



Implementation Challenges of *Merdeka* Curriculum in Primary Schools

^{1*}Dukha Yunitasari, ²I Wayan Suastra, ²I Wayan Lasmawan

¹Study Program of Primary School Teacher Education, Faculty of Education, Universitas Hamzanwadi. Jl. TGKH M. Zainuddin Abdul Madjid No. 132, Selong 63611, Indonesia

²Study Program of Primary Education, Graduate Program, Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha. Jl. Udayana No. 11, Singaraja, Bali 81116, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author e-mail: dukha.yunitasari@gmail.com

Received: June 2023; Revised: July 2023; Published: October 2023

Abstract

The aim of this study is to explain the implementation challenges of *merdeka* curriculum in primary school. This study used a systematic literature review with PRISMA method. Three steps were conducted: identification, screening, and included. The Google Scholar database was used to find the literature, using Publish or Perish 8.8.4275.8412 version. The 47 articles were identified to discuss the understanding of *merdeka* curriculum, to know the *merdeka* curriculum challenges, and to overcome the challenges. The implementation of the *merdeka* curriculum in Indonesian primary schools presents a number of obstacles, including teacher comprehension of the curriculum, habituation, quality of education, implementation of specific subjects, and teacher preparedness. To ensure a correct understanding of the curriculum and the formation of appropriate habits in teachers, institutions, and students, policymakers should establish effective communication with teachers. Teacher preparation programs that emphasize differentiated learning can prepare educators to implement the *merdeka* curriculum. Integrating values-based learning programs and employing a well-structured educational management flow can also enhance the character education component and optimize the curriculum implementation. In addition, workshops and readiness-raising initiatives can improve teachers' mental and intellectual preparedness for the new curriculum's changes and challenges. By addressing these obstacles, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian primary schools can be made more effective, thereby augmenting the quality of education offered to Indonesian students.

Keywords: implementation challenges; merdeka curriculum; primary school

How to Cite: Yunitasari, D., Suastra, I., & Lasmawan, I. (2023). Implementation challenges of merdeka curriculum in primary schools. *Prisma Sains : Jurnal Pengkajian Ilmu dan Pembelajaran Matematika dan IPA IKIP Mataram*, 11(4), 952-959. doi:<https://doi.org/10.33394/j-ps.v11i4.8079>



<https://doi.org/10.33394/j-ps.v11i4.8079>

Copyright© 2023, Yunitasari et al.

This is an open-access article under the [CC-BY](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) License.



INTRODUCTION

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools has presented educators with numerous challenges. The Merdeka Curriculum is an alternative curriculum that seeks to provide greater learning freedom and flexibility. In several subject areas, including biology, art education, senior high school, inclusive institutions, informatics, and Arabic language, its implementation has encountered obstacles. These obstacles include difficulties in determining relevant learning models, time management, and teacher preparedness, as well as inadequate teaching materials, segregation of students with disabilities, and inadequate teacher competence. Despite these obstacles, a number of studies have demonstrated the viability of implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum via teacher preparation, online and offline seminars, and the incorporation of living values education programs.

Usman et al. (2023) found that biology teachers had difficulty determining pertinent learning models and managing their time during the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. However, they did not encounter any obstacles regarding instructional materials and evaluation. Yatim et al. (2023) found in a separate study that the implementation of the

Merdeka Curriculum in art education presented its own unique difficulties. Kamila and Agus (2023) discovered that the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in senior high schools was successful due to teacher preparation, online and offline seminars, and the incorporation of living values education programs.

In implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum in informatics, Nabilah et al. (2023) discovered that material continuity was a concern. Yudi et al. (2021) described the implementation and effectiveness of the *Kampus Merdeka* program at their respective institutions of higher education, as well as the problems that arise from its implementation. Shadri et al. (2023) discovered that instructors implemented assessment in the *Merdeka* Curriculum after the learning process was completed. Nurzen (2022) emphasized that achieving the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum required the participation of all parties, including school principals, teachers, school administrators, students, parents, communities, and governments.

Ayundasari (2022) discussed the implementation of a multidimensional approach in the *Kurikulum Merdeka's* history curriculum. Rahman et al. (2023) discovered that the implementation of the *Merdeka* Learning curriculum for Arabic subjects followed an educational management flow consisting of planning, organizing, implementing, and supervising. Sobakh et al. (2022) conducted a pilot project for implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum at the high school level in Probolinggo City, with the goal of fostering an entrepreneurial mentality by enhancing the profile of *Pancasila* students.

Several previous researchers conducted a specific topic for studying the *merdeka* curriculum (see Usman et al., 2023; Yatim et al., 2023; Nabilah et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 2023). They studied in particular subject like biology, art, informatics, and Arabic language. In addition, the other researchers studied implementing *merdeka* curriculum in high school (see Sobakh et al., 2022). Therefore, this study focuses on discussing how the researchers implement the *merdeka* curriculum and its challenges at primary school level.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the implementation challenges of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in primary schools and offer suggestions for overcoming them. This article seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in primary schools by analyzing the obstacles encountered in various subject areas and the implementation of success stories. This study's findings can be used to inform policy and practice in the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum and to enhance the quality of primary school education.

Furthermore, four research questions were discussed. First, how the research trend of *merdeka* curriculum in primary schools? Second, how the academics and practitioners understanding the *merdeka* curriculum? Third, how are the challenges in implementing *merdeka* curriculum? Lastly, how overcoming implementation challenges of *merdeka* curriculum?

METHOD

This research procedure is a systematic literature review (SLR). According to Polanin et al., (2017), SLR is a part of the process for searching, selecting, filtering, and extracting data that fulfills the eligibility requirements of the study you wish to review. The SLR follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) guidelines. PRISMA's procedures consists of four main components: 1) search strategy/identification, 2) study selection/screening, 3) data extraction and analysis/eligibility, and 4) reporting and presentation of findings/include studies (see Figure 1). For the evaluation of the article, an observation sheet or protocol is utilized. The instrument contains information regarding the year of publication, research location, and challenging types.

Search Strategy

Developing an exhaustive search strategy is the initial phase in implementing the PRISMA methods. This entails identifying pertinent databases, such as educational journals,

academic repositories, and online databases, and using appropriate search terms pertaining to the Merdeka Curriculum and primary schools. The objective is to collect a variety of studies that address the curriculum's implementation challenges. The search strategy should be thoroughly documented, including the databases queried, the keywords used, and any inclusion or exclusion criteria applied.

Utilize the Google Scholar databases to conduct a search of scholarly literature by Publish or Perish software, 8.8.4275.8412 version. Articles published between 2020 - 2023. The Google Scholar database includes a number of search features, such as year range, keyword restrictions, keyword reduction, and other search filters, so that inclusion criteria can be modified for advanced keyword search, as described in the following section.

Study Selection

The PRISMA guidelines emphasize a methodical approach to selecting studies. After conducting the initial search, researchers evaluate the identified studies according to predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Relevance to the implementation challenges of the Merdeka Curriculum, the primary school context, and the availability of empirical data may be among these criteria.

Inclusion criteria, i.e., the criteria for evaluating articles to be reviewed, are required in order to obtain primary articles that align with the objectives of this study. The referred-to criteria are detailed in the following points: (1) This is a qualitative investigation into *merdeka* curriculum; (2) Publication in 2020-2023 via Publish or Perish by Harzing; (3) Google scholar indexes the text; (4) Research conducted at the primary schools in Indonesia; (5) Relating to the implementation challenges of *merdeka* curriculum; (7) The technique employed is qualitative.

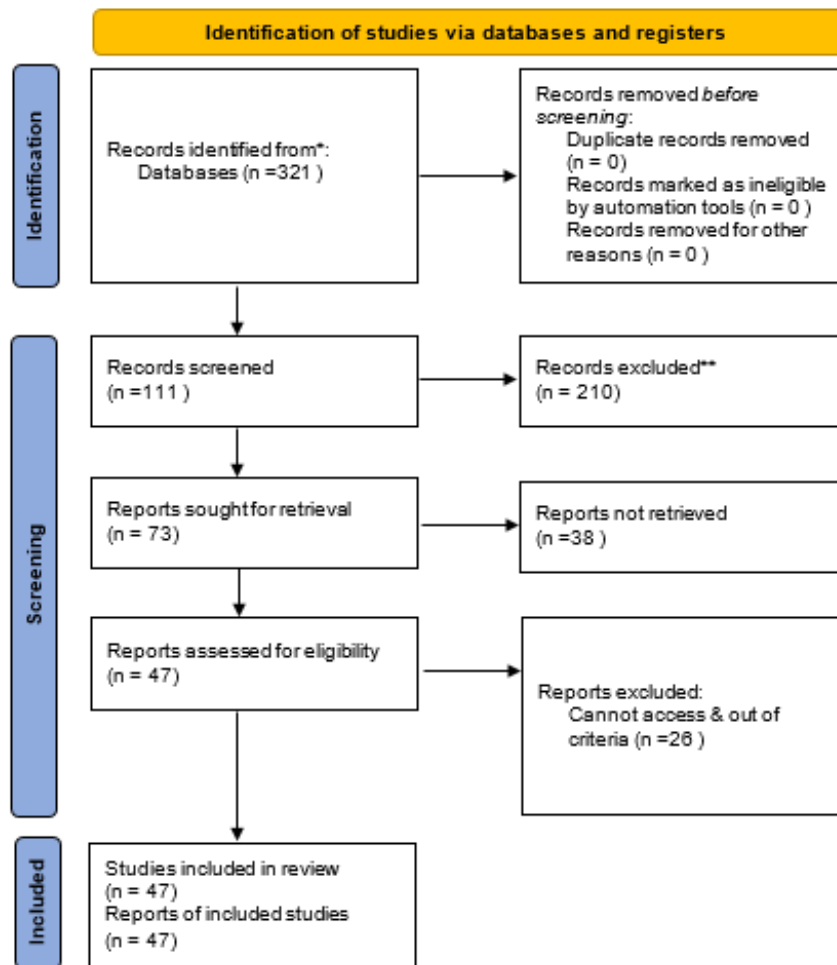


Figure 1. The PRISMA flow of this study

Data Extraction and Analysis

After identifying the relevant studies, researchers extract pertinent data from each selected study using a standardized data extraction form. This section includes information such as study characteristics, research design, sample size, data collection methods, and significant findings related to Merdeka Curriculum implementation challenges. At least two evaluators should independently extract data to ensure its accuracy and reliability. The extracted data are then synthesized qualitatively or quantitatively, depending on the character of the included studies.

Reporting and Presentation of Findings

Reporting and presenting the findings of the systematic review is the final phase in implementing the PRISMA methods. Researchers should provide a comprehensive summary of the included studies, methodology, significant findings, and limitations. The use of tables, figures, and narrative descriptions can facilitate a clear and accessible presentation of the results. The PRISMA flowchart should be used to depict the study selection procedure, with the number of studies screened, included, and excluded at each stage indicated. By adhering to the PRISMA guidelines, researchers ensure transparency and enable readers to evaluate the systematic review's quality and validity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Studies Based on Years of Publications

This study focuses on analyzing the implementation challenges of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in primary schools and offers suggestions for overcoming them. In identification step, 321 articles identified from Google Scholar database using Perish or Perish application. After screening and eligibility step, 47 review-worthy articles were obtained. These 47-article included in this study. Figure 2 shows the publication frequency from 2020 to 2023.

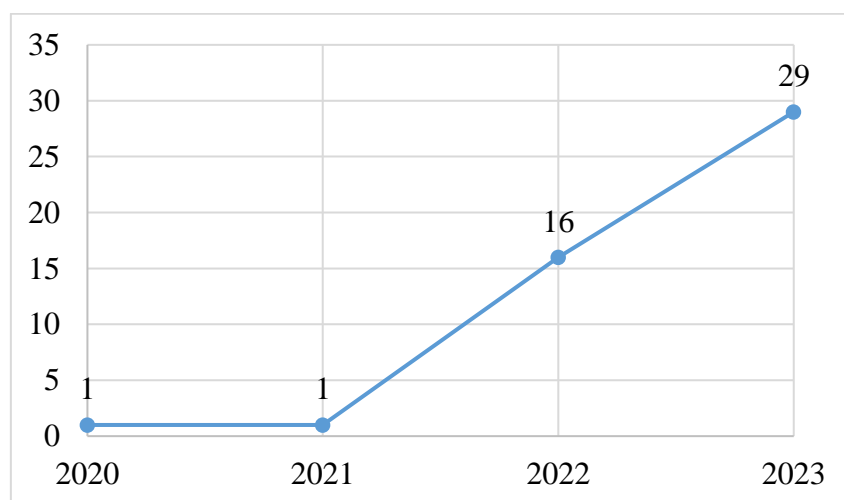


Figure 2. Studies Based on Years of Publications

Based on Figure 1, there are several studies in implementing of *merdeka* curriculum in primary schools from year to year, indicating that educational researchers have given this topic a place of prominence; studies on this topic are still a trend among researchers, despite the fact that only one study in both 2020 and 2021. Starting from the beginning of January 2023 to May 26, 2023, there are 29 articles that were published. It is increasing slightly compared to the previous year.

Understanding the Merdeka Curriculum

The Merdeka Curriculum, an educational curriculum implemented in Indonesia, has attracted considerable attention from academics and practitioners. This paper examines the existing literature on the implementation process and difficulties of the Merdeka Curriculum in primary schools.

The study by Yuhastina et al. (2020) revealed that instructors were unaware that they had been employing a pedagogical paradigm for adolescents in high school. When they shifted to the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, they were also unaware that they should be employing the andragogy paradigm. Therefore, they improvised as much as possible in order to implement the Merdeka Belajar curriculum. Yatim et al. (2023) noted that excellent habituation from teachers, schools, and students is required in order to comprehend and interpret the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in a student-centered learning process. Additionally, Yatim et al. (2023) emphasized the need for readiness and awareness. In order to support the character development of students, it is necessary to raise teachers' cognizance of the significance of comprehending and implementing the Merdeka Curriculum with differentiated learning, according to this study.

Magdalena et al. (2023) emphasized a broad aspect of the Merdeka Curriculum, which consists of objectives, content, delivery system, media, and evaluation. The Merdeka Curriculum encompasses five subject areas in primary school: Islamic Religious Education and Personality Education; Pancasila Education, Indonesian Language, Mathematics, and Natural and Social Sciences (IPAS). Adaptation of the Merdeka Learning curriculum for Arabic subjects resulted in an educational management process comprising planning, organizing, implementing, and monitoring (Rahman et al., 2023). However, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has encountered difficulties with regard to the integrity of education.

Using the theory of language development and the function of English as a lingua franca in the twenty-first century, Damayanti [20] emphasized the critical government policy of making the English language an elective in elementary schools. Nabilah et al. (2023) analyzed the application of Informatics subjects in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, revealing that Informatics subjects have been mandated at the junior high school level.

Sari et al. (2023) illuminates the new paradigm of the Merdeka Curriculum, which introduces modifications to the standard educational procedure for elementary education, with Pancasila education being mandatory. Nurzen (2022) conducted a research to determine teachers' mental and knowledge readiness regarding the independent curriculum. According to the research, teacher readiness is a prerequisite for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, which necessitates readiness from multiple parties.

The final study, conducted by Usman et al (2023), sought to identify the obstacles biology teachers encountered during the Merdeka Curriculum learning process. The study discovered that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum presented teachers and students with internal and external obstacles.

The challenges in implementing the merdeka curriculum

Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in primary classrooms has presented a number of obstacles. One of the most significant obstacles is instructors' lack of curriculum comprehension (Yuhastina et al., 2020). Due to a lack of structural explanations regarding the differences between the old and Merdeka Curriculum, it may be difficult for instructors to transition to the new curriculum. Another difficulty associated with implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is the lack of familiarity among instructors, schools, and students (Yatim et al., 2023). Understanding and interpreting the curriculum's implementation in a student-centered learning process requires teachers to be knowledgeable and prepared.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum still faces a significant obstacle regarding the quality of education (Rahman et al., 2023). Moreover, curriculum implementation for specific subjects, such as Japanese language or biology, presents its own challenges (Oeinada et al., 2023; Usman et al., 2023). Merdeka Curriculum introduces new educational standards in elementary schools, and Pancasila education has become mandatory, presenting instructors with additional challenges (Sari et al., 2023). The ability of instructors and students to optimally implement online learning in the Merdeka Belajar curriculum will have an impact on student development, posing a challenge for the changing role of school counselors (Anggita et al., 2023).

To surmount the aforementioned obstacles, it is necessary to enhance teachers' skills, comprehension of the Merdeka Curriculum, and communication with policymakers. Through group work and discussion, habituation and competence in implementing the curriculum can be developed (Ningrum & Muthali'in, 2023). In conclusion, the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in primary schools necessitates a concerted effort on the part of multiple stakeholders to overcome the aforementioned obstacles.

Overcoming implementation challenges of *merdeka* curriculum

Several measures can be implemented to overcome the challenges of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in primary schools. First, there must be appropriate communication between policymakers and teachers to ensure that the curriculum is correctly understood (Yuhastina et al., 2020). This can be accomplished through teacher training programs that provide teachers with a platform for gaining a deeper comprehension of the Merdeka Curriculum and adapting their teaching methods to fit the curriculum (Nurzen, 2022).

Second, teachers, schools, and students must develop good habits in order to successfully adjust to the new curriculum (Yatim et al., 2023). Incorporating values-based learning programs like the Living Values Education Program can also strengthen the character education component of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Thirdly, a well-structured educational management flow that is planned, organized, implemented, and monitored can optimize the curriculum implementation (Rahman et al., 2023). This can be accomplished through a comprehensive teacher training program that prepares instructors to implement the Merdeka Curriculum successfully.

Finally, the mental and knowledge readiness of the teachers is crucial to ensure that they are confident and enthusiastic about implementing the curriculum (Nurzen, 2022). This can be accomplished through workshops that prepare teachers mentally and physically for the challenges and adjustments involved in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

In conclusion, the challenges of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in primary schools can be overcome through a variety of measures, including appropriate communication, teacher training, good habituation, a well-structured educational management flow, and efforts to raise students' levels of preparedness. The implementation of these measures would guarantee the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and enhance the quality of education provided to students.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian elementary schools presents numerous obstacles that must be addressed. These obstacles include teachers' lack of curriculum understanding, the need for sound habits, and the quality of education. The implementation of the curriculum for specific subjects, such as Arabic and art education, as well as the mental and knowledge readiness of instructors, present additional obstacles. These obstacles can be overcome, however, through teacher training programs that provide a platform for teachers to acquire a better understanding of the curriculum, communication between policymakers and teachers, and readiness-raising initiatives such as workshops. In addition, well-structured educational management flows and the incorporation of values-based learning

programs such as the Living Values Education Program can enhance the curriculum's implementation. To guarantee the effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and improve the quality of education provided to Indonesian students, it is necessary to address these obstacles.

RECOMMENDATION

We suggested these results to all stakeholders involved in education. To ensure that the curriculum is correctly understood, policymakers, principals, and teachers must communicate effectively. Additionally, instructors, schools, and students must cultivate positive behaviors. Finally, a well-structured educational management flow and efforts to increase student readiness.

REFERENCES

- Anggita, I., Nabilla, A. A., Robiulkhoir, I., Kaserero, S., & Rahman, D. A. (2023). The role and professionalism of school counselors in merdeka belajar curriculum. *Proceedings of the International Conference on Educational Management and Technology (ICEMT 2022)*, 141-146. https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-95-4_17
- Ayundasari, L. (2022). Implementasi Pendekatan Multidimensional Dalam Pembelajaran Sejarah Kurikulum Merdeka. *Sejarah dan Budaya: Jurnal Sejarah, Budaya, dan Pengajarannya*, 16(1), 225-234. <https://doi.org/10.17977/um020v16i12022p225-234>
- Kamila, S. N., & Agus RM, A. H. (2023). Implementation of merdeka curriculum in improving the quality of senior high school. *Jurnal Educatio*, 9(1), 394-401. <https://doi.org/10.31949/educatio.v9i1.4591>
- Magdalena, I., Sharmadi, B. S., & Rosadah. (2023). Analisis proses penalaran capaian pembelajaran untuk diturunkan menjadi tujuan pembelajaran di SDN Poris Plawad 5 Kota Tangerang. *Yasin: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Sosial Budaya*, 3(2), 156-171. <https://doi.org/10.58578/yasin.v3i2.937>
- Nabilah, B., Zakir, S., Murtiyastuti, E., & Mubaraq, R. I. (2023). Analisis penerapan mata pelajaran informatika dalam implementasi kurikulum merdeka tingkat SMP. *PIJAR: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pengajaran*, 1(1), 110-119. <https://doi.org/10.58540/pijar.v1i1.97>
- Ningrum, P. S., & Muthali'in, A. (2023). Development of civic responsibility competence in the implementation of the merdeka curriculum. *Edunesia: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan*, 4(2), 896-908. <https://doi.org/10.51276/edu.v4i2.457>
- Nurzen, M. (2022). Teacher readiness in implementing the merdeka curriculum in Kerinci Regency. *Edunesia: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan*, 3(3), 313-325. <https://doi.org/10.51276/edu.v3i3.424>
- Oeinada, I. G., Sari, I. A. L., Putra, A. A. B. B., & Kusuma, I. K. R. (2023). Permasalahan yang dihadapi oleh pendidikan Bahasa Jepang pada SMA/SMK di Bali. *Humanis: Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 27(1), 90-97. <https://ojs.unud.ac.id/index.php/sastra/article/view/94465>
- Rahman, R. A., Huda, M., Astina, C., & Faida, F. (2023). Adaptasi kurikulum merdeka belajar mata pelajaran Bahasa Arab di SMP Takhassus Al-qur'an Wonosobo. *Lisanan Arabiya: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab*, 6(2), 265-284. <https://doi.org/10.32699/liar.v6i2.3707>
- Sari, F. F. K., Sukarno, & Murwaningsih, T. (2023). The new paradigm of merdeka curriculum: Implementation of Pancasila education subject in elementary school. *International Journal of Elementary Education*, 7(1), 79-88. <https://doi.org/10.23887/ijee.v7i1.54092>
- Shadri, R., Hermita, N., Deswarni, D., Purnamasari, S. A., Lingga, L. J., & Wijoyo, H. (2023). Assessment in the merdeka curriculum: How are the teachers' perspectives on it? *Jurnal Pajar (Pendidikan dan Pengajaran)*, 7(1), 202-209. <https://doi.org/10.33578/pjr.v7i1.9127>
- Sobakh, N., Sangadji, E. M., & Salikha, P. A. A. (2022). Fostering an entrepreneurial spirit through a project to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students. *Proceedings of*

- International Conference on Language, Education, and Social Science (ICLESS 2022)*, 272-279. https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-15-2_29
- Usman, U., Lestari, L. D., Astuti, S. H., Izanah, N., Wardani, R. A., Rahmah, A., & Purbasari, N. (2023). Analisis hambatan pembelajaran biologi pada pelaksanaan kurikulum merdeka. *Jurnal Riset Pendidikan dan Pengajaran*, 2(1), 220-231. <https://doi.org/10.55047/jrpp.v2i1.368>
- Yatim, H., Jamilah, J., Sahnir, N., & Abdullah, A. (2023). Analysis of habituation in implementing the merdeka belajar curriculum in art education in schools. *Jurnal Administrare: Jurnal Pemikiran Ilmiah dan Pendidikan Administrasi Perkantoran*, 10(1), 111-126. <https://doi.org/10.26858/ja.v10i1.45310>
- Yudi, A., Barus, F. L., & Lubis, M. J. (2021). The implementation of kampus merdeka program and the survey of students' perception on online learning at the Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia Universitas Negeri Medan. *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Innovation in Education, Science and Culture (ICIESC 2021)*, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.31-8-2021.2313733>
- Yuhastina, Y., Parahita, B., Astutik, D., Ghufronudin, G., Purwanto, D. (2020). Sociology teachers' opportunities and challenges in facing "Merdeka Belajar" curriculum in the fourth industrial revolution (Industry 4.0). *Society*, 8(2), 732-753. <https://doi.org/10.33019/society.v8i2.234>