a fresh perspective on how national reforms are interpreted outside formal schooling.

Gap Study & Objective

A research gap exists in exploring the contextual and experiential dimensions of the Merdeka Curriculum within homeschooling frameworks. This gap is significant because homeschooling lacks standardized learning structures, making curriculum adoption unique and complex. The objectives of this study are to (1) Describe the implemented learning methods, (2) Analyze teachers' and students' learning experiences, (3) Identify contextual supports and barriers, and (4) Interpret the meaning and dynamics of implementation using the Illuminative Model.

METHOD

Type and Design

This research adopted a qualitative design guided by the Illuminative Evaluation Model, which consists of three phases: orientation, investigation, and explanation. The orientation phase involved gaining familiarity with the school environment, understanding the organization, and observing learning routines. The investigation phase included systematic data collection through observations, interviews, and document analysis to explore the process and interactions during learning. The explanation phase focused on interpreting findings to understand how learning methods function and what contextual elements influence outcomes. This design allows for a holistic analysis of experiences, interactions, and interpretations related to the Merdeka Curriculum implementation.

Data and Data Sources

The data consist of observations, interview transcripts, learning documents, and photographic evidence collected from Brilliant Homeschooling Makassar. Primary data sources include the school principal, teachers (tutors), and students involved in daily learning activities. Supporting documents include lesson plans, instructional materials, curriculum guidelines, and documentation of project-based activities. These sources enable triangulation and strengthen the credibility of qualitative findings.

Data collection technique

Data were collected through three main techniques:

- (1) **Observation**, conducted to examine real-time learning activities, teacher–student interactions, and the application of learning methods;
 - (2) **Semi-structured interviews**, carried out with school leaders, teachers, and students to explore experiences and perceptions;
 - (3) **Documentation**, involving the review of instructional materials, photos, and administrative records to support observational data.
- These combined methods ensure a comprehensive understanding of the learning environment.

Data analysis

Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting, simplifying, and focusing on relevant information. Data display organized the findings into structured narratives, making relationships and themes visible. Conclusion drawing interpreted the meanings within the data, connecting them to the Illuminative Model to understand learning dynamics, challenges, and contextual influences. The analysis was iterative and conducted throughout data collection to refine interpretations.

RESULTS

1. Implementation of Learning Methods

The implementation of learning methods at Brilliant Homeschooling Makassar strongly reflected the core principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly flexibility, contextualization, and competency-based learning. Teachers adopted project-based learning (PjBL) integrated with STEAM elements, enabling students to construct knowledge through inquiry-driven tasks. During science sessions, learners engaged in hands-on investigations such as creating water-filtration prototypes from household materials. They examined filtration efficiency, recorded observations, and reflected on environmental implications, a process consistent with the inquiry cycle in PjBL pedagogy. The instructional practices observed aligned with research showing that STEAM-integrated PjBL can enhance students' creative and collaborative thinking skills (Muzaini et al., 2023).

Mathematics and arts learning were also interconnected. Teachers required learners to create geometric mosaics, scaled drawings, and visual graphs based on household measurements and real-world phenomena. This interdisciplinary approach mirrors Permana et al. (2022), who found that STEAM-integrated PjBL significantly improves creative thinking by bridging analytical and artistic tasks. Teachers frequently used thematic learning units to dissolve boundaries between subjects. For example, a sustainability project integrated science (waste-water-energy), social studies (community impact), and language (analytical writing), reinforcing the holistic nature of learning under the Merdeka Curriculum.

Contextual learning was an essential part of instruction. Teachers linked lessons to students' daily lives, local culture, and home environments to make abstract concepts more meaningful, reflecting Adams' (2017) argument that contextualized learning enhances engagement in flexible education systems. Learners were consistently encouraged to explore ideas, discuss findings, and revise project outcomes—practices that aligned with STEAM-PjBL principles outlined by Auliyani et al. (2024). Overall, the implementation demonstrated a learning environment that was interdisciplinary, student-centered, and authentic, reflecting the intended philosophy of the Merdeka Curriculum.

2. Learning Experiences of Teachers and Students

Students' learning experiences during the implementation of STEAM-PjBL were marked by high engagement, intrinsic motivation, and active participation. Learners showed enthusiasm by asking analytical questions, proposing design modifications, and collaborating closely with peers during projects. These behaviors reflected the development of 21st-century competencies—creativity, critical thinking, collaboration—highlighted as key outcomes of STEAM-PjBL (Suryaningsih et al., 2024). The homeschooling environment, characterized by small group sizes and flexible pacing, also allowed teachers to tailor instruction to individual needs. Students who required additional time received targeted scaffolding, while more advanced learners extended their learning through enriched tasks.

Such practices align with differentiated instruction principles that are naturally supported in flexible learning contexts (Zaida Ilma et al., 2021).

Assessment practices shifted significantly from traditional test-based approaches to authentic, performance-based, and formative assessments. Teachers used observation sheets, student portfolios, reflective journals, project rubrics, and peer feedback to monitor progress. These methods provided a more holistic understanding of students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development. This approach aligns with Ismiati (2024), who notes that assessment in STEAM-based curricula should emphasize continuous reflection and iteration to support deeper learning. Teachers also reported professional satisfaction from implementing these methods, noting that learners' creativity and independence increased over time. However, teachers acknowledged that implementing PjBL and STEAM required substantial preparation, creativity, and time, especially in designing individualized tasks and ensuring alignment with curriculum competencies. These challenges are consistent with findings from Utomo et al. (2023), who argue that STEAM-based PjBL requires high teacher readiness and sustained effort to maintain quality implementation.

3. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Supporting Factors: Several factors strongly supported curriculum implementation. First, parental involvement was a major contributor to successful STEAM-PjBL learning. Parents provided material support, supervised learning at home, and communicated regularly with teachers, reinforcing Rahman's (2021) finding that parental engagement significantly enhances homeschooling outcomes. Second, the flexible structure of homeschooling allowed teachers to extend project time, modify schedules, and adjust pacing—benefits not easily achievable in formal school contexts. Third, teachers exercised considerable autonomy in designing learning activities, which enhanced creativity and contextual adaptation. This autonomy reflects the spirit of the Merdeka Curriculum and supports Adams' (2017) argument that flexible education environments allow curricula to become more responsive to learners' experiences. Fourth, alignment between STEAM-PjBL and Merdeka Curriculum principles—such as exploration, contextualization, and competency focus—facilitated coherent implementation without the need for rigid structures.

Inhibiting Factors: Despite strong supports, several inhibiting factors posed challenges. The lack of standardized guidelines specific to homeschooling under the Merdeka Curriculum often left teachers uncertain about assessment standards and expected learning progressions. This aligns with Rahayu (2021), who notes that assessment remains a major challenge in the Merdeka Curriculum due to limited clarity in policy implementation. Additionally, the wide variation in student academic abilities required complex differentiation, increasing teacher workload. Teachers had to provide remedial support, design multiple variations of the same task, and frequently adjust instruction based on learner readiness. This workload challenge echoes findings by Sukmawati et al. (2023), who identified teacher fatigue and planning burdens as major obstacles in sustaining STEAM-PjBL. Furthermore, resource constraints occasionally limited the complexity of certain STEAM projects, highlighting the need for accessible materials and systemic support.

4. Illuminative Reflective Analysis

Using the Illuminative Evaluation Model allowed researchers to understand not only *what* teachers implemented but *how* and *why* learning unfolded the way it did within the homeschooling environment. The illuminative perspective revealed that curriculum implementation is a lived, evolving process shaped by teacher agency, parental involvement, learner characteristics, and contextual realities. Teachers interpreted curriculum flexibility as an opportunity to innovate, integrating STEAM-PjBL approaches that aligned with competencies expected in the Merdeka Curriculum. This resonates with findings by Auliyani et al. (2024), who argue that PjBL combined with STEM/STEAM enhances both learning ownership and contextual relevance.

The homeschooling culture further amplified these dynamics. Because instruction occurred in small, personalized settings, teachers cultivated close relationships with students and parents, creating an environment where learning became collaborative and deeply contextual. This reflects Widodo's (2020) analysis that homeschooling learning processes rely heavily on sustained interaction and personalization. However, the illuminative analysis also revealed structural weaknesses particularly the lack of clear curriculum guidelines and assessment frameworks which shaped teachers' decision-making and occasionally led to uncertainty. Such tensions support Rahayu's (2021) argument that curriculum reform requires consistent guidance and systemic support to be effectively implemented.

Overall, the illuminative model demonstrated that curriculum success at Brilliant Homeschooling Makassar resulted from a dynamic interaction between curriculum intentions, teacher creativity, contextual adaptability, and parental partnership. These findings reinforce the notion that curriculum implementation should be understood as an adaptive, socially influenced process rather than a linear application of prescribed documents.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of learning methods at Brilliant Homeschooling Makassar is strongly aligned with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in promoting student-centered, flexible, and differentiated learning. The integration of project-based learning, contextual approaches, and STEAM activities reflects a learning environment that encourages creativity, problem-solving, and meaningful engagement. These findings support previous research that highlights the effectiveness of active learning strategies in enhancing students' critical thinking skills and motivation.

From a broader perspective, this study provides new insights into how innovative learning methods operate within a homeschooling context, where formal structures and standardized guidelines are often less rigid. The Illuminative Model proved effective in uncovering the nuanced interactions between teachers, students, and learning contexts, offering a holistic understanding of how curriculum implementation unfolds in practice. The challenges identified such as the lack of standardized curriculum guidelines, heavy teacher workload, and inconsistencies in coordination highlight the importance of structural support for teachers, especially in decentralized educational settings like homeschooling.

Furthermore, this study expands existing literature by demonstrating that the success of the Merdeka Curriculum in non-formal settings is influenced not only by instructional design but also by contextual factors such as parental involvement, institutional flexibility, and teacher adaptability. These findings suggest that curriculum implementation should consider the unique needs of diverse learning environments rather than relying solely on formal frameworks. The results also open opportunities for further studies comparing implementation across various homeschooling institutions to understand broader patterns and challenges.

CONCLUSION

Novelty and contribution

Previous studies on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum have primarily focused on formal school settings, with limited attention given to non-formal contexts such as homeschooling. This study provides a novel contribution by examining curriculum implementation through the Illuminative Evaluation Model within a homeschooling environment, offering a comprehensive understanding of learning processes, contextual dynamics, and stakeholder experiences. The study revealed how project-based learning, contextual learning, and STEAM integration can be successfully adapted to flexible learning structures, demonstrating that innovative methods remain effective even without rigid institutional guidelines. These findings contribute significantly to the field by highlighting the adaptability of the Merdeka Curriculum and the essential role of teacher creativity and contextual sensitivity in promoting meaningful learning experiences.

Limitation and future study

This study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted in a single homeschooling institution, limiting the diversity of participants and reducing the generalizability of the findings to broader contexts. Second, the data collection took place within a relatively short duration, restricting the ability to capture long-term shifts in learning outcomes and curriculum implementation. Third, variations in students' academic abilities and communication styles may have influenced the depth and clarity of responses obtained during interviews. Future research should involve multiple homeschooling centers or compare different types of educational settings to provide more comprehensive insights. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to observe sustained changes in learning experiences, teacher practices, and curriculum adaptations over time.

Implication and suggestions

This study offers several implications for practice. First, homeschooling institutions and curriculum developers should strengthen professional development programs to enhance teachers' capacity in implementing differentiated, project-based, and STEAM-based instruction. Training initiatives may include workshops, peer collaboration, and access to updated digital resources. Second, policymakers should consider providing clearer curriculum guidelines and adaptable assessment frameworks to support schools with flexible learning structures. Third, improved coordination between homeschooling branches can foster consistency and innovation in

instructional practices. Finally, future program designs should incorporate stronger parental engagement strategies and structured support systems to optimize learning experiences in non-formal education contexts. These suggestions will help refine curriculum implementation and ensure that flexible learning environments continue to uphold the core principles of the Merdeka Curriculum.

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