



# **Implementation Of Independent Learning Policy: Challenges And Opportunities To Improve The Quality Of Education In Indonesia (Case Study In Three High School Schools In Malang Regency)**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Merdeka Belajar policy aims to transform the education system in Indonesia by creating more independent, innovative, and relevant learning. This policy gives teachers, students, and schools the freedom to innovate in the teaching and learning process, with a focus on developing character and skills relevant to the world of work. This study is a qualitative study with the aim of analyzing the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy in three high schools in Malang Regency to identify challenges, opportunities, and its impact on the quality of education. The research findings show that the main challenges faced are limited technological infrastructure, especially internet access, and the lack of training for teachers in adapting technology-based learning methods. However, this policy also opens up great opportunities, including collaboration with industry to introduce practical skills and relevance to the world of work. In addition, reducing the exam burden allows students to focus more on developing skills and character. Overall, the Merdeka Belajar policy has shown a positive impact on student motivation and engagement, although there are still challenges in terms of implementation. Continued support from the government and the community is essential to optimize the implementation of this policy throughout Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Independent Learning, challenges, opportunities, quality of education, Malang Regency.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Education is one of the main pillars in building a developed and competitive nation. In Indonesia, the quality of education that is evenly distributed and relevant to the needs of the times is a challenge that continues to be faced. In an effort to improve the quality of education and answer these challenges, the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia introduced the Merdeka Belajar or





"Freedom to Learn" policy. This policy is designed to transform the Indonesian education system, with the aim of creating a learning process that is more independent, innovative, and relevant to real-world needs. Merdeka Belajar provides freedom for teachers, students, and schools to innovate and participate in the education process, not only limited to the classroom, but also in a broader context, including the world of work and community life.(Nadlir & Zamzami, 2023).

The basic concept of Merdeka Belajar is in line with the philosophy of humanism which emphasizes the values of humanity, freedom of thought, and freedom of action. This philosophy seeks to make education a means to develop individual potential as a whole, not just focusing on achieving academic knowledge. One of the main aspects emphasized in this policy is the development of student character, which is the basis for creating a generation that is not only intelligent, but also has integrity and is able to contribute positively to society.(Santosa, 2022). By giving educators and students the freedom to choose learning methods and environments that suit their needs, Merdeka Belajar aims to create a more enjoyable, inclusive, and impactful education system.(Jamil et al., 2023; Wijayanti, 2023).

In addition, this policy also includes reducing the burden of exams that have been felt by students, such as replacing the National Standard School Exam (USBN) and the National Exam (UN) with a minimum competency assessment. The purpose of this change is to reduce psychological pressure on students and allow them to focus more on developing skills that are relevant to the needs of the world of work.(Kartika et al., 2022). On the other hand, the Independent Learning policy provides opportunities for students to choose learning resources outside the classroom, such as learning from industry professionals that are relevant to technological developments and job market needs, which are expected to create equal opportunities in obtaining quality education.(Christanti & Sukoco, 2022).

However, although this policy offers many opportunities, its implementation is not without challenges. One of the main challenges faced in implementing Merdeka Belajar is how to maintain the quality of education, especially in the context of the freedom given to each individual in the teaching and learning process. For this reason, there needs to be a continuous evaluation of the education system and management to ensure that the quality of learning is maintained.(Wairisal et al., 2023). Another challenge is the limited infrastructure, especially in terms of information and communication technology needed to support independent and technology-based learning processes.(Aini et al., 2022; Hastangka & Hidayah, 2023). In addition, limitations in human resources and budget, as well as the gap in access to education between urban and rural areas, are other obstacles that must be overcome in implementing this policy.(Maisyaroh et al., 2020).

The Merdeka Belajar policy also requires synergy between various parties, both educational institutions and industry, to ensure the relevance of the competencies taught in schools with the needs of the job market. Support from the government in providing adequate facilities and training for teachers, principals, and students, as well as more comprehensive and integrated policies, are needed so that Merdeka Belajar can be accepted and implemented effectively throughout Indonesia.(Hastangka & Hidayah, 2023). Therefore, the author will examine more deeply the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy, especially in the context of education in Malang Regency. This case study selects three senior high schools (SMA) in the area to analyze the challenges and opportunities faced in implementing the Merdeka Belajar





policy. This study aims to provide a clearer picture of the impact of this policy on the quality of education, as well as to identify factors that influence its success, both from internal aspects of the school and from external support from the government and community. Through this study, it is hoped that useful recommendations can be obtained to optimize the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy throughout Indonesia.

## METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy in Malang Regency. This study was conducted in three Senior High Schools (SMA) selected purposively, which represent various regional characteristics and school conditions in Malang Regency. This study aims to explore the challenges and opportunities faced by schools in implementing the Merdeka Belajar policy, as well as its impact on the quality of education at the secondary school level. The qualitative approach allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perceptions of stakeholders in schools, including principals, teachers, and students.

The data in this study were obtained through in-depth interviews, direct observations, and documentation studies related to the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy. Interviews were conducted with the principal, teachers, and several students who were directly involved in learning activities. Observations were conducted in classrooms and other educational spaces involved in the learning process designed based on the Merdeka Belajar policy. In addition, related documents such as lesson plans, evaluation reports, and notes related to policies and decisions taken in each school will also be analyzed to obtain a comprehensive picture.

Data collected from interviews, observations, and documentation will be coded and grouped based on relevant categories, to be further analyzed to provide recommendations that can be used to optimize the implementation of this policy throughout Indonesia. With this approach, the research is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy and the steps that can be taken to improve the quality of education in Indonesia.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### RESULT

This study aims to analyze the challenges and opportunities in implementing the Merdeka Belajar policy in three high schools in Malang Regency. Based on the results of interviews, observations, and documentation studies, various findings were found that reflect how this policy is implemented in the field and its impact on the quality of education. The main findings of this study can be grouped into three main categories as follows.

#### 1. Challenges Faced

The biggest challenge in implementing the Merdeka Belajar policy is limited infrastructure, especially in areas that do not have adequate internet access. The two schools that were the research samples faced difficulties in providing facilities that support technology-based learning. On the other hand, the lack





of training for teachers in adapting more flexible and independent learning methods is also a significant obstacle.

Table 1: Challenges Faced in the Implementation of Independent Learning in Senior High Schools in Malang Regency

Challenge	Frequency (%)	School A	School B	School C
Limitations of Technology Infrastructure	40%	X	X	
Lack of Training for Teachers	35%	X	X	
Human Resource Limitations	25%	X		

## 2. Opportunities Created

The Merdeka Belajar policy provides a great opportunity to create learning that is more inclusive and relevant to the needs of the times. Schools in Malang Regency have shown that this policy allows them to innovate in creating more interactive learning methods and based on skills needed by the world of work. One positive example is collaboration with industry professionals to provide learning materials that are more applicable and in line with technological developments. In addition, with the reduction in the exam load, students are better able to focus on developing skills and character, which is considered a positive step to reduce stress and improve the quality of learning.

Table 2: Opportunities Created by the Independent Learning Policy in Senior High Schools in Malang Regency

Opportunity	Frequency (%)	School A	School B	School C
Collaborative Learning with Industry	45%	X	X	X
Relevant Skills Development	35%	X		X
More Inclusive Learning	20%		X	

## 3. Impact on the Quality of Education

In general, the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy in these three schools has had a positive impact on the quality of education. Schools that implemented this policy reported an increase in student motivation in learning, although there were some challenges in terms of infrastructure readiness. Although not yet fully optimal, students felt more involved in the learning process because this policy gave them the freedom to choose methods and materials that were more in line with their interests and talents. This shows that the Merdeka Belajar policy has the potential to improve the quality of education in Indonesia, as long as it is accompanied by adequate support from the government and the community. The success of implementing this policy is highly dependent on the willingness of schools to adapt to change and consistent support from the government, both in the form of training, facilities, and more supportive policies.

## DISCUSSION





The implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy in three Senior High Schools (SMA) in Malang Regency shows that despite the challenges, this policy also opens up various opportunities that can improve the quality of education. Based on the results of the study, the findings obtained can be explained in three main categories: challenges, opportunities, and their impact on the quality of education.

### 1. Challenges Faced

One of the main challenges that emerged in the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy was the limited infrastructure, especially the uneven internet access in several regions. This is in line with findings that show that inadequate technological infrastructure, especially in terms of internet connectivity, is a major obstacle to implementing this policy effectively. As noted by Aini et al., (2022 & Hastangka & Hidayah (2023) Many areas in Indonesia, especially those located outside the city center, face limited internet access that affects the quality of technology-based learning. These limitations hinder the ability of students and teachers to access various learning resources available online, as well as to use technological devices to support more flexible and technology-based learning methods. In addition, another challenge faced is the lack of training for teachers to adapt more independent and innovative learning methods. Most teachers feel unprepared to manage technology-based learning, even though the Merdeka Belajar policy provides freedom in choosing appropriate learning methods. As expressed by Wairisal et al. (2023) Many teachers still rely on conventional approaches due to limited understanding and skills in using educational technology. Therefore, more intensive and sustainable training is needed to improve teacher competence in implementing technology-based learning methods.

### 2. Opportunities Created

The Independent Learning Policy does offer a great opportunity to create a more inclusive and relevant learning system to the needs of the times, one of which is through collaboration with industry. This collaboration provides an opportunity for students to obtain more applicable material and in accordance with technological developments and the needs of the world of work. In line with that, research by Watters et al. (2013) shows that collaboration between schools and the industrial sector can enrich the learning process by introducing relevant practical skills. This opens up opportunities for students to gain hands-on experience that not only enhances their skills but also paves the way for future career development. As expressed by The Holy Spirit (2022), this approach brings students closer to the world of work, allowing them to better understand the challenges in the industry and be better prepared for the needs of the ever-evolving job market. This collaboration not only enriches the student experience, but also increases the relevance of education to the rapid development of technology and the needs of the industry.

### 3. Impact on the Quality of Education

In general, the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy in these three schools has had a positive impact on the quality of education. Although the challenges faced in terms of infrastructure and teacher training are quite large, this study shows an increase in student motivation in learning. This is in line with the findings that show that this policy gives students the freedom to choose methods and materials that are more in line with their interests and talents, so that they feel more involved in the learning process. (Santosa,





2022). Although not yet fully optimal, this policy has had a positive impact, especially in creating a more enjoyable learning atmosphere and reducing exam pressure. By reducing the exam burden and focusing on character and skill development, students are more motivated to develop themselves more holistically, not just focusing on academic achievement alone. Observation data shows that students feel more appreciated in the learning process that provides space for the development of their individual potential. This shows that the Merdeka Belajar policy, if implemented properly, has great potential to improve the quality of education in Indonesia, especially in creating more relevant and enjoyable learning for students.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the existing findings, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy in Malang Regency provides a great opportunity to improve the quality of education. Although the challenges faced are quite large, especially related to infrastructure and teacher training, this policy still shows a positive impact on student motivation and engagement in learning. The success of the implementation of this policy is highly dependent on the synergy between the government, schools, and the community in providing the necessary support, both in the form of facilities, training, and policies that better support the development of education that is more inclusive and relevant to the needs of the times. Therefore, ongoing support from all parties is very important to optimize the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy throughout Indonesia.

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