

## Systemic Evaluation of Vocational Education Reform: A CIPP Analysis of Curriculum Implementation in Aceh

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the localized implementation of national vocational education reform, specifically focusing on the pedagogical shift within Technical and Vocational Education and Training institutions in Aceh, Indonesia. While curriculum transformation aims to address global 21st-century challenges, a gap remains in systemic evaluation within regions marked by geographical diversity and institutional disparities. Utilizing the Context, Input, Process, and Product (CIPP) model, this research employs a descriptive qualitative approach through policy document analysis and a systematic review of implementation reports. Findings reveal that while reform is urgent to bridge competency gaps, significant barriers persist in the input dimension, including uneven teacher readiness, inadequate infrastructure, and budget misalignments. In the process stage, student-centered learning remains inconsistent and largely performative, resulting in varied student outcomes where character-building and modern skill acquisition goals are not yet fully realized. The study concludes that 'one-size-fits-all' approaches are ineffective for diverse regional contexts. Practical implications necessitate differentiated support policies, localized teacher training, and a shift in supervision from administrative compliance to pedagogical substance.

**Keywords:** Merdeka Curriculum, CIPP Evaluation Model, Curriculum Reform Implementation, Regional Education Policy, Aceh Province.

### INTRODUCTION

Vocational education in Indonesia, particularly at the vocational high school (SMK) level, plays a strategic role in preparing young people who not only have theoretical knowledge but also practical skills that are ready to be used in the workplace (Amrullah et al., 2025; Yoana et al., 2024). SMKs are

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expected to serve as a bridge between education and the job market. Within this framework, the government continues to implement various educational reforms, one of which is the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Yoto et al., 2024). The Merdeka Curriculum emerged from an awareness of the complex challenges of the 21st century. Rapid technological changes, economic globalization, and the increasingly dynamic demands of the industrial world require an adaptive and relevant education system (Matyushok et al., 2021). This curriculum emphasizes flexibility in learning, character building, and comprehensive competency development. Its primary goal is to create meaningful, participatory, and contextual learning experiences tailored to the needs of students and their surrounding environment. However, the transition to this new paradigm is not without challenges. The curriculum demands systemic readiness, from educational infrastructure, human resource quality, to the management of learning processes and evaluations.

Globally, vocational education systems are undergoing significant transformation in response to rapid technological change, labor market volatility, and the demands of Industry 4.0 (Li et al., 2023). International organizations such as UNESCO and OECD emphasize that modern Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) must integrate flexible curricula, competency-based assessment, and strong industry linkages to remain relevant in a globalized economy (Yusop et al., 2023). Countries such as Germany, Australia, and South Korea have demonstrated that successful TVET reform depends not only on curriculum redesign but also on systemic evaluation mechanisms that ensure alignment between policy objectives and classroom practices. Within this global discourse, curriculum reform without robust evaluation risks becoming symbolic rather than transformative (González-Pérez et al., 2022; Hassan et al., 2021).

In the global landscape, the transformation of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is increasingly shifting toward models that are highly responsive to industrial demands, such as the German "Dual Education System" or Australia's flexible competency frameworks (Bhandari, 2025; Serrano et al., 2025; Schröder, 2019). International trends indicate that developed nations have successfully integrated "green skills" and advanced digital literacy into their competency standards to navigate the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Martínez-Bravo et al., 2022). However, in many developing economies, the primary obstacles remain infrastructure disparities and the readiness of educators to adopt advanced pedagogical technologies. This comparison places the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in Indonesia at a critical juncture; it strives to reach global standards through learning flexibility while simultaneously contending with structural constraints similar to those faced by other developing nations (Suci et al., 2023).

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In Aceh, the urgency for a systemic evaluation becomes more evident when observing the significant "policy-practice gap" compared to the successful adoption of competency-based curricula in neighboring Southeast Asian countries. While international literature emphasizes that transformational leadership and school autonomy are the keys to successful reform, the reality in Aceh's vocational schools shows that rigid administrative supervision and budgetary misalignments often stifle such innovations. Consequently, comparing local dynamics in Aceh with global standards is not merely about closing a technical gap, but about understanding how adaptive national policies can be effectively translated in regions with unique geographical and socio-economic characteristics.

Aceh Province, as one of the regions with rich cultural heritage and high geographical diversity, faces unique challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at state vocational schools (Ramli et al., 2025; Akhyar et al., 2025). Disparities in educational access between urban and rural areas, limited educational facilities, and the diverse socioeconomic backgrounds of students are part of the dynamics influencing the implementation of this curriculum (Mulasi et al., 2024). In some areas, teaching practices remain highly conventional, while the Merdeka Curriculum demands creative, collaborative, and project-based learning.

The evaluation aspect is a global focal point in contemporary curriculum transformation, as scholars argue that assessment frameworks must evolve to mirror the complexities of the modern workforce (Li & Zhang, 2024; David, 2025). In the international discourse, this shift is characterized by a move away from "assessment of learning" toward "assessment for learning," where evaluation serves as a diagnostic and reinforcement instrument rather than a mere judgmental tool. The Merdeka Curriculum aligns with these global trends by requiring teachers to develop holistic assessment approaches encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions. Internationally, this is recognized as the integration of "soft skills" and "technical competencies" within Technical and Vocational Education and Training frameworks. Consequently, assessment is no longer limited to standardized final exams but includes formative assessments, observations, and real-world projects that reflect the authentic demands of the workplace.

In this globalized context, the role of educators has become increasingly complex, shifting from knowledge transmitters to learning facilitators (Rahimi & Oh, 2024). International scholars debate the challenges of this transition, noting that teachers must design relevant, fair, and meaningful instruments while ensuring individualized student support (Sato et al., 2023). However, the reality in regional contexts such as Aceh reveals a significant "policy-practice gap" often discussed in international educational reform literature. Most public vocational school teachers in Aceh face serious challenges in internalizing these mandated systems (Idani et al., 2025). Many vocational instructors lack adequate training in competency-based

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assessment, a common barrier identified in global TVET studies where traditional memorization-based models persist. This lack of preparedness prevents evaluations from fulfilling their function as transformative learning tools.

Furthermore, the international debate on "inclusive pedagogy" highlights that curriculum success depends on social equity (Arday et al., 2021). Vocational students in Aceh represent a diverse demographic, with many facing socio-economic pressures that require them to work part-time. This necessitates empowering learning approaches that avoid formalistic and inflexible evaluation, which international research suggests can cause psychological stress and widen learning gaps in developing economies (Ozer & Perc, 2020). Systemic success, therefore, requires what global literature defines as "transformational leadership" from school principals and regional agencies to create a conducive learning climate (De Jong et al., 2020). Without such systemic support and adequate digital infrastructure which remains a challenge in Aceh the shift toward technology-integrated, project-based learning remains difficult to achieve. In some schools, laboratories are still limited, internet access is restricted, and even vocational practice equipment is insufficient to support contextual learning. This disparity has the potential to cause imbalance in the implementation of project-based evaluation or work simulations (Dahalan et al., 2023).

Given these complexities, evaluating the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in state vocational schools in Aceh is of utmost importance (Haq, 2024). This study aims to identify the real challenges faced by teachers and students, understand systemic and structural constraints, and formulate contextual and sustainable adaptation strategies. By comprehensively evaluating the implementation of the curriculum, particularly in terms of learning evaluation, it is hoped that practical recommendations can be generated to improve vocational education practices in Aceh. The urgency of this research stems from the vital role of SMKs as pillars of skilled and ready-to-use human resource development. Amid the Aceh government's efforts to reduce unemployment rates and enhance the competitiveness of the local workforce, SMKs serve as a strategic instrument.

Evaluations that are not aligned with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum risk producing learning that is merely procedural and not oriented toward character development and 21st-century skills (Khuluqi et al., 2024). When teachers are unable to design grounded and contextual evaluations, students will not receive meaningful feedback to improve the quality of their learning. As a result, SMK graduates will struggle to compete in the job market and may fail to leverage local potential. The disparity between central policies and their implementation at the regional level is also a critical concern. The Merdeka Curriculum, as a national policy, requires support from local governments in terms of budgeting, teacher training, and monitoring and evaluation (Yanti et al., 2024). In Aceh, not all vocational

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schools have the managerial capacity and adequate budgetary support to fully implement this curriculum.

The urgency also arises from a pedagogical perspective, or what is known as a view or approach to education that focuses on the teaching and learning process and how knowledge and skills can be conveyed to students (Al-khresheh, 2024). Appropriate learning evaluation not only functions as a measuring tool, but also as a tool for reflection for students to understand their strengths and weaknesses (Owan et al., 2023). In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, evaluation serves as a means of character development and the formation of an active, collaborative, and autonomous learning culture (Manca & Delfino, 2021).

In terms of improving teacher professionalism, this research is an important foundation for developing educator capacity building policies. Vocational school teachers need ongoing support in the form of training, mentoring, and learning communities to be able to carry out evaluations effectively (Lenning et al., 2023). Without this capacity building, the hope of producing outstanding graduates will be difficult to achieve. The empirical reality through this research is expected to provide answers to important questions regarding how evaluation is implemented, the challenges faced by teachers and schools, and the most effective adaptation approaches or strategies to be applied in state vocational schools in Aceh. The results of this evaluation will contribute significantly to evidence-based policy development and more contextual and inclusive educational practices.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design based on secondary data analysis (Abdussamad, 2021). The research does not involve primary data collection such as interviews, surveys, or direct field observations. Instead, the analysis relies on systematically reviewed secondary sources to examine the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in state vocational schools in Aceh.

The data sources consist of: (1) national and regional education policy documents, including ministerial regulations and official guidelines; (2) reports and publications issued by the Ministry of Education and the Aceh Education Office; (3) school-level implementation documents made publicly available through institutional websites; and (4) credible online media, web-based reports, and other publicly accessible digital sources that discuss vocational education reform and curriculum implementation. These sources were selected based on their relevance, credibility, and consistency with the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2019).

Data analysis was conducted using the Context, Input, Process, and Product (CIPP) evaluation model as an analytical framework (Stufflebeam, 2000). In this study, the CIPP model functions as a thematic categorization and interpretation guideline, rather than as a primary data collection

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instrument. All secondary data were systematically classified into the four CIPP dimensions to enable structured and coherent analysis of policy intentions, resource readiness, implementation dynamics, and observed outcomes.

To enhance analytical rigor and conceptual validity, the CIPP-based analytical guideline and categorization matrix were reviewed through an expert judgement process involving senior academics with expertise in education policy and curriculum evaluation. This expert review was intended to ensure the clarity, relevance, and coherence of the analytical framework, not to validate empirical measurement instruments. The data analysis process followed qualitative procedures of data reduction, thematic organization, and narrative synthesis, while source triangulation was applied by cross-referencing policy documents, institutional reports, and media sources to strengthen the credibility of the findings.

CIPP evaluation instrument is designed as an analytical framework for systematically reviewing and categorizing secondary data related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in vocational education settings. The instrument functions as a thematic guide rather than a primary data collection tool (Stufflebeam, 2000).

Table 1:  
*CIPP Instrument*

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CONTEXT EVALUATION

*Focus: Policy relevance, needs, and environmental conditions*

Indicator	Description	Data Sources
Policy alignment	Alignment between national curriculum policy and vocational education objectives	National regulations, ministerial guidelines
Reform urgency	Rationale for curriculum reform in response to labor market and global demands	Policy briefs, international reports, media analysis
Regional characteristics	Socio-economic, geographical, and cultural context influencing implementation	Regional education reports, government websites
Institutional vision	School vision and mission supporting curriculum reform	School profiles, official school websites

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## INPUT EVALUATION

*Focus: Resource readiness and institutional capacity*

Indicator	Description	Data Sources
Teacher readiness	Availability and preparedness of teachers to implement the curriculum	Training reports, official school publications
School leadership	Leadership capacity in managing curriculum change	Institutional reports, education office publications
Infrastructure availability	Adequacy of facilities, laboratories, and digital infrastructure	School inventories, government reports
Financial support	Budget allocation supporting curriculum implementation	BOS reports, regional budget documents

## PROCESS EVALUATION

*Focus: Implementation practices and supervision mechanisms*

Indicator	Description	Data Sources
Learning implementation	Application of student-centered and project-based learning approaches	School reports, curriculum implementation documents
P5 project execution	Implementation of Pancasila Student Profile projects	School project reports, official announcements
Monitoring mechanisms	Internal supervision and evaluation practices	Supervision reports, institutional guidelines
Stakeholder collaboration	Collaboration among teachers, schools, and external partners	MoUs, school partnership reports

## PRODUCT EVALUATION

*Focus: Outcomes and observable impacts*

Indicator	Description	Data Sources
Student learning outcomes	Achievement of cognitive, vocational, and character competencies	Assessment summaries, school evaluation reports
Character development	Internalization of Pancasila values among students	P5 evaluation reports, school publications
Graduate employability	Readiness of graduates for the labor market	Tracer studies, employment statistics
Program	Continuity and scalability	Policy evaluations,

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Indicator	Description	Data Sources
sustainability	of curriculum implementation	institutional strategic plans

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## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The CIPP evaluation model comprises four main components: context, input, process, and product (Dizon, 2023). These four aspects are designed as an integrated whole. Although in practice evaluations may be conducted on only one or several dimensions, the main strength of this model lies in the comprehensive implementation of all four dimensions. According to Stufflebeam, the essence of evaluation is not merely to prove, but to encourage improvement (Huang, 2025). He states that “the CIPP approach is based on the view that the most important purpose of evaluation is not to prove, but to improve” (Stufflebeam, 2000).

The CIPP evaluation model developed by Stufflebeam and Shinkfield is a decision-oriented evaluation approach (Nguyen & Condry, 2023). The primary purpose of this model is to provide relevant information to assist policymakers or administrators in determining strategic directions and making decisions. According to Stufflebeam, evaluation results are intended not only to provide assessments but also to offer alternative solutions to various problems faced by decision-makers. The CIPP model structure includes four main components: context, input, process, and product evaluation. The explanation of each component is as follows:

### 1. Context Evaluation

This evaluation aims to understand the program's background by examining the objective conditions in the external and internal environments that underlie its implementation. This process includes identifying needs, problems, potentials, and the objectives to be achieved. At this stage, an analysis is conducted regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the object under evaluation. Specifically, context evaluation examines unmet needs, target populations, and program objectives in greater detail.

### 2. Input Evaluation

This stage involves gathering information to support the planning process and the formulation of program implementation strategies. Input evaluation plays a crucial role in identifying available resources, assessing potential alternative strategies, and defining the operational plans and working mechanisms required to achieve objectives. Key input components include human resources, supporting facilities and infrastructure, funding, and necessary administrative procedures.

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### 3. Process Evaluation

This evaluation focuses on directly assessing program implementation to determine whether it aligns with the established plan. The process provides critical information to facilitate decision-making during implementation and serves as documentation of program activities. The collected data tracks the progress of activities, identifies obstacles, and highlights areas for improvement to ensure that program objectives are achieved optimally.

### 4. Product Evaluation

This evaluation measures the extent to which the program's results or outputs have achieved the planned objectives. Based on the findings, evaluators can recommend whether the program should be continued, refined, expanded.

The general objective of program evaluation is to provide the necessary information to serve as a basis for decision-making. Specifically, the objectives include providing input for planning, supporting decisions on program continuation or termination, facilitating program modifications, identifying supporting and inhibiting factors, and improving motivation as well as the quality of program management and implementation. Additionally, evaluation helps deepen the understanding of a program's theoretical and scientific foundations. Although various evaluation models exist, they all share a common goal: to collect accurate and relevant data on the object under evaluation to provide valuable information that supports decisions regarding the program's continuation.

As part of ongoing national education reform, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) of the Republic of Indonesia issued Ministerial Regulation No. 12 of 2024. This regulation substantively establishes new provisions regarding the structure and implementation of the curriculum at the early childhood education, primary education, and secondary education levels. This regulation emphasizes the importance of a more flexible, contextual, and character-oriented curriculum system based on the values of Pancasila and the principle of lifelong learning.

In the context of this regulation, the curriculum is defined as a comprehensive and systematic set of plans regarding learning objectives, teaching materials, and the methods and approaches used to achieve the desired educational outcomes. The curriculum is not merely an administrative document, but a pedagogical framework that serves as the foundation for managing the formal education process. The so-called Merdeka Curriculum is a curriculum approach that offers greater autonomy to educational units in managing the learning process (Putri et al., 2025). The main focus of this curriculum is to strengthen essential material, simplify the learning load, and

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develop the Pancasila learner profile, which reflects national character, independence, and critical thinking skills.

The Merdeka Curriculum is built on two main pillars, namely the basic curriculum framework and the curriculum structure. The basic framework includes philosophical, pedagogical, and sociological dimensions that form the basis for the formulation of learning policies. The elements in this basic framework include:

1. Educational objectives that emphasize the development of well-rounded Indonesian citizens;
2. Curriculum principles that encourage flexibility, relevance, and independence;
3. Learning characteristics that emphasize student activity, understanding of teaching materials, and differential learning;
4. Philosophical, sociological, and psychopedagogical foundations that form the basis of theory and practice in learning design.

The curriculum structure is then derived from this basic framework into a concrete form in the form of organizing competencies, learning content, and learning load allocation. This includes the division of intracurricular, cocurricular, and extracurricular activities tailored to the context of each educational unit.

Student competencies are formulated in the form of Learning Outcomes (CP), which are statements of the learning outcomes expected to be achieved at each stage of education. LOs are developed progressively and continuously, from the foundational phase in early childhood education (PAUD) to phase F in secondary education. Each phase represents the holistic development of students in terms of attitude, knowledge, and skills. For example, in early childhood education, learning outcomes emphasize social-emotional, motor, and basic cognitive development. Meanwhile, at the vocational secondary education level (SMK), the CP is directed toward mastering specific skills relevant to the world of work and industry (Jaya et al., 2025). Thus, the CP structure enables education that is adaptive to the needs of the 21st century (Nurjanah et al., 2024).

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is a collective responsibility involving three levels of government: central, regional, and educational institutions (Amiruddin et al., 2023). This division of roles reflects a decentralized approach to education that is oriented toward local empowerment:

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1. The central government is responsible for providing teaching materials, main textbooks, and technical guidance in the form of training and advocacy;
2. Local governments are tasked with designing and implementing local content, facilitating the development of contextual curricula, and assisting educational units in curriculum implementation;
3. Educational units are authorized to develop school operational curricula (KOS) based on the framework and structure of the national curriculum. KOS must reflect the vision, mission, objectives, and characteristics of students and their social environment.

The development of the Operational Curriculum for Educational Units is an integral part of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Wahyuni et al., 2024). Each educational unit is required to prepare a curriculum document that includes at least the following:

1. Educational unit profile (vision, mission, objectives);
2. Learning organization strategy;
3. Lesson plans (RPP) and assessments;
4. Learning innovations based on local potential.

This development was carried out collaboratively with the involvement of school committees, community leaders, and other stakeholders, under the coordination of the local Education Office. The Merdeka Curriculum policy requires a paradigm shift from mechanistic teaching to transformative and participatory learning. Educators are no longer merely conveyors of material, but facilitators and learning partners. Therefore, improving teachers' capacity in adaptive pedagogy, digital literacy, and classroom management is a crucial aspect (Latief et al., 2025). However, the implementation of this curriculum also faces challenges, including:

1. Infrastructure disparities between regions;
2. Human resource readiness;
3. Limited access to quality teaching materials;
4. Lack of understanding of the essence of the Merdeka Curriculum at the technical implementation level.

Ministerial Regulation on Education, Culture, Research, and Technology No. 12 of 2024 represents a progressive step in the reformulation of national education policy, emphasizing flexibility, contextual relevance, and the humanization of learning. With the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, it is hoped that educational institutions will be able to become inclusive, adaptive, and relevant learning centers in line with societal dynamics. However, the success of this policy implementation heavily

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depends on collaboration among stakeholders, readiness of resources, and the strengthening of institutional capacity in education as a whole

### **Contextual Evaluation of the Independent Curriculum at State Vocational Schools in Aceh**

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in public vocational high schools (SMK) in Aceh cannot be separated from the dynamics of 21st-century educational needs, which demand transformation in the learning system, particularly in vocational education institutions. This is in line with the statement made by the Head of the Aceh Education Office, Marthunis, ST., D.E.A., who stated that:

*"We seek to understand the extent to which students have mastered literacy, numeracy, character, and 21st-century skills".<sup>1</sup>*

In general, the need for curriculum reform in public vocational schools in Aceh is driven by the gap between the competencies of graduates and the demands of the job market. The learning model that has been oriented toward memorization and mastery of theoretical material is no longer considered relevant to the needs of the industry, which demands soft skills, critical thinking skills, collaboration skills, and independent learning abilities (Latifah et al., 2025). However, on the other hand, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum faces various obstacles. The most prominent issue is the limited understanding of teachers regarding the basic principles of the new curriculum. Not all teachers have received adequate training, both in terms of duration and substance (Listrianti & Nuzulah, 2025). The lack of access to learning resources, weak internal school management in managing curriculum changes, and resistance to shifts in the learning paradigm are also major obstacles.

Despite these challenges, state vocational schools in Aceh have a number of potentials that can be leveraged to support the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Most SMKs have vocational programs based on local characteristics, such as integrated agriculture, marine, fisheries, and tourism, which align with the contextual approach in the Merdeka Curriculum. This opens opportunities to develop project-based learning rooted in local potential (local wisdom-based learning). Additionally, the presence of industry partners, both at the local and regional levels, provides opportunities to strengthen collaboration in the development of

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Teaching Factories, internships, and work-based assessments (Pianda et al., 2024; Pianda et al., 2025). Local governments have also begun to demonstrate commitment to supporting the revitalization of vocational education, although this remains sporadic and unsystematic.

Despite these potentials, structural weaknesses remain embedded in the education system at the school level. Most school principals lack the instructional leadership capacity needed to drive systemic curriculum changes. Coordination between curriculum teams, vocational teachers, and general education teachers remains weak, resulting in decision-making processes in instructional planning that are not fully aligned with students' needs. Disparities in quality between schools in the Aceh region also remain a serious issue. Vocational schools located in coastal or inland areas generally face obstacles in accessing training, the internet, and practical facilities, which are vastly different from vocational schools located in urban centers or near industrial areas (Dinas Pendidikan Aceh, 2024).

The main objective of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is to produce graduates who not only have technical skills but are also able to think critically, collaborate, and adapt to an ever-changing world of work. In the context of vocational schools, this orientation is particularly relevant as it aims to improve the quality of entry-level workers who are ready to enter the workforce. The target population of this program includes vocational high school students as direct beneficiaries, teachers as learning facilitators, school principals as curriculum managers, as well as supervisors and other education stakeholders. However, most of this population does not yet fully understand the new paradigm promoted by the Merdeka Curriculum, leading to confusion in planning and implementing learning (Kusumawati & Umam, 2025).

Context evaluation also aims to understand the background, needs, and conditions underlying the implementation of a program. In this case, the initiative of the Head of the Aceh Education Office to promote educational transformation through the Merdeka Curriculum and Kombel Belajar.id reflects a response to urgent needs in the world of education. The statement that the Merdeka Curriculum is no longer an option but a necessity indicates an awareness of the need for change in the education system to adapt to the challenges of the times. This reflects an identification of the problems and unmet needs in the current education system. This is in line with what was conveyed by the Head of the Aceh Province Education Quality Assurance Agency (BPMP), Dr. Muhammad Anis, S.Si., M.Si, who stated that:

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*"If we want to compete in the global era, we must adapt and move forward with a more flexible and innovative approach".<sup>2</sup>*

In addition, the push to utilize the Kombel Belajar.id platform as a digital learning tool demonstrates efforts to overcome access limitations and improve the quality of learning. This reflects an analysis of the potential that can be utilized in the local context to achieve better educational goals. Contextual evaluation indicates that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMK Negeri Aceh is in a complex situation: on the one hand, there is an urgent need for contextual and competency-based learning transformation; however, on the other hand, objective conditions show that the readiness of the system, resources, and school culture is still not optimal. Therefore, strategic steps such as continuous teacher capacity building, strengthening school governance, and regulatory support from local governments are key to bridging the gap between expectations and the reality of curriculum implementation.

### **Evaluation of Inputs to the Independent Curriculum at State Vocational Schools in Aceh**

Input evaluation is an important stage in the educational program evaluation process, as it focuses on assessing the readiness and suitability of various elements that support policy implementation (Mukhdlor & Syahri, 2024). In the context of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at state vocational schools in Aceh Province, input evaluation is used to comprehensively identify the completeness and quality of supporting components, ranging from human resources, educational infrastructure, funding, to administrative mechanisms used in the planning and operationalization of the program.

One of the main aspects of input evaluation is the readiness of human resources as the primary implementers of the curriculum (Suri et al., 2024). At state vocational schools in Aceh, teachers play a central role in transforming the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum into concrete learning practices in the classroom (Meliza et al., 2024). However, observations indicate that not all teachers have adequate readiness levels. Many teachers have not fully grasped the concepts of differentiated learning, formative assessment, and project-based learning, which are central to this curriculum. Additionally, the managerial capacity of school principals in leading the curriculum change process is not yet evenly distributed. Most school

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principals still rely on administrative approaches and have not implemented transformational leadership strategies that support curriculum innovation. Training and mentoring for teachers and school principals remain limited, both in terms of frequency and depth of content.

Another input aspect that significantly influences the success of curriculum implementation is the availability of facilities and infrastructure (Nabila & Nadlir, 2025). In the context of vocational schools, practical facilities, laboratories, workshops, and technological devices are crucial components. In some public SMKs in urban areas of Aceh, these facilities are relatively adequate, but in remote or border areas, many educational institutions face infrastructure limitations, including internet connectivity and multimedia devices supporting digital learning. This disparity in facilities impacts the inequity in the implementation of contextual and technology-based learning. However, the Merdeka Curriculum strongly emphasizes the integration of technology and active learning, which requires modern and adaptive supporting facilities.

The implementation of the new curriculum also heavily depends on the adequacy of the education budget. Input evaluation includes an examination of the allocation and distribution of education funds, whether sourced from the State Budget (APBN), Regional Budget (APBA), or School Operational Assistance (BOS). In many cases, the available funds have not been specifically allocated to support the learning innovations required in the Merdeka Curriculum. Most schools allocate funds for routine and operational needs, while the need for teacher training, the development of contextual teaching materials, and the provision of digital devices are not yet budget priorities. The lack of adequate financial support makes it difficult for schools to carry out the strategic activities required in this curriculum, such as implementing projects to strengthen the Pancasila student profile (P5) (Samsudi et al., 2024).

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is also greatly influenced by the existence of systematic work mechanisms and administrative procedures. Evaluations at this level show that many schools do not yet have planning documents that are in line with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. Teaching tools, such as teaching modules, lesson plans (RPP), and formative assessments, are still largely based on the previous curriculum approach. In addition, coordination procedures between the curriculum development team, teachers, and other educational personnel are not yet running optimally. Not all schools have active and structured curriculum coordination forums. As a result, program planning and

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implementation are carried out partially, without strong synergy between components within the educational unit (Samsudi et al., 2024).

Input evaluation focuses on gathering information that supports the planning process and the formulation of program implementation strategies. For example, the steps taken by SMKN 3 Aceh Barat Daya (Abdya) in preparing for the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in the field of digital integration, reflect efforts to ensure the readiness of available resources. This is in line with what was conveyed by the Principal of SMKN 3 Abdya, Wiwik Kurniati, ST, through the Deputy Head of the Curriculum Department, Risman Sahputra, S.Kom, who stated that:

*“The school continues to make improvements and developments, both in the learning process, teacher capabilities, school facilities, the creation of school TEFA products, and the addition of areas of expertise, among other things”.*

This school has conducted self-directed digital training for teachers as preparation for the 2023/2024 National Standardized School Final Exam (UASBN) in an independent and digitally integrated manner. This initiative demonstrates the school's commitment to enhancing the competencies of its teaching staff, a critical component in input evaluation. This aligns with the statement made by the Principal of SMKN 3 Andya, Wiwik Kurniati, ST, through the Deputy Head of the Curriculum Department, Risman Sahputra, S.Kom, who stated that:

*“Today, we participated in a self-directed digital training program for teachers organized by the school, as part of SMKN 3 Abdya's preparations to independently and digitally integrate the 2023/2024 UASBN”.*<sup>3</sup>

In addition, SMKN 3 Abdya has also made improvements and developments in the learning process, teacher capabilities, school facilities, the creation of Teaching Factory (TEFA) products, and the addition of areas of expertise. These efforts reflect attention to supporting facilities and infrastructure, as well as the administrative procedures required in curriculum implementation. By involving all school stakeholders and collaborating with relevant parties and the community, SMKN 3 Abdya demonstrates its commitment to ensuring that human resources, infrastructure, and administrative support are available and ready for use in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Based on the above analysis, the steps taken by SMKN 3 Abdya in preparing for the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in the area of digital integration, align with the input evaluation indicators. The

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school has demonstrated efforts to ensure the readiness of human resources, facilities and infrastructure, as well as the necessary administrative procedures. Input evaluation serves as a crucial foundation for designing and implementing relevant and effective educational programs.

Based on the evaluation results of the input components, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMK Negeri Aceh still faces serious challenges from the internal readiness aspect. Although there have been efforts by the central and local governments to provide support, the implementation has not been able to fully address the complexity of needs at the school level. This condition emphasizes the importance of adaptation strategies based on local realities, including increasing human resource capacity through school-based training, innovative program-based budgeting, and strengthening school management in building a collaborative and responsive work system to curriculum changes.

### **Process Evaluation of the Merdeka Curriculum at State Vocational Schools in Aceh**

Process evaluation is an important stage in analyzing how a policy or program is actually implemented in the field. This evaluation emphasizes the assessment of the extent to which the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in state vocational schools in Aceh has been carried out in accordance with the plans, operational standards, and guidelines set by the government. In other words, the main focus of process evaluation is to observe the dynamics of curriculum implementation directly, document ongoing activities, and identify actual obstacles and problems that arise during the process (Zaenab et al., 2024).

In its implementation, the Merdeka Curriculum requires a paradigm shift in learning from a teacher-centered approach to a student-centered approach. However, observations at various state vocational schools in Aceh indicate that this transformation is still ongoing and uneven. Although some teachers have attempted to apply project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, and differentiated instruction, the implementation has not been fully consistent and comprehensive (Sari et al., 2024).

One of the main components of the Merdeka Curriculum is the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5). In state vocational schools in Aceh, the implementation of this project is an important indicator

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in evaluating the curriculum process. However, based on field findings, P5 activities have not been fully implemented in accordance with the local characteristics of the school or the needs of the students. Some schools have difficulty determining themes, developing project modules, and integrating them with the vocational competencies possessed by vocational high school students. These issues are generally influenced by a lack of technical guidance, limited resources, and insufficient collaboration between normative teachers and productive teachers in designing cross-curricular projects (Setyawati et al., 2025).

The process evaluation also reviewed the internal monitoring and supervision mechanisms implemented by the schools. In this context, some SMKs have formed curriculum teams and internal working groups to monitor the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. However, the effectiveness of these mechanisms depends heavily on the managerial capacity of school principals and curriculum development teams at each educational institution. Unfortunately, it is still found that monitoring is carried out formally, is only administrative in nature, and does not touch on the substance of learning implementation. Implementation reports sometimes only describe surface activities without evaluating the depth of the teaching and learning process or its impact on student competency achievement (Suhendra, 2024).

Process evaluation focuses on assessing program implementation directly to determine whether it aligns with the established plan. For example, the socialization activity for the Merdeka Curriculum assessment conducted by SMK SMTI Banda Aceh is an integral part of the curriculum implementation process (Gea, 2023). This socialization activity, which was opened by the principal and attended by all teachers and Professional Field Practice (PLP) staff, demonstrates a systematic effort to convey information related to assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum. This step reflects the school's seriousness in ensuring that all stakeholders understand the changes and adjustments needed in the assessment process. This is in line with what was conveyed by the Principal of SMK SMTI Banda Aceh, Mr. Junaidi, who said that:

*“After this socialization, the Merdeka Curriculum Assessment can be implemented appropriately during the assessment of students later on”.*<sup>4</sup>

The implementation of this socialization also reflects the existence of internal mechanisms that support curriculum implementation, such as coordination between teachers and school administrators. Thus, this activity can be

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categorized as part of process evaluation, as it assesses the progress of activities, identifies obstacles, and aspects that need to be improved so that program objectives can be achieved optimally.

During the implementation process, a number of obstacles were identified as factors hindering the smooth running of the program. Technical obstacles include limitations in teaching tools, the unavailability of modules based on the new curriculum, and infrastructure constraints, such as limited internet access in remote areas of Aceh. Cultural obstacles are also significant, as some teachers and parents have not fully understood the values of change promoted by the Merdeka Curriculum, leading to resistance or passive attitudes toward learning innovations. The lack of forums for reflection and discussion among teachers about implementation experiences also hinders the creation of a professional learning culture within the school environment (Boudouaia et al., 2024).

The evaluation results indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMK Negeri Aceh still faces challenges in both technical application and strengthening the culture of educational quality. While there has been progress in conceptual understanding of the curriculum in some schools, implementation on the ground remains suboptimal and requires ongoing intervention. These findings underscore the importance of strengthening a learning-based supervision system, providing periodic contextual training, and creating a collaborative learning environment. Information from the process evaluation also serves as a foundation for policymakers to adjust implementation strategies in a more adaptive and sustainable manner, in line with the real needs and socio-cultural conditions of schools in Aceh.

### **Product Evaluation in the Merdeka Curriculum at State Vocational Schools in Aceh**

Product evaluation is the final stage in the program evaluation cycle, focusing on assessing the results, achievements, and impact of program implementation on previously designed objectives. In the context of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at SMK Negeri Aceh, product evaluation is used to measure the extent to which curriculum objectives have been achieved through student learning outcomes, improvements in learning quality, and systemic impacts on school culture and management. This evaluation is important in providing an empirical basis for strategic decision-making, whether to continue, refine, expand, or even discontinue certain

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aspects of the program.

One of the main indicators in product evaluation is student learning outcomes, which reflect the effectiveness of the curriculum approach in enhancing students' competencies (Winata et al., 2025). The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes the development of holistic competencies, including literacy, numeracy, vocational skills, and the values of the Pancasila Student Profile (Sari & Solihah, 2024). However, in many public vocational schools in Aceh, evaluations of these achievements show significant variation between schools. Some vocational schools in urban areas have shown improvements in formative test results and student project performance, while vocational schools in underdeveloped areas are still stagnating in academic achievement. This is partly due to disparities in teacher training, learning support facilities, and the quality of internal supervision (Suhendra, 2024).

The Merdeka Curriculum not only targets cognitive competencies but also builds students' character and personality through the implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5). Product evaluation of this aspect shows that some schools have successfully implemented thematic projects that reflect values such as mutual cooperation, independence, and diversity. However, not all schools have been able to consistently integrate these values into regular learning processes. In some educational institutions, the P5 project remains ceremonial and has not had a strong impact on transforming students' character. This highlights the need for improvements in the design and implementation of P5 to make it more meaningful and contextual (Siswanto et al., 2025).

The product evaluation also considers the efficiency of curriculum implementation in utilizing available resources (Mukhdlor et al., 2024). Based on the product evaluation data, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMK Negeri Aceh is still in a transitional phase with mixed results. Some schools show positive trends in developing the quality of learning and character building of students, while others are still constrained by technical and structural aspects. These findings form the basis for policy recommendations. For schools that have shown significant achievements, this program is worthy of being expanded and used as a model of good practice. Meanwhile, for schools that still face obstacles, it is necessary to refine implementation strategies, increase human resource capacity, and provide systemic support from local and central governments. This evaluation also indicates that it is not yet time to discontinue the program, but rather it should continue to be developed with consideration

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for the local context and specific needs of each educational unit (Suhendra, 2024).

The product evaluation of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMK Negeri Aceh emphasizes the importance of an adaptive and sustainable approach in the curriculum reform process. The success of the program is highly dependent on the alignment between curriculum design, implementers' capabilities, and the availability of resources. Therefore, evaluation at this stage serves as a crucial tool for assessing policy effectiveness and as a basis for strategic decision-making to ensure the sustainability of meaningful and equitable educational innovation.

## CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in state vocational schools in Aceh shows complex dynamics, with various challenges arising from contextual, input, process, and product aspects. Contextually, this curriculum reform is an urgent need in response to the gap between educational output and the demands of the world of work. However, in terms of input, limitations in human resources, infrastructure, and budget remain significant obstacles. The implementation process of the curriculum in most schools has not been optimal, marked by uneven teacher understanding of the new teaching approach and weak internal supervision and collaboration. From the product aspect, learning outcomes and student competency achievements remain varied, reflecting significant disparities between schools. This study provides a unique contribution by extending the application of the CIPP model to contextualize it for decentralized curriculum implementation in Aceh's vocational education. It moves beyond simple program evaluation to diagnostically map the systemic barriers such as resource gaps at the 'Input' stage and supervisory weaknesses in the 'Process' stage that hinder the achievement of curriculum goals in a region with high geographical challenges and readiness gaps.

## CREDIT AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

**Zubaidah Zubaidah:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Instrument development, Data collection, Writing the original draft. **Suraiya:** Data analysis, Validation, Writing the original draft. **Abdul Manan:** Literature review, Data analysis, reviewing and editing. **M Nur Akhyar:** Literature review, Data interpretation, revising and editing.

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