

# The Impact of the Implementation of the Independent Learning Policy on the Governance Performance of SMP Negeri

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## ABSTRACT

Education has a strategic position in national development because it is the main instrument in shaping the quality of human resources. This study examines the effect of Merdeka Belajar policy implementation on school governance performance at SMP Negeri 1 Karangtengah, Cianjur Regency. The study was motivated by the importance of school capacity in translating educational policy into effective institutional governance. This research used a quantitative approach with an explanatory design. The population consisted of all educators and education personnel at SMP Negeri 1 Karangtengah, totaling 55 respondents, and the sampling technique used was total sampling. Data were collected through questionnaires using a five-point Likert scale. The data were analyzed using descriptive analysis, simple linear regression, correlation coefficient, determination coefficient, and t-test. The results showed that both Merdeka Belajar policy implementation and school governance performance were in the moderate category. The regression analysis showed that Merdeka Belajar policy implementation had a positive and significant effect on school governance performance, with a regression coefficient of 0.725, a correlation coefficient of 0.872, and a coefficient of determination of 0.760. These findings indicate that 76.0% of school governance performance is explained by Merdeka Belajar policy implementation.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education holds a strategic position in national development because it is the primary instrument in shaping the quality of human resources. Education is not only understood as a classroom learning process, but also as part of public policy involving planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and accountability by various government actors (Melda, 2019). The success of education delivery

depends heavily on the government's ability to formulate adaptive policies and the ability of educational units to translate these policies into effective practices (Asih, 2026).

Developments in the strategic environment, technological advances, and changing societal needs encourage the government to continuously implement educational reforms. Educational reform is necessary so that the education system can produce students who not only excel academically but also possess character, creativity, independence, and critical thinking skills (Andika et al., 2021). From a modern government perspective, educational reform is part of the state's efforts to provide responsive, innovative, and citizen-oriented public services.

One form of educational reform in Indonesia is the Freedom to Learn policy. The Merdeka Belajar policy was designed to provide educational units with greater flexibility to develop learning processes tailored to student characteristics, school potential, and the local environment. The Merdeka Belajar policy emphasizes curriculum flexibility, material simplification, strengthening project-based learning, and school independence in developing learning strategies (Aulia, 2025). Therefore, the Merdeka Belajar policy is not only related to curriculum changes but also to changes in school governance.

Policy implementation is a crucial stage in determining the success of Merdeka Belajar. Policy success does not stop at the formulation of regulations but is largely determined by the ability of the implementing organization to implement the policy consistently, coordinated, and measurably (Elih, 2020). Schools, as policy implementing organizations, are required to be able to manage communication, resources, implementer dispositions, and bureaucratic structures to ensure the effective implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy. In this regard, schools function not only as educational units but also as public organizations responsible for realizing good governance (Hendrik, 2025).

School governance is crucial because the "Merdeka Belajar" (Freedom to Learn) policy grants educational units greater autonomy. This autonomy requires schools to have the ability to formulate plans, manage human resources, utilize infrastructure, develop internal coordination, conduct supervision, and evaluate program implementation on an ongoing basis. School governance can be understood as a reflection of an organization's ability to translate public policy into administrative performance and educational service performance (Kurniasih et al., 2025). The better the policy is implemented, the greater the opportunity for improving school governance performance.

At the implementation level, the "Merdeka Belajar" policy still faces various challenges. Not all schools have the same level of readiness to implement differentiated learning, the Pancasila student profile strengthening project, or the new curriculum-based evaluation system. Variations in principal capacity, organizational culture, internal coordination quality, and resource adequacy lead to differences in the quality of policy implementation across educational units. This situation indicates a gap between policy objectives and the reality of implementation at the school level.

SMP Negeri 1 Karangtengah, Cianjur Regency, is a relevant educational institution for study because it has a large student population of 1,347, and is supported by teaching and administrative staff with relatively adequate qualifications. This situation indicates that the school has the institutional capital to implement the Merdeka Belajar policy. However, the large student population also creates governance complexity, particularly in managing the operational curriculum, distributing workloads, coordinating programs, monitoring learning implementation, and evaluating internal performance. This complexity demands effective school governance for optimal implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy.

Several previous studies have examined the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum from various perspectives. Research by Walukow et al. shows that the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy, particularly the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project, still faces obstacles at the educator, school, and student levels (Walukow et al., 2023). Research by Iriyani et al. found that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in public junior high schools in Mataram City has been successful, but still requires more structured evaluation to improve the quality of curriculum implementation (Iriyani et al., 2023). Research by Tarigan et al. showed that the implementation of the

Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian language learning in junior high schools has been implemented through the preparation, implementation, and evaluation stages (Tarigan et al., 2024). Research by Budiwati et al. emphasized the importance of principal leadership in realizing Merdeka Belajar at the junior high school level (Budiwati et al., 2024).

Based on several previous studies, studies on Merdeka Belajar have largely focused on aspects of learning, teacher readiness, teacher perceptions, and principal leadership. Studies directly examining the impact of Merdeka Belajar policy implementation on school governance performance are still relatively limited. This gap serves as an important basis for this research, as the success of Merdeka Belajar is determined not only by the quality of classroom learning but also by the school's ability to manage its organization effectively.

The novelty of this research lies in its placement of the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy as a factor influencing school governance performance. This research views Merdeka Belajar not only as a curriculum policy but also as a public education policy that impacts how schools plan programs, manage resources, build coordination, implement activities, and conduct monitoring and evaluation. Based on this description, this study aims to determine the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy, determine school governance performance, and analyze the extent of the Merdeka Belajar policy's impact on school governance performance at SMP Negeri 1 Karangtengah, Cianjur Regency.

## 2. METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach with an explanatory approach. The quantitative approach was used because the study aimed to objectively measure variables and test the effect of the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy on school governance performance through statistical analysis. The explanatory approach was chosen because the study aimed to explain the causal relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The independent variable in this study was the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy, while the dependent variable was school governance performance.

The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Karangtengah, Cianjur Regency. The study population was all 55 Educators and Education Personnel (PTK) at SMP Negeri 1 Karangtengah for the 2025/2026 academic year, consisting of 46 teachers and 9 education personnel. The sampling technique used non-probability sampling with a total sample, so that all members of the population served as respondents. The total sample was chosen because the population size was less than 100 people and all respondents were deemed relevant to provide information on the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy and school governance performance.

Data collection used a questionnaire as the primary instrument. The questionnaire was structured based on indicators for each variable and used a Likert scale with five response options, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The Merdeka Belajar policy implementation variable was measured through the dimensions of communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure. The school governance performance variable was measured through the dimensions of program planning, resource management, internal coordination, program implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and verification analysis. Descriptive analysis was used to describe the level of Merdeka Belajar policy implementation and school governance performance based on respondent responses. Verification analysis was used to examine the effect of Merdeka Belajar policy implementation on school governance performance. The analytical techniques used included classical assumption testing, simple linear regression analysis, correlation coefficient testing, coefficient of determination testing, and hypothesis testing using t-tests. The regression model in this study placed school governance performance as the dependent variable and Merdeka Belajar policy implementation as the independent variable. In accordance with JMA guidelines, the general method is sufficiently explained concisely without overly detailed formula descriptions.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Penelitian ini dilakukan di SMP Negeri 1 Karangtengah Kabupaten Cianjur dengan responden sebanyak 55 orang pendidik dan tenaga kependidikan. Data penelitian diperoleh melalui penyebaran kuesioner yang memuat dua variabel utama, yaitu implementasi Kebijakan Merdeka Belajar sebagai variabel bebas dan kinerja tata kelola sekolah sebagai variabel terikat. Hasil penelitian disajikan melalui analisis deskriptif untuk menggambarkan kondisi masing-masing variabel dan analisis verifikatif untuk menguji pengaruh implementasi Kebijakan Merdeka Belajar terhadap kinerja tata kelola sekolah. Pedoman JMA menekankan bahwa bagian hasil dapat memuat proses pengumpulan data, lokasi penelitian, hasil analisis, tabel, serta interpretasi hasil secara ringkas dan jelas.

Berdasarkan hasil analisis deskriptif, implementasi Kebijakan Merdeka Belajar di SMP Negeri 1 Karangtengah Kabupaten Cianjur berada pada kategori sedang. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa kebijakan Merdeka Belajar telah dilaksanakan di lingkungan sekolah, tetapi pelaksanaannya belum sepenuhnya optimal. Aspek yang relatif paling kuat terlihat pada ketersediaan informasi teknis mengenai kurikulum, asesmen, dan pembelajaran, serta mekanisme kerja pelaksanaan kebijakan yang cukup tertib. Adapun aspek yang masih lemah terdapat pada keyakinan terhadap manfaat kebijakan bagi peningkatan kualitas pendidikan serta pelaksanaan kebijakan yang dinilai belum sepenuhnya jujur dan sesuai ketentuan. Kondisi ini menunjukkan bahwa implementasi kebijakan masih memerlukan penguatan pada aspek pemahaman, penerimaan, dan konsistensi pelaksanaan.

Kinerja tata kelola sekolah di SMP Negeri 1 Karangtengah Kabupaten Cianjur juga berada pada kategori sedang. Hasil ini menunjukkan bahwa pengelolaan sekolah secara umum telah berjalan cukup baik melalui perencanaan program, pengelolaan sumber daya, koordinasi internal, pelaksanaan program, serta pengawasan dan evaluasi. Kekuatan utama tata kelola sekolah terdapat pada kecukupan sarana dan prasarana serta pelaksanaan program yang cukup sesuai dengan rencana. Aspek yang masih relatif lemah terdapat pada kecukupan jumlah pendidik dan tenaga kependidikan dalam mendukung seluruh kegiatan sekolah. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa tata kelola sekolah telah memiliki dasar manajerial yang cukup baik, tetapi masih perlu ditingkatkan agar lebih efektif dan optimal.

Hasil pengujian asumsi klasik menunjukkan bahwa model regresi layak digunakan untuk analisis lebih lanjut. Pada uji heteroskedastisitas, titik-titik residual menyebar secara acak di atas dan di bawah garis nol pada sumbu Y serta tidak membentuk pola tertentu, sehingga model regresi tidak menunjukkan gejala heteroskedastisitas. Hasil uji Durbin-Watson menunjukkan nilai sebesar 1,874, berada di antara batas  $dU = 1,528$  dan  $4-dU = 2,472$ . Hasil tersebut menunjukkan bahwa model regresi tidak mengalami autokorelasi dan residual bersifat independen.

**Tabel 1. Hasil Uji Regresi Linear Sederhana**

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Konstanta	20,300	2,415	-	8,407	0,000
Implementasi Kebijakan Merdeka Belajar	0,725	0,056	0,872	12,971	0,000

Sumber: Olah Data Primer (2026)

Berdasarkan Tabel 1, persamaan regresi yang diperoleh adalah  $Y = 20,300 + 0,725X$ . Nilai konstanta sebesar 20,300 menunjukkan bahwa apabila implementasi Kebijakan Merdeka Belajar bernilai nol, maka kinerja tata kelola sekolah berada pada nilai 20,300. Koefisien regresi sebesar 0,725 menunjukkan bahwa setiap peningkatan implementasi Kebijakan Merdeka Belajar akan diikuti peningkatan kinerja tata kelola sekolah sebesar 0,725. Nilai signifikansi sebesar 0,000 lebih kecil dari 0,05, sehingga implementasi Kebijakan Merdeka Belajar terbukti berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap kinerja tata kelola sekolah.

**Tabel 2. Hasil Uji Koefisien Korelasi dan Determinasi**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0,872	0,760	0,756	6,41299

Sumber: Olah Data Primer (2026)

Berdasarkan Tabel 2, nilai koefisien korelasi sebesar 0,872 menunjukkan bahwa hubungan antara implementasi Kebijakan Merdeka Belajar dan kinerja tata kelola sekolah berada pada kategori sangat kuat. Nilai koefisien determinasi sebesar 0,760 menunjukkan bahwa 76,0% variasi kinerja tata kelola sekolah dapat dijelaskan oleh implementasi Kebijakan Merdeka Belajar, sedangkan sisanya sebesar 24,0% dipengaruhi oleh faktor lain di luar model penelitian. Hasil ini menunjukkan bahwa implementasi Kebijakan Merdeka Belajar memiliki kontribusi yang besar dalam menjelaskan perubahan kinerja tata kelola sekolah.

Hasil uji hipotesis menunjukkan nilai *t* hitung sebesar 12,971 dengan nilai signifikansi 0,000. Karena nilai signifikansi lebih kecil dari 0,05, hipotesis penelitian diterima. Artinya, implementasi Kebijakan Merdeka Belajar berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap kinerja tata kelola sekolah di SMP Negeri 1 Karangtengah Kabupaten Cianjur. Temuan ini memperlihatkan bahwa semakin baik komunikasi kebijakan, kecukupan sumber daya, disposisi pelaksana, dan struktur birokrasi dalam pelaksanaan Merdeka Belajar, maka semakin baik pula perencanaan program, pengelolaan sumber daya, koordinasi internal, pelaksanaan program, serta pengawasan dan evaluasi sekolah.

The research results show that the implementation of the Independent Learning Policy at SMP Negeri 1 Karangtengah, Cianjur Regency, is in the moderate category. This finding indicates that the policy has been implemented, but has not yet fully achieved optimal conditions. Policy implementation is supported by the availability of technical information regarding curriculum, assessment, and learning, as well as a fairly orderly work mechanism. However, policy implementation still requires strengthening aspects of implementer confidence in the policy's benefits, consistency of implementation, and compliance with applicable regulations. This condition indicates that the implementation of Independent Learning is not supported solely by the availability of documents or technical directives; it also requires the understanding, commitment, and active involvement of all school elements.

These findings align with George C. Edward III's policy implementation theory, which places communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure as key factors for successful implementation. Clear communication is necessary for all implementers to understand the policy's direction, while adequate resources are required for the policy to be operationally implemented. The implementer's disposition is crucial because education policy demands acceptance, commitment, honesty, and responsiveness in the face of change. The bureaucratic structure also determines the smoothness of implementation because it relates to work procedures, task allocation, coordination, and implementation mechanisms. Thus, the moderate category for the implementation of the Independent Learning Policy indicates that the four dimensions are already in place, but not yet fully established as a policy implementation system in schools (Subarsono, 2005).

School governance performance is also moderate. These findings indicate that SMP Negeri 1 Karangtengah, Cianjur Regency, has a fairly strong governance foundation through program planning, resource management, internal coordination, program implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. The strength of governance is evident in the support of facilities and infrastructure and the relatively consistent program implementation. However, weaknesses remain in the adequacy of the number of educators and education staff, clarity of personnel responsibilities, and consistency of implementation according to procedures. This means that the school has an institutional foundation to carry out its management functions, but still needs strengthening in aspects of human resources, role allocation, and internal control.

These results align with the view that school governance performance is a combination of managerial and service performance. Managerial performance is evident in the existence of school planning, resource management, organizational coordination, and evaluation mechanisms. Service

performance is evident in the support of facilities, program implementation, and school management that support the educational process. Research findings indicate that both elements are present at SMP Negeri 1 Karangtengah, Cianjur Regency, but are not evenly distributed across all aspects. Therefore, school governance performance needs to be understood multidimensionally, as weaknesses in one aspect can impact the overall quality of school management (Raharjo & Umbar, 2025).

The results of the regression analysis indicate that the implementation of the Independent Learning Policy has a positive and significant impact on school governance performance. The regression equation  $Y = 20.300 + 0.725X$  indicates that each increase in the implementation of the Independent Learning Policy will be followed by a 0.725 increase in school governance performance. The correlation coefficient of 0.872 indicates a very strong relationship between policy implementation and school governance performance. The coefficient of determination of 0.760 indicates that 76.0% of the variation in school governance performance can be explained by the implementation of the Independent Learning Policy, while the remaining 24.0% is influenced by factors outside the research model. A significance value of 0.000 also proves that this effect is statistically significant.

Substantively, these results indicate that the better the implementation of the Independent Learning Policy, the better the school governance performance. Good policy communication helps schools achieve a shared understanding of the direction of program implementation. The availability of resources supports schools in implementing the curriculum, teaching, administration, and evaluation. A positive disposition of implementers strengthens the commitment of principals, teachers, and education staff to implementing change. An orderly bureaucratic structure clarifies the division of tasks, work coordination, and program implementation flow. These four elements of implementation encourage strengthened school governance through clearer planning, more appropriate resource management, more focused internal coordination, more orderly program implementation, and more systematic monitoring and evaluation.

These findings reinforce previous research, which suggests that the success of the Independent Curriculum is closely related to the quality of governance and the readiness of implementers in schools. Research by Maulana et al. indicates that good principal governance is related to the successful implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum. Research by Kurnia and Novaliyosi indicates that teacher readiness is a crucial factor in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Research by Rahmi et al. indicates that teacher perceptions of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum are an early indicator of policy implementation in schools. Research by Afna et al. also indicates that the management of the Independent Curriculum is related to aspects of planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning. The difference is that this study positions the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Policy as a variable that directly influences school governance performance. Therefore, the focus of the study is not solely on learning aspects, teacher readiness, or implementer perceptions, but also on the broader institutional performance of the school.

The theoretical implication of this research is that policy implementation theory can be used to explain the performance of school governance as an implementing organization for education policies. The Merdeka Belajar Policy impacts not only the learning process but also how schools manage their organization, resources, coordination, programs, and evaluation. Practical implications: SMP Negeri 1 Karangtengah, Cianjur Regency, needs to strengthen internal communication, improve the adequacy and equity of resources, build implementer commitment, and clarify work mechanisms so that the implementation of Merdeka Belajar can optimally improve school governance. These findings can also provide input for the education office in designing school mentoring that focuses not only on curriculum implementation but also on strengthening the governance capacity of educational units.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, the implementation of the Independent Learning Policy at SMP Negeri 1 Karangtengah, Cianjur Regency, is in the moderate category. This condition indicates that the policy has been implemented through communication, resource support, implementer disposition, and

bureaucratic structure. However, its implementation still needs to be strengthened for optimal performance. School governance performance is also in the moderate category, meaning the school has a management foundation through program planning, resource management, internal coordination, program implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. However, there are still aspects that need improvement, particularly the adequacy of human resources, consistency of program implementation, and strengthening ongoing evaluation.

The analysis results indicate that the implementation of the Independent Learning Policy has a positive and significant impact on school governance performance. A regression coefficient of 0.725 indicates that improved policy implementation will be followed by improved school governance performance. A correlation coefficient of 0.872 indicates a very strong relationship, while a coefficient of determination of 0.760 indicates that 76.0% of the variation in school governance performance can be explained by the implementation of the Independent Learning Policy. Thus, the better the implementation of the Independent Learning Policy, the better the school governance performance at SMP Negeri 1 Karangtengah, Cianjur Regency.

Based on the research findings, the school is advised to strengthen internal communication regarding the direction, procedures, and targets of the Independent Learning Policy so that all educators and education personnel have a common understanding. The school also needs to improve resource management, particularly through workload management, strengthening teacher and education personnel competencies, and more effective utilization of infrastructure. Furthermore, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms need to be implemented more regularly so that program implementation results can be used as a basis for continuous improvement of school governance.

This study has limitations because it was conducted in only one educational unit with a limited number of respondents, so the results cannot be broadly generalized to all schools. Future research is recommended to involve more schools, different educational levels, or a broader research area for more comprehensive results. Future research could also include other variables, such as principal leadership, school organizational culture, teacher competency, technology support, or parental participation, to further elucidate the factors influencing school governance performance.

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