

Collaborative Leadership of Rakat Mufakat in Overcoming Limited Access to Education in the Implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in Hulu Sungai Selatan

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Abstract: This study was conducted to analyze the problems in the implementation of the merdeka belajar curriculum, namely the limited access to education through the collaborative leadership rakat mufakat. This study uses a qualitative approach to describe the application of collaborative leadership in overcoming limited access to education. This research focuses on schools in South Hulu Sungai that have limited access to education. This research was conducted on participants consisting of 2 school principals, 4 teachers and 2 administrative staff. Based on the results of observations, it shows that respondents experience obstacles in the implementation of the independent learning curriculum, including access to education such as electricity and the internet is still very limited. Data were obtained through triangulation results from questionnaires, interviews and observations. Based on observations, it was found that collaborative leadership rakat mufakat can help schools in overcoming limited access to education, including increasing familiarity and deliberation (rakat mufakat), respecting and listening to opinions, trust in teacher competence, appreciation and appreciation, involvement in decision-making, accommodating cooperation, consistent communication, agreement in policy, appreciation for new ideas, support for innovation learning, and supporting self-development and various ideas. Through the implementation of collaborative leadership, the consensus is expected to be able to overcome the limitations of access to education in the implementation of the merdeka belajar curriculum.

Keywords: Collaborative leadership, limited access, merdeka belajar curriculum

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, education has a very important meaning in human life on earth. In this ever evolving era, education has a high level of need to be able to help individuals in facing the 4.0 revolution which has many impacts on all sectors of life, including the education sector which has an important role in implementing and integrating digital technology to provide wider and more flexible access in accordance with the times. The impact of technological advances touches every aspect of life as well as the 4.0 revolution that has penetrated into daily life, including known as the ten pillars of the 4.0 revolution, namely system integration, robots, Internet of Things (IoT), additive manufacturing, big data, could, virtual environment simulation, AI artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, reality. (Pangestika et al., 2020). The existence of the pillar of revolution makes human life even more complex with digital developments which are currently unavoidable.

According to (Siswanto & Hidayati, 2021) the government's efforts to improve the quality of education that can be in accordance with the needs of the times are continuously encouraged through curriculum implementation regulations which are strengthened by the issuance of the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture number 12 of 2024 concerning the Curriculum in Early Childhood Education, Primary and Secondary Education Levels where the independent or independent learning curriculum has been officially established as the basic framework and curriculum structure for all educational units in Indonesia.

In the implementation of the curriculum that is currently determined, of course, there are obstacles and technological gaps that are a big task in the world of education today. Although information and communication technology has developed rapidly in some areas, not in certain areas that still have difficulty accessing the internet as well as remote rural areas with urban centers and infrastructure that have not yet fully penetrated into rural areas. The digital divide in Indonesia is clearly visible when we compare between urban and rural areas, this can be seen from data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) which states that internet penetration in urban areas reaches more than 70% while rural areas are only around 45% caused by inadequate internet access, economic capabilities, and digital literacy. This digital gap certainly also has an impact in the world of education, namely difficulties in online learning, limited teaching materials, and gaps in education quality (Mustari, 2023).

In an era of globalization and increasing complexity, leadership has an increasingly important role in guiding organizations to overcome the challenges and obstacles that arise. Modern leaders are faced with pressures that not only achieve their results and responsibilities, but also to build an inclusive, innovative and sustainable organizational culture (Ulfah et al., 2025). Like a leader, the principal must be able to lead, guide and influence a component in a school to carry out their respective duties. Based on Permendiknas No. 162 tahun 2003 in (Anggela & Permana, 2022), Guidelines for the Assignment of Teachers as School Principals. Inclusive and solid leadership is effective leadership in dealing with change so that collaboration from various parties to understand and find solutions to create quality learning.

Collaborative leadership is leadership that involves principals working closely with the teaching team to achieve common goals, encourage active participation, and build a relationship of mutual trust between the principal and the teaching team. This leadership style focuses on empowering teaching team members, shared decision-making, and developing collective professionalism. (Fitri & Permatasari, 2022). Collaborative leadership theory encourages open communication, team empowerment and cooperation between leaders and teachers. This form of cooperation will later produce a decision that combines the opinions and inputs of all members so as to produce a mutually agreed solution to overcome the problems that have occurred.

According to (Kasmawati, 2021; Burgaz and Turan, 2018), collaborative leadership in schools has general characteristics, namely (1) leaders value teachers' ideas, (2) leaders trust teachers' professional judgments, (3) leaders take time to appreciate teachers who have good performance, (4) leaders involve teachers in decision-making, (5) leaders facilitate teachers to work together, (6) leaders inform teachers about current problems in schools, (7) leaders believe that teachers' involvement in policymaking is important, (8) teachers are rewarded when implementing new ideas and techniques, (9) leaders support innovation in learning, (10) leaders encourage teachers to come up with ideas. Collaborative is a form of cooperation that is also related to the motto in Hulu Sungai Selatan known as Rakat Mufakat. Rakat mufakat is a close unity accompanied by deliberation where the rakat describes the level of familiarity or closeness between individuals or groups so that it reflects a warm, close and close relationship. Meanwhile, mufakat is a form of agreement or agreement that is reached through deliberation and joint discussion between the parties involved. (Ulfah et al., 2025)

Based on the results of observations in Loksado District, the researcher used the research location because the school is located in the geographical conditions of highlands and mountainous areas, which results in the area still having limited internet access, namely SDN Halunuk and SDN Panggungan. This was conveyed by educators who acknowledged that limited internet access is an obstacle in implementing merdeka belajar which is currently a reference curriculum set by the government. In learning that applies technology such as audio, video learning and the use of educational applications that are still limited in the implementation of learning in the classroom, these limitations require an effective strategy from school leaders in order to carry out quality learning. According to (Ananda et al., 2017) the implementation of appropriate leadership is the answer to the obstacles faced by teachers as the spearhead of the implementation of education, but the lack of collaboration is still very much needed to be improved in overcoming limited access to education.

The problem that occurs in the two schools above is the lack of awareness and understanding of teachers on the importance of collaboration and teamwork in schools caused by the lack of individual awareness to create a collaborative culture to overcome the problems faced in the implementation of the independent learning curriculum. This can be seen from teachers who still have difficulty implementing learning to overcome limited access to education.

Therefore, the researcher argues that it is important to know the efforts of school principals in exploring the application of collaborative leadership rakat mufakat in overcoming the limitations of access to education in the implementation of independent learning and how to overcome obstacles in the implementation of the merdeka belajar curriculum.

2. Research Objectives

This research was conducted in order to analyze the application of collaborative leadership rakat mufakat in overcoming the limitations of access to education in the implementation of the merdeka belajar curriculum in Hulu Sungai Selatan. The specific variations of this study are as follows:

- Analyzing the collaborative leadership of rakat mufakat people in overcoming the limitations of access to education in the implementation of the merdeka belajar curriculum in Hulu Sungai Selatan.

- b. Analyze how to overcome obstacles in the implementation of the merdeka belajar curriculum in Hulu Sungai Selatan.
- c. Analyzing the implementation of the merdeka belajar curriculum in Hulu Sungai Selatan.

3. Research Questions

There are three research questions in this study, namely:

- a. How is the collaborative leadership of rakat mufakat in overcoming the limited access to education in the implementation of the merdeka belajar curriculum in Hulu Sungai Selatan?
- b. How to overcome obstacles in the implementation of the merdeka belajar curriculum in Hulu Sungai Selatan?
- c. How is the implementation of the merdeka belajar curriculum in Hulu Sungai Selatan?

4. Literature Review

Limited access to education is considered a challenge for the implementation of merdeka belajar in elementary schools. The implementation of the merdeka belajar curriculum will be successful if the obstacles to its implementation can be overcome. Some of the things that need to be considered in the implementation of independent learning are understanding the outline of the merdeka belajar curriculum, learning and assessment, curriculum development and P5 development. (Nisa et al., 2023).

Obstacles to the implementation of the independent curriculum, especially limited access to education, are expected to be overcome with collaborative leadership. Collaborative leadership theory encourages open communication, team empowerment and cooperation between leaders and teachers. This form of cooperation will later produce a decision that combines the opinions and inputs of all members so as to produce a mutually agreed solution to overcome the problems that have occurred.

Collaborative leadership is leadership that requires collaboration, listening to each other, influencing and adapting so as to encourage teamwork to achieve goals through discussion, listening to opinions, involving members in decision making, and not unilaterally deciding without involving suggestions from members of the organization.

(Kasmawati, 2021) conducted research and stated that collaborative leadership is a solution to globalization changes that need to be applied in the face of change for the success and effectiveness of schools, including for teachers and students, this is applied by school principals by involving and harmonizing members of the organization, in this case teachers to collaborate with each other in achieving a common vision and mission.

According to (Daulay, 2023) who stated that collaborative leadership has a significant positive influence on the teaching team at SDN 100950 AEK Tolong. Good collaboration between principals and teaching team members, effective communication, team member empowerment, and participation in decision-making have been proven to make significant contributions to improving the quality of teaching and team member motivation.

The same thing was also researched by (Arnun, 2023) that expanding the combination for each person in the school is the main key to building a solid teacher work team. This study exposes the skills of collaborative leadership in building a solid team that can meet the expectations of the community, so that solid collaborative leadership can realize good and balanced educational goals.

Overall, it can be concluded that collaborative leadership is leadership that has a positive influence on improving the quality of teaching because of the formation of a solid team so that it can achieve educational goals. Thus, this study aims to analyze the application of collaborative leadership in overcoming limited access to education in the implementation of the merdeka belajar curriculum in Hulu Sungai Selatan.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

In this study, the research design is based on qualitative methods that lead to descriptive. Descriptive is research that is used to analyze data by descriptive or describing data that has been collected as it is without intending to make conclusions that apply to generalities or generalizations (Nugroho, 2018). The researcher uses descriptive because it explains the information being researched and the researcher's dissection to help analyze the research data obtained. Descriptive research is aimed at describing a situation or phenomena as it is so that the written research has data that better describes the object of collaborative leadership.

Thus, the data collection in this study is based on a qualitative method approach. This method helps to obtain information based on triangulation data, namely observation and interviews. Interviews were used to obtain data findings from school principals, teachers and administrative staff in the application of collaborative leadership of rakat mufakat.

The main instrument in this study is the researcher himself. Therefore, the researcher as an instrument must also be validated to how far the qualitative researcher is ready to conduct research which then goes to the field. Validation of the researcher as an instrument includes validation of the understanding of qualitative research methods, mastery of insight into the field being researched, readiness of the research to enter the research object, both academically and logically. (Rukajat, 2018).

5.2 Research Sample

This research was conducted in two schools in Hulu Sungai Selatan Regency, namely SDN Halunuk and SDN Panggungan. The subjects in this study were 8 people, namely 2 school principals, 4 teachers, and 2 administrative staff at two different schools in Loksado District, namely SDN Halunuk and SDN Panggungan. School principals lead and make decisions to deal with limited access in the era of merdeka belajar, teachers spearhead the implementation of the curriculum applied to students in the era of merdeka belajar, and administrative staff provide data related to supporting data that explains the lack of access to the implementation of the merdeka belajar curriculum.

5.3 Research Instruments

The purpose of this survey is to survey the application of collaborative leadership of rakat mufakat people to overcome the limitations of access to education in the implementation of the merdeka belajar curriculum in Hulu Sungai Selatan. There is one type of instrument used in this study, namely interviews with school principals, teachers and administrative staff.

6. Finding and Discussion

6.1 Demographic Analysis of Respondents

Based on the demographic analysis of the respondents' gender, 25% were female teachers and 75% were male teachers. Furthermore, it was found that 100% of respondents were natives of the Hulu Sungai Selatan Regency area. The academic level aspect shows that 12.5% of respondents have a high school education while 87.5% of the other respondents have a bachelor's degree. Based on the aspect of position, it was found that 25% of respondents were school principals and 75% were teachers and staff councils. On the other hand, teaching experience from 1-10 years is 25% and 11-20 years is 75%.

6.2 Research Questions Analysis

6.2.1 Research Question 1 : How is the collaborative leadership of rakat mufakat in overcoming the limited access to education in the implementation of the merdeka belajar curriculum in Hulu Sungai Selatan?

The findings of the interpretation of the original manuscript show the application of collaborative leadership of rakat mufakat in overcoming the limitations of access to education in the implementation of the merdeka belajar curriculum in Hulu Sungai Selatan Regency. The analysis conducted shows that the application of collaborative leadership is to increase familiarity and deliberation (rakat mufakat), respect and listen to opinions, trust in teacher competence, appreciation and appreciation, involvement in decision-making, accommodating cooperation, consistent communication, agreement on policies, appreciation for new ideas, support for learning innovation, and support for self-development. This application showed the highest frequency of 5 respondents. This is because the implementation of consensus is effective in overcoming limited access to education through deliberation and learning communities. The interview results of 5 respondents support the findings of the questionnaire data from the interpretation as follows:

- a. *"The application of collaborative leadership of rakat mufakat in this school is always to involve the entire board of teachers and educators to jointly convey constructive opinions, ideas and suggestions. Applying consensus to every decision or policy taken so that everyone participates in decision-making. In addition, the application of consensus is open communication for all members to avoid conflicts, the last is to align the goals that will be pursued together, for example in this context is to jointly overcome limited access to the implementation of merdeka belajar." (R1)*
- b. *"In the application of collaborative leadership of rakat mufakat in this school, common goals are the most important thing. Shared goals can be easily achieved through mutual deliberation and problem solving. So that whatever problems are faced, the motto of the consensus makes problems easy to get solutions. Therefore, we must form a vision and mission together so that it is easy to achieve common goals". (R2)*
- c. *"Collaborative leadership of rakat mufakat can be carried out in schools through deliberations, learning communities, joint discussions, teacher council meetings, and not only in formal activities but can also be done through casual activities such as lunch together, joint vacations, mutual cooperation and so on. (R4)*
- d. *"Collaborative leadership of rakat mufakat can be applied in schools by harmonizing the vision so that all members can actively participate in the implementation of policies to achieve common goals. Deliberation and solidarity in the team will be formed. Through discussions, meetings, and joint trainings, it will form harmony in realizing common goals. As a leader, of course, you must respect members' opinions, give appreciation, provide support, facilitate cooperation, and involve members in decision making and sharing ideas". (R5)*
- e. *"Collaborative leadership of rakat mufakat can be carried out through deliberation before determining a policy or program, respecting members' opinions in deliberations, open communication with all members, trusting the competence of members to implement freedom of learning and collaborating with stakeholders to overcome the problems faced" (R8)*

In addition, it was found that collaborative leadership of rakat mufakat people was also applied to have a good impact on the implementation of learning in schools which were researched, including increased work motivation, increased familiarity between colleagues, a conducive and adaptive environment, enriching creativity through teamwork 4:

- a. *"The impact is of course very many, including the establishment of two-way communication, familiarity and close relationships with fellow educators and the community so that every problem that exists can be communicated and a solution can be found." (R1)*
- b. *"The impact caused is very good, this can be seen from the increase in teaching motivation, a conducive environment, and adaptive learning because teachers collaborate with each other in facing updates, especially curriculum updates that are implemented." (R3)*
- c. *"The impact of the implementation of rakat mufakat is a sense of kinship and mutual attachment to each other. A sense of mutual ownership will support motivation and enthusiasm so that performance can improve." (R6)*
- d. *"The impact of the implementation of rakat mufakat meetings in schools is every policy based on the results of a joint decision which will create a comfortable environment and high work motivation" (R7)*
- e. *"The impact of the implementation of rakat mufakat is a new experience because we share opinions with colleagues. In addition to new knowledge experiences, we also get new knowledge because the more people who give opinions, the more it will enrich our creativity in teaching and learning." (R8)*

Based on the results of interviews with informants, the implementation of consensus has a significant influence on the implementation of leadership in schools. The principal explained that the rakat mufakat are a characteristic of the people in Hulu Sungai Selatan who like to carry out activities together through deliberation to achieve common goals, which in this case are educational goals.

The activities of the rakat mufakat have many benefits for the familiarity and solidity of the teacher council in the work environment, the activities are illustrated by deliberations, mutual cooperation, learning communities, early semester meetings and joint training. In addition to formal activities, rakat mufakat gatherings are carried out at school through non-formal activities such as lunch together, cleaning office spaces together and teacher council holidays on semester holidays.

The results of the interview stated that rakat mufakat have several benefits, including providing a comfortable and inclusive work environment, increasing work motivation, increasing active participation and contributions from all members, creating a strategic plan, involvement of all parties in decision-making, minimizing conflicts, increasing collaboration and cooperation and increasing communication skills.

Deliberation accompanied by the involvement and participation of all members will create a positive relationship. Didi Susanto stated that the value of mufakat in the leadership of the principal creates a strong foundation for positive and productive relationships among all members of the school community. The application of these values can have a positive impact on academic achievement, school climate, and developing students' character (Ulfah et al., 2025). Respondents confirmed this by mentioning that the impact of the implementation of mufakat creates a positive relationship, this can be seen from increasing teaching motivation, a conducive environment, and adaptive learning because teachers collaborate with each other in facing updates, especially curriculum updates that are implemented, a sense of mutual ownership will support motivation and work spirit so that it can produce a solution plan to the obstacles that are implemented faced.

The findings of this study are that collaborative leadership is a leadership that respects the opinions of members and involves teachers in decision-making or policy. So it's important for a leader to align the vision and ensure members have a common understanding of the direction of the goals and how to achieve them.

Through deliberation and consensus carried out, leaders can involve all teachers and administrative staff to commit to the vision to be achieved and continue with the preparation of a joint mission which in this case is to overcome the limitations of access to education in schools. This will later give birth to a solutive planning process and ensure that the vision and mission are a mutual agreement and aspirations of all members.

The principal explained that by aligning the vision and forming a mission together, this will make all school residents understand the direction they are going so that it will motivate the teacher council to jointly find solutions to the obstacles faced, namely in overcoming limited access to education. The deliberations carried out aimed to accommodate the aspirations and opinions of the teachers' council in overcoming limited access.

This was conveyed by the principal as for the teachers' opinions regarding the limited access faced are the use of ORBIT from Terkomsel, the use of signal capture devices, collaborating with other schools, holding training for the use of technology, fulfilling facilities and infrastructure, and using concrete learning media. This is confirmed by Juhriansyah who said that through the principal's supervision activities, FGD, learning community, teachers' opinions are always explored to determine a mutually agreed decision.

Collaborative leadership theory underscores the importance of respecting teachers' opinions, ideas and perspectives to achieve a shared vision and encourages leaders to consider decisions based on mutual agreement. According to (Lawrence, 2017) states that collaborative leadership is characterized by shared vision and values, mutual dependence and responsibility, mutual respect, empathy, ambiguity and effective communication and synergy. The statements of teachers involved in the implementation of collaborative leadership support this theory that leaders who value teachers' opinions can overcome barriers to limited access

6.2.2 Research Question 2: How to overcome obstacles in the implementation of the merdeka belajar curriculum in Hulu Sungai Selatan?

Based on the analysis, it was found that the obstacles that are often encountered in implementing merdeka belajar are limited access to education such as the internet which is still not smooth so that it cannot use learning applications, teachers' ability to use learning technology, teachers' understanding of the new curriculum, references that teachers have, and time management.

In this finding, the way for the principal and the teacher council to overcome the obstacles encountered in the implementation of the merdeka belajar curriculum at SD N Halunuk and SD N Panggungan is to invite education staff and the teacher council to collaborate with each other in several activities such as in the learning community, in this case the creation of concrete learning media together, preparing game questions from home, utilizing the environment and local wisdom and collaborating with each other in making administrations such as teaching modules and LKPD for obstacles related to limited internet access. In addition, the solution obtained from the results of the consensus deliberation was also found about the procurement of a device called ORBIT from Telkomsel and a signal capture device.

Referring to the results of the interviews, it was found that all respondents worked hard to overcome the limitations of access to education through continuously improved collaboration. To overcome the obstacles to the implementation of the independent learning curriculum related to human resources, through trainings that are carried out offline, learning community activities that are increasingly encouraged, KKG activities, and simulations of the use of technology, seminars from resource persons brought in from outside schools, and improving teacher literacy.

The conclusions of the researcher's analysis show that principals and teachers take various initiatives to create effective merdeka belajar curriculum learning despite having limited access to education. They took the initiative to overcome it through several actions, namely collaborating with each other through learning community activities, preparing learning plans from home, using concrete learning media, utilizing nature-based learning and local wisdom, working together to create learning administration, providing ORBIT tools from Telkomsel and signal capture tools, In addition to overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the independent curriculum related to human resources, It is carried out through activities related to collaboration such as learning communities, cooperation in creating concrete learning media, offline training, demonstrations and simulations of the use of technology, workshops and improving teacher literacy

6.2.3 Research Question 3: How is the implementation of the merdeka belajar curriculum in Hulu Sungai Selatan Based on the analysis, it was found that the implementation of the merdeka belajar curriculum at SD Negeri Halunuk and SD Negeri Panggungan is continuously improved in schools that have limited access. It can be seen from the results of the interview, the principal and the teacher council already understand the outline of the merdeka belajar curriculum, the learning and assessment used, curriculum development and the implementation of P5. All of them can be implemented through cooperation and collaboration carried out by the principal and the entire board of teachers and education staff.

Referring to the results of the interview, it was found that the implementation of the merdeka belajar curriculum in schools has obstacles from inadequate access. However, there are findings that the planning, organization and implementation of the merdeka belajar curriculum in schools has a complex strategy. Learning that utilizes local wisdom and the surrounding nature is the highlight of this discovery. The projects carried out are based on local wisdom such as regional songs, traditional games and culture in the Hulu Sungai Selatan area. In addition, students are also taught how to grow crops such as those that describe the livelihood of local residents.

According to (Rima, 2024) the simultaneity of the researcher's analysis shows that the application of the merdeka belajar curriculum which refers to the indicators of the outline of the merdeka belajar curriculum, learning and assessment, curriculum development and the implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) can be carried out through the collaboration of all teacher councils and education staff through the use of the environment and local wisdom.

7. Conclusion

This study discusses the application of collaborative leadership of rakat mufakat to overcome the limited access of educators to the implementation of the merdeka belajar curriculum. Findings from interviews and observations showed that respondents described the application of effective collaborative leadership in overcoming limited access in schools. This is because the collaborative leadership of the rakat mufakat has a positive impact on the school environment where schools feel comfortable collaborating with each other and working together to overcome and minimize the access gap faced.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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