

The Role of Curriculum, Instruction, and Education Funding in Improving the Quality of Basic Education (Case Study: SDN 14 Rantau Selatan)

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Abstract

The quality of basic education is the primary foundation for the development of highquality human resources. This study aims to analyze the roles of the curriculum, teaching and learning, and educational funding in improving the quality of basic education at SDN 14 Rantau Selatan, Rantau Selatan Subdistrict, Labuhan Batu Regency, North Sumatra Province. The research method used was qualitative descriptive through field studies, in-depth interviews with the principal and teachers, as well as a review of school documents. The results of the study indicate that: (1) the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN 14 Rantau Selatan is proceeding gradually with adjustments to the socio-economic characteristics of the plantation community; (2) a contextual learning approach based on local potential has proven to enhance student motivation and understanding; and (3) transparent and accountable management of the School Operational Assistance Fund (BOS) significantly contributes to meeting the school's operational needs. This study concludes that synergy between an adaptive curriculum, meaningful learning, and efficient funding is the key to improving the quality of basic education in plantation areas.

Keywords: *Curriculum, Learning, Education Funding, Quality Of Basic Education, Sdn 14 Rantau Selatan.*

INTRODUCTION

Basic education is the most fundamental level of education in the national education system. Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System stipulates that every citizen has the right to quality education and that the government is obligated to fund basic education free of charge. However, there remains a gap between these normative ideals and the reality on the ground that needs to be continuously narrowed, particularly in schools located in rural areas and plantation zones

SDN 14 Rantau Selatan, located in Rantau Selatan Subdistrict, Labuhan Batu Regency, North Sumatra Province, is one of the elementary schools situated within a plantation community. Labuhan Batu Regency is known as one of the major centers for oil palm and rubber plantations in North Sumatra, with the socioeconomic characteristics of its community closely tied to fluctuations in global commodity prices. These conditions pose unique challenges for the delivery of quality education, ranging from limited parental involvement and students' dependence on seasonal work to limited school resources.

The three main pillars that determine the quality of basic education are curriculum, instruction, and financing. The curriculum determines the direction and content of education; instruction determines how knowledge is transferred to students; while financing determines the availability of resources needed to implement the previous two components. These three pillars are closely interrelated and must work synergistically to produce quality education.

Research on the role of these three pillars in the context of schools in plantation areas remains relatively limited in the Indonesian academic literature. Most educational research focuses on urban schools or developed regions, so rural plantation contexts like Rantau Selatan are often overlooked. This study aims to fill this gap while providing practical contributions to the development of educational policies in Labuhan Batu Regency.

Based on this background, this study formulates three research questions: (1) How does curriculum implementation at SDN 14 Rantau Selatan contribute to improving the quality of education? (2) How do the applied learning approaches support the achievement of educational goals? (3) How does the management of educational funding affect the quality of educational services at the school? Answers to these three questions are expected to provide a comprehensive overview and practical recommendations.

RESEARCH METHODS

Data collection was conducted using three main techniques: (1) semi-structured interviews, which are in-depth interviews guided by open-ended questions that allow for a thorough exploration of responses; (2) partial participatory observation, which involves direct observation of classroom learning processes and school management; and (3) document analysis, which entails a review of various relevant official school documents. Triangulation of sources and techniques was performed to ensure data credibility.

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive analysis model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which includes four stages: data condensation, *data display*, drawing conclusions, and *verification*. The analysis process is cyclical and interactive, beginning at the data collection stage rather than after all data has been collected.

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach with a *single-case* study design. According to Creswell (2014), a qualitative approach is appropriate for deeply understanding social phenomena within their natural context. The case study design was chosen because this research focuses intensively on a single educational institution to obtain a rich and comprehensive picture.

The research was conducted at SDN 14 Rantau Selatan, Rantau Selatan Subdistrict, Labuhan Batu Regency, North Sumatra Province. The location was selected based on the consideration that this school represents a basic educational unit in a plantation area that faces challenges while possessing unique potential for educational quality development. The research was conducted over four months, from March to June 2025.

The data sources for this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with key informants, including: the school principal, two senior classroom teachers, the school treasurer, and the chair of the school committee. Secondary data was obtained from school documents, including: the School Operational Curriculum (KOSP), the School Activity and Budget Plan (RKAS), the BOS Fund accountability report, the school quality report card, and the school profile from the Basic Education Data (Dapodik)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of the Curriculum in Improving the Quality of Education

The research findings indicate that SDN 14 Rantau Selatan has been implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in phases since the 2023/2024 school year. The interviewed principal explained that the transition to the Merdeka Curriculum provides teachers with greater flexibility to adapt materials to the students' environmental context. This aligns with the findings of Darling-Hammond et al. (2019) that flexible curricula lead to better learning outcomes.

The School Operational Curriculum (KOSP) developed by the school integrates the local potential of Rantau Selatan into several subjects. In Social Studies, for example, teachers use real-world examples from the economic activities of oil palm and rubber plantations as contextual

teaching materials. Students are encouraged to observe the production, distribution, and marketing processes of plantation products, which they can witness firsthand in their own family environments. This strategy has proven to increase students' interest and engagement in learning.

Nevertheless, this study also identified several challenges in curriculum implementation. The lack of textbooks aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum is the most frequently cited obstacle by teachers. Additionally, teachers' capacity to develop innovative teaching materials still needs improvement, as most are accustomed to the previous, more prescriptive curriculum approach. Regular training and guidance from school supervisors are an urgent necessity.

An interesting finding is the integration of local wisdom values into curriculum development. Schools have developed local content based on the potential of the Labuhan Batu region, which includes an introduction to plantation crops, sustainable agricultural practices, and the values of community cooperation among local residents. This local content has been positively received by parents and the community as it is considered relevant to the region's development needs.

The Role of Learning in Improving Educational Quality

Observations of the learning process at SDN 14 Rantau Selatan indicate that most teachers have endeavored to adopt active and contextual learning approaches, although implementation varies across classes. More senior and experienced teachers tend to be more skilled at integrating local experiences into learning, while younger teachers are still in the process of adapting.

One notable learning practice is the use of the school's surrounding environment as a learning medium. A fourth-grade teacher, for example, took students on a field trip to a community garden near the school to study the life cycle of plants. This approach reflects the CTL principle outlined by Johnson (2002), where learning is meaningfully connected to students' real-life contexts. This study also found a fairly consistent application of cooperative learning in several classes. Teachers placed students in heterogeneous groups to work on learning tasks, which indirectly builds collaboration and communication skills.

This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD principle, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction in the learning process. However, this study also identified several areas requiring improvement. The use of educational technology remains very limited due to uneven internet access in Rantau Selatan Subdistrict. Assessments conducted by some teachers are still dominated by conventional written tests, while *authentic assessment* as recommended by the Merdeka Curriculum has not yet been optimally implemented. In addition, remedial and enrichment programs for students with diverse learning needs still need to be strengthened.

The Role of Education Funding in Improving Quality

An analysis of the school's financial documents indicates that SDN 14 Rantau Selatan receives BOS Funds as its primary source of funding, managed in accordance with Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 2 of 2022. The management of BOS Funds at this school is considered fairly transparent, as evidenced by the publication of the School Budget Plan (RKAS) and accountability reports on the school's bulletin board, as well as their regular reporting to the school committee.

The allocation of BOS Funds at SDN 14 Rantau Selatan demonstrates a fairly targeted distribution. Based on the reviewed RKAS documents, the purchase of books and learning materials received the largest share, followed by learning activity costs (including extracurricular activities), teacher professional development, and maintenance of facilities and infrastructure. This distribution reflects the school's commitment to prioritizing direct learning needs.

The most significant funding challenge is the uncertainty and delays in the disbursement of BOS funds. The school treasurer noted that delays in fund disbursement often disrupt learning activity planning, particularly at the start of the school year. This situation forces the school to

make priority adjustments that are not always optimal from a pedagogical perspective.

In addition to BOS funds, the school also receives support from the Labuhan Batu Regency Government through the Physical Special Allocation Fund (DAK), which is used for building repairs and the procurement of school furniture. The Indonesia Pintar (PIP) program, which is distributed to underprivileged students, also plays a crucial role in reducing dropout rates at SDN 14 Rantau Selatan. Community participation through the school committee also contributes, particularly in collaborative activities such as fence repairs and planting school greenery.

Overall, the available funding is considered sufficient to meet minimum operational needs, but it remains inadequate to drive significant learning innovations. The need for computer labs, a well-stocked library, and technology-based learning materials cannot yet be fully met with the current budget.

Synergy of Curriculum, Learning, and Funding

The findings of this study reinforce the argument that the quality of basic education is not determined by a single factor, but rather by the synergy between an adaptive curriculum, meaningful learning, and efficient funding. These three components support and depend on one another within an integrated system.

A contextual curriculum will not have an optimal impact without teachers who have the competence to implement it through innovative teaching methods. Conversely, high-quality teachers will not be able to perform optimally without adequate infrastructure and funding. And all of these components require the leadership of a visionary school principal as the primary driving force.

At SDN 14 Rantau Selatan, this synergy is still in its developmental stage. The principal's commitment to continuously improving educational quality, the enthusiasm of some teachers to innovate, and the strong community support constitute invaluable social capital. With systematic strengthening of its weaker aspects, this school has great potential to become a model for quality elementary schools in the Labuhan Batu plantation area.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussion, three main conclusions can be drawn. First, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN 14 Rantau Selatan is progressing positively by leveraging the curriculum's flexibility to integrate the local potential of the plantation area into the learning process. Although it still faces challenges related to teacher capacity and limited textbooks, the adaptive curriculum has proven to enhance the relevance and meaningfulness of learning for students. Second, the contextual learning approach based on local potential implemented by the teachers at SDN 14 Rantau Selatan has proven effective in enhancing student motivation and understanding.

The utilization of the plantation environment as an authentic learning medium is a distinctive strength that needs to be continuously developed and institutionalized as a best practice for the school. Third, the relatively transparent and accountable management of the BOS Fund at SDN 14 Rantau Selatan has made a tangible contribution to meeting operational learning needs. However, budget constraints and delays in

disbursement remain obstacles that require serious attention from the local government. The synergy between these three components curriculum, instruction, and funding is the primary determinant of the quality of basic education at this school.

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