



National Curriculum and Parental Involvement: Bridging Home and School Education

Original scientific paper

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Abstract

This study investigates parents' understanding of school-implemented curricula and their involvement in enhancing the quality of learning. In Indonesia, the Ministry of Education and Culture updated the basic education curriculum policy on March 26, 2024, as part of the evolution of the Merdeka Curriculum. This research uses an exploratory approach to examine parents' perceptions of their roles as school partners. Data were collected through an online survey involving 230 respondents selected via non-probability sampling and analyzed using an exploratory quantitative method. The findings reveal that while parents are generally aware of and willing to engage in school activities, they require resources and structured programs to guide their involvement effectively. Similarly, schools strive to involve parents but lack programs designed to strengthen learning outcomes. Additionally, the concept of parents' literacy regarding the learning environment at home and school remains an ongoing challenge. These results highlight the need for schools to develop effective programs that bridge parental involvement and curriculum success, ultimately fostering better learning experiences for students.

Keywords: Parental Involvement, Curriculum Understanding, Learning Quality, School Partnerships

The 2024 national curriculum for elementary education in Indonesia emphasizes essential materials tailored to students' learning needs and interests, aiming to strengthen their character. The key to the success of the implementation of the national

curriculum needs to be supported by parents as school partners (Ishimaru, 2019; Passmore & Zarate, 2020). This strong partnership can improve academic outcomes (Epstein, 2018) and student character development (Okeke, 2014; Paul et al., 2022).

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Many studies have revealed that parent's involvement in education plays a significant influence on the success of parents, children, teachers, and schools in terms of (1) supporting academic achievement and increasing attendance, awareness of healthy living (Nash et al., 2020) and positive behavior (Alias et al., 2023; Hoskins, 2014; Povey et al., 2016); (2) improving parents' perspective of schools, increasing teacher satisfaction, and strengthening relationships with children (Cano et al., 2019; Custodio et al., 2022; Dami et al., 2020); and (3) improving the climate, quality, and school discipline (Coplan et al., 2002; Goering & Mrug, 2021; Purnomo et al., 2022). Parental involvement in education to build an educational ecosystem aligns with the vision of the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia: The development of individuals and an education and cultural ecosystem with character, grounded in mutual cooperation (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020). Therefore, family involvement in providing education is expected to be appropriate and meaningful (Bornstein et al., 2022; Hart et al., 2019). On the other hand, in practice, schools have difficulty formulating effective programs to support curriculum implementation. A previous study revealed (Gross et al., 2020), that parents have the desire to be involved but they face some obstacles such as lack of time, lack of understanding of the curriculum, and form of involvement which can affect learning achievement (Yamamoto et al., 2022). Many studies have emphasized the differences between school and parent expectations regarding children's educational goals (Jeziarski & Wall, 2019; Li & Xie, 2020; Pinquart & Ebeling, 2020). However, only some investigate how the national curriculum can serve as a bridge to align these expectations. Most studies on parental involvement focus on their contribution to informal education at home (Cosso et al., 2022; Epstein et al., 2021; Williams-Johnson & Gonzalez-DeHass, 2022), but rarely explore how parents can directly support the national curriculum implemented in schools. Studies on parental support for the implementation of the national curriculum at schools are limited. Parental access to involvement in school curriculum planning is still not a policy

priority, although this issue has emerged since a decade ago (Russell, 1991). Previous studies focused more on the form or model of parental involvement in schools such as the Dual Navigation Approach (Jeynes, 2018), and the Hoover-Dempsey model (Gonzalez et al., 2013; Nash et al., 2020), in health literacy practices but the stages carried out did not begin with parental perceptions of the ongoing curriculum. In addition, parental involvement is quite effective in the form of joint assignments between parents and children (Johansson, 2009; Moore & Ronau, 2024), but long-term impact data have not been available.

The needs of parents across all grades in primary school and their need to support the school curriculum have not been examined. Research on effective strategies to bridge the gap between parental and school expectations is limited which indicates a critical area for further research to create synergy between the home and school educational environments. This creates a gap regarding parental roles in supporting the goals of the national curriculum and policy formulation to encourage such involvement.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a survey method with an exploratory quantitative approach to investigate parents' understanding of the school-implemented curriculum and their involvement in enhancing the quality of learning. The research focused on parents of primary school children who met specific characteristics.

Research Subject

This study involved 230 parents of elementary school students who had experienced the "Merdeka Curriculum," the latest national curriculum in Indonesia. They provided valuable insights of their perspective on the new curriculum and their involvement in children's learning process within this educational framework which is important to understand the effectiveness of parental involvement in the implementation of this curriculum. This study also identified challenges and opportunities in bridging parental support with the goals of the "Merdeka Curriculum." Table 1 shows the respondents' characteristics.

Table 1.
Respondents' Characteristics

No	Aspect	Number	Percentage
1	Status		
	Employed	174	75.6%
	Unemployed	56	24.4%
Total		230	100%
2	Latest Education		
	Elementary School, Junior High School, and Senior High School	163	70.87%
	Diploma	3	1.30%
	University (S1, S2, dan S3)	64	27.83%
Total		230	100%
3	Children's Grade		
	Grade 1	48	20.86%
	Grade 2	26	11.30%
	Grade 3	10	4.34%
	Grade 4	55	23.95%
	Grade 5	58	25.21%
	Grade 6	33	14.34%
Total		230	100%

The respondents of this study were 230 parents of elementary school students. In terms of employment, 75.6% of them are employed and the rest (24.4%) are unemployed. Based on educational level, most parents (70.87%) completed Elementary School, Junior High School, and Senior High School levels. Only 1.30% had a Diploma level (D1, D2, and D3) and 27.83% had a university level (Bachelor, Master, or Doctoral). In terms of grade, the students consisted of grade 1 (20.86%), grade 2 (11.30%), grade 3 4.34%, grade 4 (23.95%), grade 5 (25.21%), and grade 6 (14.34%). These characteristics provide a

comprehensive picture of the respondent.

Instrument and Data

Data was collected by distributing an online questionnaire to teachers and principals, who were then asked to share it with the parents of their students. After receiving completed questionnaires from the parents, individuals with unique characteristics based on their survey responses were identified. These parents were subsequently invited to participate in follow-up interviews conducted via Zoom, particularly for those living in remote areas. Table 2 provides details about the research instruments used.

Table 2.
Interview Guidelines

No	Indicator	Number of Item	Example
1	Understanding of National Curriculum	4	Attending the socialization of the independent learning curriculum
2	Supporting Technological Devices	2	Facilitating smartphones to support children's learning
3	Learning Changes	3	Impact of the national curriculum on changes in student learning
4	Parental Involvement and Forms of Involvement	7	Parents' willingness to be involved and parents' expectations of schools.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using both descriptive and analytical techniques to understand the dynamics of parental involvement in the 'Merdeka Belajar' reform era. Data collected from 230 respondents were summarized using descriptive statistics, presented in percentages and frequency distributions to illustrate respondents' understanding, support, and involvement. Additionally, the findings were visualized through graphs to provide a clearer picture of the respondents' responses. The relationship between demographic variables, such as education level, employment status, and parental involvement in children's learning, was examined through cross-tabulations. Parental involvement trends were analyzed using descriptive measures like central tendency and variance. Responses to open-ended questions were analyzed qualitatively using

thematic analysis, revealing deeper insights into parents' challenges and needs. This combination of quantitative and qualitative data offered a comprehensive understanding of parents' roles and perspectives on the Merdeka curriculum.

Results and Discussion

Understanding of Merdeka Curriculum

Parents' position as school partners must have good connectivity (Amunga et al., 2020; Goodall & Montgomery, 2013). Parents are required to understand the latest developments in the world of education (Fitriani et al., 2023), including understanding the Merdeka curriculum which has been implemented for 5 years in order to align the vision and mission between schools and families. Data on respondent's participation in the Merdeka Curriculum socialization are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Participation in the Merdeka Curriculum Socialization

No	Description	Number	Percentage
1	Have received socialization	133	58%
2	Have never received socialization	97	42%

It is quite interesting that 58% of respondents admitted to having received socialization and 42% had never received socialization of the Merdeka Curriculum. It can be said that respondents understand the Merdeka curriculum from socialization but do not fully understand its implementation. The socialization of the Merdeka curriculum is conducted to all school residents to help all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and students, understand the basic principles and objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum to help all elements of the education ecosystem properly implement it. Curriculum socialization aims to help parents understand their involvement in their children's learning at home (Dye, 1989; Gonzalez et al., 2013). The technological development era has

provided space for parents to access the national curriculum (Russell, 1991), but most of them do not use this opportunity. A comfortable and warm discussion of the curriculum with parents requires good principal skills (Demirbilek, 2024; Jeynes, 2018), to help parents and schools understand the curriculum as a joint work that requires collaboration (Pinquart & Ebeling, 2020). Establishing effective communication with parents and teachers and formulating a simple program can be further researched regarding effective and long-term impactful involvement models for all school residents. The results of the Merdeka Curriculum socialization are quite interesting as presented in Table 4.

Table 4.*Results of Socialization*

No	Description	Number	Percentage
1	Not understand	20	8.6%
2	Less understand	120	52.2%
3	Quiet understand	67	29.2%
4	Understand	23	10%

Concerning parental participation in curriculum socialization, some parents already have a good understanding, while others need time to understand the concept in depth. The curriculum is a manual book that is easy for teachers to use, but difficult for parents to understand (Pladevall-Ballester, 2015), as they may come from various backgrounds. Many studies have investigated the parental perceptions of the curriculum (Jeziński & Wall, 2019; Li & Xie, 2020; Pinquart & Ebeling, 2020). The key characteristic of the Merdeka curriculum is involving parents as partners in educational success and providing a parent guidebook to assist their children's learning at home (Ansori et al., 2022). However, it is not easy for parents to understand it and start their task at home. Parental awareness and understanding can develop especially when they perceive the positive benefits of this curriculum in children's learning in everyday life. Various involvement models provide essential information that the form of involvement must be conceptualized, structured, and (Nash et al., 2020; Passmore & Zarate, 2020). The initiated programs must be sustainable (Okeke, 2014), to strengthen the connection between schools and parents in understanding the curriculum (Dye, 1992; Jeznik & Gregorčič Mrvar, 2022). Parents and schools need to work together to plan the

curriculum according to the cultural context (Pinquart & Ebeling, 2020), and needs to support learning achievement. Parents believe that their involvement in learning will make a positive difference (Surikova & González, 2022). Based on a previous study (Yamamoto et al., 2022), the sociocultural model is recommended to support school and parent involvement. Thus, it is important to research curriculum manuals that are adjusted to the diverse abilities of parents and limited experience in pedagogical science.

The active role of families (parents) in schools must be prioritized (Jeziński & Wall, 2019), as it supports educational success (Erlendsdóttir et al., 2022). The diversity of parents' experiences and backgrounds affects the way students learn (Hemmerechts et al., 2017), and gives rise to various learning methods are needed (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). As the child's first teacher, parents understand the effective learning methods for their children, but parents also need to respect the educational methods applied at schools. This study tries to explore information related to the learning methods expected to be applied at schools to help students understand learning materials. The parents' response regarding the expected learning methods applied at schools is presented in Table 5.

Table 5.*Expected Learning Methods in the Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum*

No.	Description	Number	Percentage
1	In-class learning	30	13%
2	Learning outside the class	4	1.8%
3	Learning inside and outside the class	196	85.2%

Based on Table 5, 85.2% of parents agree that the learning method should not be monotonous, instead it must be varied. Parents expect an inclusive approach to learning methods in schools (Paseka & Schwab, 2020). The Merdeka curriculum

changes the learning method from inside the classroom to outside the classroom (Indarta et al., 2022). The concept of learning outside the classroom can provide an opportunity for students to be able to discuss flexibly with teachers. Students are given the freedom

to elaborate their skills. Thus, teachers and students can collaborate to create active and productive learning (Manalu et al., 2022). The principle of learning in the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes students' development of creativity, skills, and character. This curriculum is a positive step forward as it teaches children to think critically and independently as well as to take initiative. Critical thinking skills and mastery of concepts are important for everyone to solve a problem (Amanda et al., 2022). Parents need to consider creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving as skills relevant to everyday life, not just focusing on cognitive abilities. However, this perception is not fully understood by parents (Minke et al., 2014), which becomes a challenge to parental involvement in curriculum design. This indicates the importance of conducting further research related to parents' desires and

expectations of schools, especially in non-academic aspects that can be used as a basis for creating parental involvement models in curriculum enrichment which can be adopted and adjusted according to the characteristics of the Indonesian region (Meier & Lemmer, 2015).

Supporting Merdeka Belajar

The new era of society 5.0 requires society to solve problems or social dynamics by utilizing technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), robot technology, and even big data. In this era, humans can develop their skills and abilities by utilizing various technologies such as smartphones (Naslund & Aschbrenner, 2021). The use of smartphones in education faces some challenges. Parental perspectives on the use of smartphones in learning are presented in Table 6.

Table 6.

Parental Perspective on the use of Smartphones in Learning

No	Description	Number	Percentage
1	Agree using smartphones	180	78.2%
2	Disagree using smartphones	50	21.7%

As a form of validation, data were obtained from open-ended questions regarding the reasons for accepting the use of smartphones in learning. Around 78.2% of parents expressed their agreement with the use of smartphones for learning as smartphones facilitate learning. Parents realize that using smartphones provides easier and wider access to educational resources, such as applications, learning videos, and e-learning platforms. Besides, the use of smartphones facilitates communication among teachers, students, and parents. Parents can interact with teachers, receive updates, and get involved in the development of their children's learning easily. A study showed that the use of smartphones to improve learning depends on several factors such as learning design, the type of technology used, and the level of student expertise (Almaiah & Alismaiel, 2019). Therefore, designing educational technology policies according to students' characteristics in primary education and higher education is important (Chauhan, 2017; Iqbal & Bhatti,

2020). Table 6 also shows that 21.7% of parents expressed disagreement with the use of smartphones for learning. In open-ended questions, the reasons for their disagreement are worry that children would be too lazy to study, lack of concentration, and not all students had internet access. This is in line with a previous study (Han, 2022), that the age of first using a smartphone and the duration of use affect smartphone addiction, learning independence, and other learning achievements. Therefore, the use of smartphones at school needs clear and wise regulation to minimize distractions and ensure that smartphones function as effective learning aids (Anshari et al., 2017), and families need to have an active and preventive role by teaching values (Ramírez-Ramírez & Castro, 2023). At the primary education level, family involvement is highly needed to ensure the dynamics of technology use have the right impact on educational success. Parent's perceptions of their involvement at schools are presented in Table 7.

Table 7.
Parental Involvement in Schools

No	Description	Number	Percentage
1	Agree to hold routine activities involving parents	183	75.6%
2	Disagree to hold routine activities involving parents	47	20.4%

Table 7 shows that parents agree that schools hold routine activities involving parents. Parental involvement in children's activities can form strong family bonds and support children's overall development (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014; Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2020; Povey et al., 2016). Parents involve themselves in their children's homework because they believe they should be involved (Surikova & González, 2022). They believe that their involvement will make a positive difference (Okubo et al., 2022), and their children or their children's teachers want their involvement. Hornby, G. & Lafaele (2011), argue that parents' interest in being involved in children's stimulation is a positive predictor of children's learning processes and achievements (Maulya et al., 2024). Thus, parental perceptions and beliefs about involvement practices affect

educational success (Almeida & Pacheco, 2023). Their disagreement has been validated with open-ended questions related to work and busyness. Therefore, future studies need to examine how schools facilitate busy parents to have the awareness to maintain school-parent connectivity. Schools should respect parents' knowledge and build their awareness by establishing prior agreements regarding the engagement program (Fenton et al., 2017).

In addition to participating in school activities, parental involvement can be in the form of home learning assistance, for example when children do their homework. Homework become an eternal debate in the world of education as attitudes and perspectives on it change (Gill & Schlossman, 2000). Table 8 presents the respondents' perceptions of homework.

Table 8.
Parents' Perception of Homework

No	Description	Number	Percentage
1	Agree to Homework	190	82.6%
2	Disagree to Homework	40	17.3%

Around 82.6% of parents agree if children are given homework. Parents' companionship and motivation to complete homework (PR) can result in a prominent level of achievement and self-acceptance (Chophel & Choeda, 2021). Besides accessing school programs to participate in their children's education (Williams-Johnson & Gonzalez-DeHass, 2022), and experiences helps the quality of school and parent connectivity (Roksa & Kinsley, 2019). Some studies have revealed that in addition to teaching methods applied by the teacher and student's understanding of lessons, homework is a key factor that improves achievement. However, some argue that homework can also cause stress on parents and children

(Gill & Schlossman, 2000; Landis & Voorhis, 2011; Moore & Ronau, 2024). Thus, parents want to strengthen collaboration to ensure the quality of education and life of their children (Alickovic, 2019; Mujic, 2023).

Problems and Needs

The learning environment at home influences children's understanding and application of knowledge gained at school (Djurisic & Bunijevac, 2017), because it positively influences the level of children's independence (Castro et al., 2015). However, parents face the following challenges in their involvement in home learning, as described in Table 9.

Table 9.
Challenges in Home Learning Involvement

No	Description	Number	Percentage
1	Difficulty in understanding literacy and numeracy questions	50	21.7%
2	Difficulty in providing motivation for children to learn	110	47.8%
3	Difficulty accompanying children in studying or doing homework	70	30.5%

Parents find it difficult to motivate and accompany their children in learning and doing homework. Therefore, they need to develop and maintain communication about school activities as well as create reading habits to maintain their motivation (Baranauskaitė et al., 2023). Children feel tired after attending school and need extra encouragement to stay focused and enthusiastic about learning. Parental involvement in helping children solve mathematics has an impact on parents' ability to find ways to help children with learning difficulties

(Jay et al., 2018; Purnomo et al., 2022). Learning at home requires cooperation among parents, teachers, and children a positive, open, and supportive approach can help children develop strong intrinsic motivation to learn (Ramírez-Ramírez & Castro, 2023).

Parental support in the Merdeka curriculum is also driven by parents' expectation that children will have various abilities after graduating from primary school. Parental expectations of children's abilities after completing primary education are presented in Table 10.

Table 10.
Expected Student Achievements in the Merdeka Curriculum

No	Description	Number
1	Literacy and numeracy skills	73
2	Creativity	67
3	Good character	115
4	Social emotional skills	53
5	Technology usage skills	30
6	Learning independence	61

Table 10 shows that some parents expect their children to have good character, literacy and numeracy skills, creativity, social-emotional skills, technological skills, and learning independence. Having a good character requires parental effort in building positive relationships with their children (Hosokawa & Katsura, 2019; Ibabe & Bentler, 2016). Students' literacy motivation is a function of two motivational beliefs, namely self-concept ability and subjective values in literacy, which are formed by various social influences including parental expectations (Baranauskaitė et al., 2023), particularly effective parent-school partnerships to implement character education in schools (Surikova & González, 2022). Schools

need to know these parental expectations. Building excellent communication and partnerships influences the agreement of effective strategies to improve educational success (Bednarska, 2014; Stanley & Kuo, 2022). Other research shows the success of home-based character learning programs, supporting further research to find effective strategies to strengthen the parent-school connection in supporting the curriculum are important findings for further research (Paul et al., 2022). As initial data, this study tries to provide parents' perspectives on real needs in the form of products that can bridge positive relationships to support learning achievement. The parents' concrete needs are presented in Table 11.

Table 11.*Parents' Concrete Needs*

No	Description	Number	Percentage
1	Routine and Scheduled Parenting Activities	45	19,5%
2	Activity Books/Worksheets for Children and Parents	115	50%
3	Intensive Guidance to Overcome Gadget Addiction	50	21,7%
4	Competitions to Strengthen School and Parent Relationships	20	8,8%

Parents' needs are activity books or worksheets in the form of homework for children and guidance to overcome gadget addiction. A previous study reveals the advantages and disadvantages of giving homework to children (Landis & Voorhis, 2011; Pressman et al., 2015). One of the advantages is building a strong relationship between parents and children and motivation to learn (Doctoroff & Arnold, 2017). However, homework can also have a stressful impact on both parents and children (Chophel & Choeda, 2021). Future studies need to examine specific homework that has an impact on learning motivation for both children and parents. Concerning parents' awareness of gadget addiction problems, schools need to mitigate the children's mental health (Naslund & Aschbrenner, 2021). The problem of gadget addiction can be a scheduled parenting topic so that parents feel they have a partner to address this problem. This topic is a hot issue for parents (Terras & Ramsay, 2016), so they can learn to address it at home (Genc, 2014), and schools also need to regulate the use of smartphones in learning wisely (Anshari et al., 2017).

Conclusion

Based on the analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that while parents are aware of the current national curriculum, they do not fully understand their roles or how to effectively contribute to its

successful implementation. Similarly, schools understand the curriculum implementation policy but have yet to translate it into practical and effective programs to enhance learning quality. Both parents and schools recognize the importance of involvement in curriculum implementation, but current participation is mostly limited to parent meetings, coordination, and joint committees. The integration of technology in the Merdeka Curriculum is understood by parents as a necessary step to facilitate educational activities. Parents express willingness to be involved but require practical and effective avenues for participation to make significant progress in their children's learning. However, many parents struggle to motivate and assist their children at home, highlighting the need for tools such as structured homework that can serve as a bridge to align home and school learning activities. Schools must consider parents' challenges and expectations when planning and implementing the curriculum. Establishing effective communication and designing structured programs can foster meaningful parental involvement. This study highlights that educational success requires not only involving parents in school activities but also ensuring a shared understanding of the curriculum. Schools should prioritize structured programs, active communication, and practical tools to bridge parental involvement and support curriculum success.

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