

Zero Curriculum Communication Strategy in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

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Abstract: *This study examines the communication tactics employed by VHSTelesandi Bekasi in the Merdeka curriculum. The adoption of the autonomous curriculum is neither obligatory nor optional, resulting in disparities over its application for new students at vocational high schools. Telesandi Bekasi. Incoming ninth-grade students will have varying experiences with the curriculum due to differences in curricular backgrounds in junior high schools. Consequently, VHSTelesandi Bekasi identifies the communication tactics for implementing the Merdeka curriculum for incoming students. VHS Telesandi Bekasi employs a communication approach centered around the establishment of a Zero Curriculum. The objective is for all new students entering class X to possess uniform proficiency levels despite their varied experiences in utilizing the curriculum throughout junior high school. Innovation based on the premise put forward by Everett M. Rogers in his book Diffusion of Innovations led to the adoption of the Zero Curriculum. This Zero Curriculum will positively influence new students in their subsequent engagement with the Merdeka curriculum. This essay aims to enable readers to utilize the Zero Curriculum (Kurikulum Nol) as a strategic measure in implementing the Merdeka curriculum inside their schools.*

Keywords: communication strategy, Merdeka curriculum, zero curriculum

INTRODUCTION

The change in the Ministry of Education, Research, and Technology from Mr. Muhadjir Effendy to Mr. Nadiem Makarim resulted in policy changes in the curriculum. In February 2022, through the Decree of the Head of the Educational Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency (BSKAP) Number 044/H/KR/2022, the Merdeka Curriculum for every educational unit was implemented voluntarily. The Merdeka curriculum is voluntary; this means that the curriculum can be used, or the old curriculum can still be used. Because of this, there are differences in the use of curriculum in educational institutions. But VHS Telesandi Bekasi chose adopted and implemented it. Therefore, Telecommunications Vocational School needs a communication strategy for socializing the Merdeka curriculum to the entire academic community, especially class X students. Because class X students have different backgrounds in using



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the curriculum in their respective schools. Some have used it, and some have not used it in junior high school.

To accomplish the intended goal, communication strategy is a process of communication direction that begins with communication planning and management (Galli, 2022). Communication strategy plays an essential role in socializing a new policy. Additionally, the audience for the proposed new policy will come from several backgrounds. Anggaira (2020) stated that the curriculum is an educational program designed as a learning plan from educational institutions to students. VHS Telesandi Bekasi is a secondary-level educational institution with four skill competencies, namely software engineering and visual communication design. Computer and Network Engineering and Telecommunication Transmission Engineering are always at the forefront of the IT field and always follow government policies, especially the Ministry of Education and Culture, in the use of the curriculum, so when the Merdeka Curriculum policy was launched, the Bekasi Telecommunication Vocational School immediately adopted and implemented it. In the history of the Bekasi Telecommunication Vocational School Curriculum, four curriculums have been used since the school was founded in 2008. The curriculum that has been used includes the 2008 Education Unit Level Curriculum, the 2013 Curriculum, and the Covid-19 Emergency Curriculum during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the latest and currently being implemented is the Merdeka Curriculum. Different from the implementation of the curriculum in previous years, this Merdeka curriculum is because the use of the curriculum is voluntary or does not have to be adopted by educational institutions, resulting in differences between students who come from junior high schools. As additional data, the author looked for sources regarding this matter.

Freedom in Learning was launched by the government, by the Ministry of Education and Culture, in 2022 and became the National Curriculum in 2024. Since the Merdeka curriculum was implemented in 2022, many people have not adopted the Merdeka curriculum, only around 70%. There are still a few schools in West Java that use the Merdeka curriculum, with only around 2161 education units, and West Java is in second place after East Java, which has 2754 education units. Because the VHS Telesandi Bekasi is in West Java Province. This is where VHS Telesandi Bekasi needs a communication strategy in implementing the Merdeka curriculum for students, especially class X, who have different backgrounds in using the Merdeka curriculum in junior high schools. The communication strategy used is to create a new curriculum, which the VHS Telesandi Bekasi named the Kurikulum Nol (Zero Curriculum).

The Zero Curriculum is a strategic step in eliminating background differences in the use of the curriculum at first-level middle schools. In an adaptation of Merdeka curriculum, VHS Telesandi Bekasi faced the challenge of students' and parents' resistance regarding the method of learning and the expected learning outcome. VHS Telesandi Bekasi, which has multiple batches in one school, finds it challenging to adapt because third-graders graduate using the previous curriculum. 1st grade has just

begun their study time, yet they must shift to the Merdeka curriculum. To introduce and familiarize children and their parents with the Zero Curriculum, VHS Telesandi uses socialization as one of its strategies.



Figure 1 Socialization of School Curriculum to 1st grade students

The purpose of writing this article is to provide information to readers and other researchers that the Bekasi Telecommunication Vocational School can find communication strategies in socializing the Merdeka curriculum to students with different backgrounds in using the curriculum at the previous education level, namely Junior High School. So the problem formulation of this article is how the communication strategy of the Bekasi Telecommunication Vocational School is in socializing the Merdeka curriculum to new students who have a different background in using the curriculum at the junior high school level.

METHOD

Arrangement of a framework as a reference or view that researchers use in the overall research process, the form and results of research examines the reality of a problem and theory. A method used by researchers to identify issues by testing to determine solutions to the issue encountered is the meaning of the research paradigm (Guba and Lincoln, 1988).

In this research, the paradigm is constructivism. We used this paradigm because the researcher sees the suitability between the problem and the solution that will result from this research, like producing a new

solution to the issue at hand. Creswell & Creswell (2018) stated that social interactions and personal experience build knowledge. Therefore, the way individuals interpret personal experiences is a communication strategy for achieving goals. Researchers gain further and deeper insight into the dynamics between problems and their solutions.

The focus of research in constructivism is to explore how individuals can build or produce innovations. Priority must be given to implementing the Merdeka curriculum in educational units and addressing the underlying issue of differences in the curriculum's implementation across earlier educational units. Additionally, the Merdeka curriculum shifts perspectives on the paradigm of educational practice from behaviourism to constructivism in the way that the teaching and learning process is implemented in the classroom. Teachers must be more creative and innovative in the teaching and learning process (teacher-centred).

This research employs a qualitative research method, so it does not require numerical measurements in the form of numbers. Qualitative methods are subjective because they rely on field observations, experiences, or facts that occur in the field. Ghanad (2023) stated that analyzing quality or not changing it into a quantitative entity can maintain the form and content of human behavior.

This study employs an in-depth field approach. This approach directly observes the processes carried out at the research location to obtain data. Qualitative research with analytical descriptive methods uses the Miles, et al. (2014) model to analyze data. The first stage of this model reduces the data. Then, we analyze and display the data and finally verify and conclude it. The results can explain or describe something in the field in a comprehensive, holistic, integrative, and in-depth manner, namely, the socialization of the new curriculum. Researchers explore research data in the form of words or meanings. This step aims to explain the actual situation in depth regarding socializing the Merdeka Curriculum to students. In this study, researchers employ 1) in-depth interviews with the principal, vice principal for curriculum, and vice principal for student affairs; 2) observation; and 3) document analysis in implementing the Merdeka curriculum at SMK Telesandi Bogor.

Researchers review various relevant articles to draw the research findings. Qualitative descriptive data is a collection of data obtained to be used in studying various relationships of attitudes, activities, views, and processes that occur towards an event/phenomenon and to provide a picture of an object or subject based on existing reality (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Creswell & Creswell (2018) revealed that qualitative methods are classified as artistic methods because the research process is less patterned and are classified as interpretative methods because the data produced in a study tends to be related to the interpretation of data collected in the field. Qualitative research is the process of collecting data naturally for interpreting and analyzing phenomena when the researcher can be the primary tool. "In qualitative research, we do not seek data through statistics or other quantitative measurement methods (Aspers & Corte, 2019). A method used to analyze or explain findings but not used to

draw broad conclusions is the qualitative descriptive method. This qualitative descriptive method is research that describes and analyzes objects or particular situations during field activities. Interviews and observations are the techniques used in this research.

The research location is at Telesandi Telecommunications Vocational School, Bekasi. The research period is from May 2024 to January 2025. The researcher employs the triangulation method to conduct interviews with informants and documentation.

a. Interview

the procedure of gathering information about communication strategy employed in implementing the Merdeka curriculum for students at VHS Telesandi Bekasi through questions and answers from informants and the researcher. An interview is "a conversation with a specific purpose, conducted by an interviewer who asks questions and an interviewee who provides answers." (Moleong, 2011). Researchers employ interviews as fully as possible by asking prepared questions about the object under study to obtain detailed information. Researchers can access and enter the object, both intellectually and logistically, once they comprehend the answers to the study's questions. The researcher conducts interviews based on a framework of questions to the object of study. What communication strategies did VHS Telesandi Bekasi introduce the Merdeka curriculum to students?

b. Documentation

Researchers obtain information or other essential records through documentation methods from institutions, foundations, or individuals. Documents are a form of data that includes images, writings, or works. We examining the profile of SMK Telesandi Bekasi, employee and teacher statistics, and other research-related materials are all part of the documentation studies.

c. Literature Study

This study aims to obtain theories about the methods, as well as information related to the research object. Library study sources include books, data from the internet, and the media. In this research, we employ the interactive data analysis model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana. The interactive model data analysis technique consists of three steps: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification (Miles, et al., 2014).

1) Data Reduction

Data reduction is an analytical process that sharpens, selects, focuses, discards, and organizes data in a way that allows the formation of conclusions.

2) Data Presentation

Data presentation is defined as an organized collection of information that allows conclusions and actions. The most common form of presenting qualitative data is narrative text.

3) Conclusion Drawing/Verification

From the beginning of data collection, qualitative researchers begin to interpret the meaning of the data, noting regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configurations, causal flows, and propositions (Ardianto, 2016).

RESULTS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method and a literature study approach. The writing process begins with collecting data from various trusted literature sources, including the title book *Diffusion of Innovations* by Everett M. Rogers (Rogers, 2003), academic journals, research reports, and relevant scientific articles. We analyzed the data systematically to understand the concept of communication strategy and the Merdeka curriculum. Zero Curriculum is a new curriculum that aims to introduce the Merdeka curriculum at VHS Telesandi Bekasi. The Zero Curriculum is a breakthrough in socialization for the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum. The reason is that new students who enter SMK Telesandi Bekasi will have a different curriculum background than that used in junior high schools.

The Zero Curriculum is a communication strategy to implement the Merdeka curriculum. Therefore, students receive this curriculum during the School Environment Introduction Period in five days and the Scout Orientation in two days. In addition, the school collaborates with government institutions in the military environment, with Yon Bekang Kostrad Cilodong conducting character education.

The Zero Curriculum was created by taking steps such as introducing the culture of the school environment starting from entering the school gate to give a smile, greet and greet, passing through zebra crossings, walking on green lanes, not being allowed to bring private vehicles, bringing the necessary equipment in accordance with instructions from the committee activities, bringing the specified food and drink supplies every day using tumblers or personal eating containers and must not use expanded polystyrene foam (Styrofoam) or plastic wrap, wear the specified uniform, follow the morning culture at the mosque, put your footwear in the place that has been prepared, put your footwear facing out of line, introduction school environment by means of a school tour (seeing

school facilities, both existing facilities and infrastructure, seeing learning activities for classmates, seeing extracurricular activities, taking part in character learning according to the Merdeka curriculum material, getting into the habit of eating and drinking together and carried out in a predetermined formation and a predetermined time, getting used to cleaning the place to eat after finishing the meal, getting used to ice breaking Before starting the learning, the provision of more material on character development and team building with joy and happiness, literacy habits by providing opportunities for summaries at the end of the material, and rewards for each material. The provision of the Zero curriculum during the socialization of school introduction aims to ensure that the gap between junior high schools of origin that have implemented the Merdeka curriculum or not does not feel the difference in implementation. Thus, the communication strategy for implementing the Merdeka curriculum for students who come from different curriculum backgrounds does not become an obstacle in learning.

Communication strategy is one of the consequences of innovation. It causes various changes in individuals or a social system and impacts the adoption or rejection of an innovation (Rogers, 2003: 436). The changes assumed or desired are, of course, positive and the innovation of the individual or social system. The expected consequence is an innovation that has a functional influence on the personal or social system.

The direct consequences of innovation are changes in individuals or social systems that occur directly from innovation. As a direct consequence, innovation produces a change. Three intrinsic elements determine the success of innovation: a) form is the physical appearance and substance of something; and b) four innovations that can be observed directly. In the world of education, forms of innovation must be designed to be intuitive and easy to understand by users such as students, teachers, or administrative staff.

The principal of the school deliberately created the Zero curriculum to anticipate differences in the junior high school curriculum. According to the curriculum section, the Zero curriculum is also part of the communication strategy that the school created to overcome differences in students' backgrounds in junior high school. All programs in the Zero curriculum build character so that all students start learning from zero. Likewise, with the Student Affairs section, the program carried out in the Zero curriculum is also to anticipate differences in the use of the curriculum in junior high school by zeroing all students first without seeing that they have used the Merdeka Curriculum. or not, whether from private, state, Islamic boarding school, or madrasah, it's all the same at zero first, right? From these three sources, it can be concluded that the Zero curriculum is a strategy that the school created to overcome differences in the use of the curriculum during middle school.

According to Everett M. Rogers in *Diffusion of Innovations* (2003), unexpected consequences can occur due to a lack of planning in the process of adopting innovation and making community groups unprepared for change. Because the Zero Curriculum is meticulously planned,

beginning with the team, the materials created, and the objectives to be met, it satisfies the difficulties posed by the Diffusion of Innovations theory.

DISCUSSION

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a literature study approach. The writing process begins with collecting data from various trusted literature sources, including the book Diffusion of Innovations by Everett M. Rogers, academic journals, research reports, and relevant scientific articles. Systematically, we analyzed the data to understand the concept of communication strategy and Merdeka curriculum. Zero curriculum is a form of innovation that aims to introduce the Merdeka curriculum as a new curriculum in VHS Telesandi Bekasi. Due to the differences in the curriculum background applied to junior high school to new students who will join Telesandi Bekasi Vocational School, it is felt necessary for Telesandi Telecommunication Vocational School to make innovation as a breakthrough in socialization in the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum by creating a Zero Curriculum. The Zero Curriculum was created as a communication strategy to socialize the Merdeka curriculum during the School Environment Introduction period, which was carried out for 5 days through the School Environment Introduction activity for 3 days and Scout Orientation for 2 days. Thus, the Merdeka curriculum can be directly received by students. In addition, character education is carried out outside of school in collaboration with government institutions in the military environment with Yon Bekang Kostrad Cilodong.

The Zero Curriculum was created by taking steps such as introducing the culture of the school environment starting from entering the school gate to give a smile, greet and greet, passing through zebra crossings, walking on green lanes, not being allowed to bring private vehicles, bringing the necessary equipment in accordance with instructions from the committee activities, bringing the specified food and drink supplies every day using thumblers or personal eating containers and must not use stereofoam or plastic wrap, wear the unique uniform, follow the morning culture at the mosque, put your footwear in the place that has been prepared, put your footwear facing out of line, introduction school environment by means of a school tour seeing school facilities, both existing facilities and infrastructure, seeing learning activities for classmates, seeing extracurricular activities, taking part in character learning according to the Merdeka curriculum material, getting into the habit of eating and drinking together and carried out in a predetermined formation and a predetermined time, getting used to cleaning the place to eat after finishing the meal, getting used to ice breaking.

Before the material, the material provided is more about character development and team building through joy and excitement, literacy familiarization by allowing the opportunity to provide a resume at the end of the material, and there are rewards given for each material. Therefore, the Zero curriculum is given during the socialization period for the

introduction of schools so that the gap between the original junior high school, which has implemented the Merdeka curriculum or not, will not feel the difference in the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum. So that the communication strategy in implementing the Merdeka curriculum for students who come from different curriculum backgrounds will not feel any different.

The strategy of communication is one of the consequences of innovation. The strategy causes various changes in individuals or a social system. This condition influences the adoption or rejection of an innovation (Rogers, 2003: 436). Positive changes are that the innovation provides benefits to the individual or social system. The expected consequence is an innovation that has a functional influence in accordance with the wishes of the individual or social system.

The direct consequences of innovation are changes in individuals or social systems that occur directly from innovation. As a direct consequence, innovation produces a change. Three intrinsic elements that determine the success of innovation: a) form is the physical appearance and substance of something; and b) four innovations that can be observed directly. In the world of education, forms of innovation must be designed to be intuitive and easy to understand by users, be they students, teachers, or administrative staff. According to Everett M. Rogers in *Diffusion of Innovations* (2003), unintended consequences can occur due to a lack of planning in the innovation adoption process, which makes some groups of society unprepared to face change. The Zero curriculum answers the Diffusion of Innovations theory because it is carefully planned, starting from the team involved, the materials prepared, and the goals to be achieved.

CONCLUSION

Innovation is a crucial element in driving change and progress in various sectors, including technology and education. Zero curriculum is a communication strategy for implementing the Merdeka curriculum at VHS Telesandi Bekasi. By understanding the characteristics of innovation, such as form, function, and meaning, as well as the factors that influence its consequences, we can be wiser in planning and managing the impact of innovation, and its benefits can be felt to the maximum. The form, function, and meaning of the consequences of innovation play an essential role in its successful adoption and impact. Form refers to the physical form or design of innovation that influences ease of use, such as activities that introduce the school environment in curriculum implementation in Merdeka by using communication strategies with a variety of fun activities. Function is the real benefit provided by innovation in meeting user needs, such as the Zero Curriculum, which can eliminate the background gap of new students at VHS Telesandi Bekasi. Meaning, on the other hand, is related to the perception or symbolic value attached to innovation; for example, the Zero Curriculum is considered a symbol of innovation in the

implementation of the Merdeka curriculum. These three aspects are interrelated and determine how innovation becomes a communication strategy in implementing the Merdeka curriculum at VHS Telesandi Bekasi so that the Zero curriculum can be accepted and its impact on individuals and society. This article emphasizes that innovation, although complex, must be managed with a mature strategy to create a sustainable and equitable positive in society.

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