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Evaluation of Independent Curriculum Implementation in Student-Centered Mathematics Learning at SMPN 1 Cikidang Sukabumi

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Abstract: The Independent Curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning; therefore, its implementation in Mathematics subjects at SMPN 1 Cikidang, Sukabumu needs to be evaluated. This study aims to examine how teachers design and implement Mathematics learning based on the Independent Curriculum and to reveal how students perceive its benefits and challenges. In addition, this research aims to assess the extent to which the implementation aligns with the core principles of the Independent Curriculum. The research employed a qualitative method with a field study approach, using in-depth interviews with teachers and students of SMPN 1 Cikidang. Data analysis was conducted descriptively through reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results show that teachers are fairly adaptive in designing contextual learning despite facing facility constraints, while students feel more motivated but require intensive guidance. The study concludes that teacher training and adequate facilities are essential to optimize Mathematics learning based on the Independent Curriculum.

Keywords: Independent Curriculum; Student-Centered Learning; Mathematics Learning; and Evaluation

Abstrak: Kurikulum Merdeka menekankan pembelajaran yang berpusat pada peserta didik; oleh karena itu, pelaksanaannya pada mata pelajaran Matematika di SMPN 1 Cikidang, Sukabumi perlu dievaluasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis evaluasi penerapan pembelajaran Matematika berbasis Kurikulum Merdeka oleh guru serta persepsi siswa terhadap manfaat dan tantangannya. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi lapangan, melalui wawancara mendalam dengan guru dan siswa SMPN 1 Cikidang. Analisis data dilakukan secara deskriptif melalui tahap reduksi, penyajian, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa evaluasi pembelajaran guru mampu menerapkan pembelajaran Matematika berbasis Kurikulum Merdeka secara kontekstual meskipun terkendala fasilitas. Sementara itu, siswa menilai pembelajaran tersebut bermanfaat dan memotivasi, namun masih memerlukan pendampingan yang lebih terarah. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pelatihan guru dan ketersediaan fasilitas yang memadai sangat penting untuk mengoptimalkan pembelajaran Matematika berbasis Kurikulum Merdeka.

Kata Kunci: Kurikulum Merdeka; Pembelajaran Berpusat pada Peserta Didik; Pembelajaran Matematika; Evaluasi

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the key pillars in improving the quality of human resources in Indonesia. Efforts to improve educational quality cannot be separated from curriculum changes made by the government. One of the latest policies is the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes competency-based, student-centered learning. This curriculum is designed to provide space for creativity

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and independence according to students' potential. Such changes require both teachers and students to adapt to a new paradigm of learning (Kemdikbud, 2021).

Mathematics, as a fundamental subject, plays a vital role in developing students' critical, logical, and systematic thinking skills. However, various studies indicate that Mathematics is still perceived as a difficult subject, resulting in low motivation among students. The implementation of the Independent Curriculum seeks to overcome this issue by introducing contextual and differentiated learning approaches. Teachers are encouraged to design creative and meaningful learning experiences that relate to real-life contexts, while students are guided to actively construct their own understanding. Contextual learning in Mathematics has been shown to significantly enhance students' motivation and engagement in the classroom (Asmara et al., 2019; Hussein & Khoiruzzadittaqwa, 2024; Khoiruzzadittaqwa & Hussein, 2024). Similarly, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum positively influences students' interest in learning Mathematics, helping to transform traditional teaching perceptions (Lutfiana, 2022; HR & Mandailina, 2024; Musnaini & Kamal, 2025).

Furthermore, the Independent Curriculum provides teachers and schools with greater flexibility in designing instructional strategies suited to students' needs and characteristics. Teachers are given autonomy to select methods, materials, and assessments that align with the principles of student-centered learning, emphasizing empowerment and lifelong learning. In Mathematics, this flexibility is essential to address diverse learning styles and foster higher-order thinking skills. The implementation of the Independent Curriculum has also been found to enhance students' critical reasoning abilities and motivation in Mathematics learning (Nuraeni et al., 2023; Rahim, 2023; Utomo & Hardini, 2023; Utia et al., 2024). Therefore, evaluating its implementation is crucial to ensure that the curriculum's core principles are effectively realized in classroom practices and contribute to achieving the intended educational goals.

Moreover, the Independent Curriculum emphasizes project-based learning that connects academic concepts to real-life issues. This model allows students to develop critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity. In Mathematics, project-based learning can be applied through data analysis, simple financial calculations, or the application of geometry in daily life. Hence, students not only master abstract concepts but also apply them practically. This approach increases the relevance of learning in students' eyes (Wijayanti, 2021; Apriyanti et al., 2023; Mahbubi & Sa'diyah, 2025).

The role of teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum is crucial. Teachers are required not only to deliver content but also to act as facilitators, motivators, and mentors. Teachers' readiness significantly influences students' learning outcomes. At the same time, students are expected to be more active, responsible, and creative. Therefore, evaluation should take into account both teacher and student perspectives (Rahmawati, 2022; Akhyar et al., 2024; Adib, 2025).

In practice, however, various challenges exist. Many teachers struggle to align strategies with the new curriculum requirements. Some schools lack the facilities needed for innovative learning. Students, too, are still adapting to the increased demands for independence. These conditions create a gap between curriculum ideals and classroom realities (Hidayat, 2020).

Further, environmental and cultural factors also affect success. In some areas, limited access to technology hinders contextual and project-based learning. Teachers

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must balance curriculum demands with students' actual conditions. Meanwhile, parental and community support is often insufficient. This highlights the need for evaluative research to measure curriculum effectiveness across school contexts (Fauzan, 2019).

At SMPN 1 Cikidang, Regency, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Mathematics has its own dynamics. Teachers face difficulties designing contextual learning due to limited facilities. Students often begin enthusiastically but struggle when required to be independent. This reveals a gap between curricular expectations and classroom realities. Therefore, evaluation based on teacher and student perspectives is important to find solutions (Suryana, 2022).

Based on the above, this study aims to evaluate the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Mathematics learning at SMPN 1 Cikidang. First, it aims to describe how teachers design and implement learning according to the curriculum principles. Second, it explores students' perceptions of benefits and challenges. Third, it assesses alignment with the Independent Curriculum's main goals. Thus, this study contributes to developing more effective Mathematics learning practices (Yuliana, 2021).

With such flexibility, teachers have greater room to adapt teaching to classroom conditions. They can combine conventional methods with innovative strategies such as problem-based learning, group discussions, or simple technology use. This creates more varied and engaging Mathematics lessons. Students, meanwhile, can learn in ways that suit them without rigid constraints. As a result, Mathematics learning becomes more meaningful, connecting abstract concepts with students' real experiences.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative method with a field study approach, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of the mathematics learning process under the Independent Curriculum at SMPN 1 Cikidang. The research subjects consisted of Mathematics teachers and eighth-grade students directly involved in the implementation of learning. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and documentation, with instruments such as interview guidelines, field notes, and audio recordings.

To ensure data validity, the study applied source and method triangulation so that the obtained information could be verified. Data analysis was carried out interactively in three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The process was repeated throughout the study to identify patterns, meanings, and relevant findings. Thus, the results are expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Mathematics learning at SMPN 1 Cikidang.

Location and Research Subjects

This research was conducted at SMPN 1 Cikidang, Regency, which is one of the public junior high schools implementing the *Merdeka Curriculum* in Mathematics. The selection of this site was based on the consideration that the school is currently in a transition phase of applying the new curriculum, making it relevant to be examined in greater depth. The research focuses on Mathematics learning, as this subject is often

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perceived as difficult by students and requires teachers' creativity in implementing the principles of the *Merdeka Curriculum*.

The presence of the researcher in this qualitative study is crucial, as the researcher acts as the main instrument in the data collection and analysis process. The researcher was directly involved in the field to conduct observations, interviews, and document classroom activities. Intensive interactions with teachers and students were carried out to gain an in-depth understanding of the research context. The researcher's presence also enabled the development of a more open relationship between respondents and the researcher.

The study lasted for two months with a structured schedule that included classroom observations, interviews, and documentation. This duration was considered sufficient to capture the dynamics of Mathematics learning using the *Merdeka Curriculum* repeatedly and consistently. With a relatively extended period, the researcher was able to observe patterns and variations in teachers' instructional strategies as well as students' responses. This allowed for the collection of richer and more in-depth data.

Data Collection Technique

Data collection was carried out using three main techniques: interviews, observations, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore teachers' perspectives on lesson planning, experiences, and challenges in implementing the *Merdeka Curriculum*. Meanwhile, student interviews were aimed at obtaining information regarding their perceptions, motivation, and experiences during Mathematics learning. This technique allowed the researcher to gather subjective data from both parties.

Observations were employed to directly examine teacher and student activities during the learning process. The observation instrument was designed in the form of observation sheets, structured with indicators that covered elements of differentiated learning. These elements included the variety of teaching strategies, student engagement, and the use of relevant media or learning resources. The results of the observations were used to verify interview data and to describe the actual conditions in the classroom.

In addition to interviews and observations, documentation also served as an important data source. The documentation consisted of learning tools such as lesson plans (*Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran* or RPP), modules, and students' work, which were collected for analysis. The analysis focused on how the principles of differentiated learning were integrated into Mathematics materials and activities. This documentation data provided an objective overview of teachers' readiness and students' engagement in the learning process.

To clarify the direction of data collection, interview guidelines for teachers and students were developed, along with observation sheets that encompassed elements of differentiated learning. The teacher interview guidelines included aspects of planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning, while the student interview guidelines focused on motivation, challenges, and learning experiences. The observation guidelines emphasized teacher–student interactions, method application, and student engagement. These guidelines could also be presented in table form, serving as a systematic reference throughout the research process.

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Table 1. Teacher Interview Guidelines

No	Aspect Explored	Indicator	Example Question
1	Lesson Planning	Teacher prepares lesson plans/modules based on the *Merdeka Curriculum*	How do you design Mathematics lessons in accordance with the principles of the *Merdeka Curriculum*?
2	Lesson Implementation	Use of methods, media, and differentiated strategies	What strategies do you use to adapt learning to students' diverse abilities?
3	Assessment & Evaluation	Application of formative/summative competency-based assessments	What forms of assessment do you apply to evaluate Mathematics learning?
4	Challenges & Solutions	Barriers to curriculum implementation and teachers' efforts	What are the main challenges you face in implementing the *Merdeka Curriculum*, and how do you overcome them?

Table 2. Student Interview Guidelines

No	Aspect Explored	Indicator	Example Question
1	Learning Motivation	Enthusiasm in attending lessons	How do you feel when taking Mathematics lessons with the *Merdeka Curriculum*?
2	Learning Experience	Participation in class activities/projects	What activities do you find most interesting in Mathematics lessons?
3	Understanding Concepts	Ability to grasp mathematical concepts	Do you find it easier to understand the material with the current learning approach?
4	Learning Challenges	Difficulties encountered by students	What difficulties do you often face in Mathematics learning with the new curriculum?

Table 3. Observation Guidelines

No	Aspect Observed	Indicator	Observation Focus
1	Teacher Activities	Teacher facilitates differentiated learning	How the teacher opens the lesson, uses varied methods, and applies learning media
2	Student Activities	Student involvement in learning	Student participation in discussions, group work, or projects
3	Teaching Strategies	Application of *Merdeka Curriculum* principles	Differentiation of content, process, and product
4	Use of Learning Resources	Utilization of instructional tools	Use of modules, lesson plans, or other teaching materials
5	Classroom Interaction	Teacher–student and student–student relationships	Classroom atmosphere, communication, and responses to questions

Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed qualitatively using an interactive model comprising three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During data reduction, information from interviews, observations, and documentation was selected, focused, and simplified to highlight relevant findings aligned with research objectives. The data were then displayed in descriptive narratives, tables, and thematic matrices to identify emerging patterns and relationships. Finally, conclusions were formulated based on the analyzed data, verified through triangulation to ensure validity, and used to develop

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recommendations for Mathematics learning under the Merdeka Curriculum. This analytical process was cyclical and continuous, with each stage repeated as new data emerged, reflecting the flexible and iterative nature of qualitative research.

Data Validity

To ensure data trustworthiness, this study applied source and method triangulation by comparing information from teachers, students, and learning documents, as well as cross-checking results from interviews, observations, and documentation. Member checking was also conducted to confirm the accuracy of interview results and interpretations with respondents, minimizing misunderstanding and enhancing data credibility.

Additionally, an audit trail was maintained by systematically documenting field notes, transcripts, and observations to ensure transparency and accountability. The researcher's prolonged engagement in the field allowed a deeper understanding of the research context and fostered trust with participants, encouraging honest responses. Through these combined strategies, the validity and reliability of the research data were effectively ensured.

RESULTS

Analysis of Mathematics Learning Evaluation

Based on interviews with Mathematics teachers at SMPN 1 Cikidang, the learning evaluation strategies applied have already aligned with the principles of the *Merdeka Curriculum*. Teachers used formative assessments in the form of contextual problems and group discussions to measure students' conceptual understanding. Evaluation was also carried out continuously through observations of students' attitudes, skills, and participation in class activities. This indicates a shift from evaluations that focus solely on numerical scores to more comprehensive evaluations emphasizing competencies. Classroom observations revealed that students were more active in expressing opinions when given open-ended questions.

In terms of management, the school supported the implementation of *Merdeka Curriculum*-based evaluations by providing administrative tools and simple assessment instruments. Teachers were given the flexibility to design assessment rubrics according to students' needs. Documentation analysis showed that the learning materials used already included competency indicators relevant to the learning objectives. However, challenges remained, particularly the limited availability of supporting facilities such as digital learning media. Despite this, teachers sought to maximize available resources by utilizing real-life examples from students' surrounding environment.

From the perspective of educators, Mathematics teachers at SMPN 1 Cikidang have attempted to integrate spiritual values, attitudes, and skills into the evaluation process. Teachers assessed not only the final results in the form of grades but also students' learning processes, such as collaboration in groups and activeness in asking questions. Interviews with students indicated that they felt appreciated because evaluations recognized effort and creativity, not merely correct or incorrect answers. Teachers also provided direct feedback after evaluations, allowing students to

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immediately correct mistakes. Consequently, the evaluation process became more humanistic and oriented toward students' development.

Mathematics learning activities based on the *Merdeka Curriculum* at SMPN 1 Cikidang took place in an interactive atmosphere. Observations showed that teachers often began lessons with contextual problems, such as calculating building material requirements for a house or estimating travel costs. Evaluation was conducted through small projects, such as preparing calculation reports or presenting group discussion results. Students appeared more enthusiastic about learning because the material was closely related to their daily lives. This reinforced the role of evaluation as an integral part of the learning process rather than merely a final stage.

The findings of this study indicate that the evaluation process in the Merdeka Curriculum is designed to be authentic and holistic. Authentic evaluation emphasizes students' real abilities demonstrated through learning activities rather than solely their performance on written tests. Through this approach, teachers are able to comprehensively assess students' attitudes, skills, and knowledge, ensuring that learning outcomes reflect both competence and character development. The evaluation practices at SMPN 1 Cikidang show that such an approach effectively enhances student engagement and participation in learning.

Moreover, the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum-based evaluation at SMPN 1 Cikidang highlights the importance of providing constructive feedback as part of the learning process. Feedback is not merely a form of correction but serves as motivation to build students' confidence and encourage continuous improvement. Incorporating opportunities for student reflection makes the evaluation process more meaningful and supports the development of independent learning habits. Overall, these evaluation practices align with the core objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasize meaningful learning, active participation, and continuous growth.

Effectiveness of Learning Evaluation Implementation

Interviews with Mathematics teachers revealed that *Merdeka Curriculum*-based evaluation has had a positive impact on students' development, particularly in the spiritual dimension. Teachers reported that assessment was not only focused on test results but also included honesty, discipline, and students' sense of responsibility during the learning process. Classroom observations supported this finding, as students were seen to be more orderly in collaborating and more respectful of their peers' opinions. Attitude-based assessment encouraged students to become more aware of the importance of moral values in learning. Thus, evaluation helped balance academic and spiritual aspects.

In terms of vocational skills, students at SMPN 1 Cikidang demonstrated greater ability to apply mathematical concepts in everyday life. Teachers used project-based evaluations such as calculating household expenses or measuring the area of the schoolyard. Through these evaluations, students were trained to connect mathematical content with real-life contexts. Documentation analysis showed student project reports that included calculation steps and group reflections. This provided evidence that evaluation contributed to improving students' practical skills.

Students interviewed also stated that they felt more appreciated because assessment included effort, creativity, and teamwork. Some admitted feeling more confident in expressing their opinions when evaluations were conducted through group presentations. Observations supported these statements, showing that students who

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were usually passive began to speak up in class. With this model of evaluation, Mathematics learning was no longer perceived as a burden but as a means of sharpening life skills. These impacts illustrated the tangible effectiveness of evaluation implementation.

Furthermore, evaluation results helped teachers map students' abilities more comprehensively. Teachers could identify weaknesses in cognitive aspects while also paying attention to character development. Documentation analysis showed teacher records on students' attitudes and skills at the end of each lesson. With this information, teachers were able to provide follow-up in the form of special guidance or additional motivation. Evaluation functioned not only as a final measurement but also as a diagnostic tool for continuous improvement.

These findings show that learning evaluation in the Merdeka Curriculum is designed to foster both competency and character development. A comprehensive evaluation approach allows students to achieve academic success while also nurturing positive attitudes and essential 21st-century skills. Such balanced assessment ensures that knowledge, attitudes, and skills are equally measured to support the formation of the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*. Accordingly, the evaluation practices at SMPN 1 Cikidang reflect the core objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum, emphasizing holistic student growth.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of evaluation implementation at SMPN 1 Cikidang demonstrates its significant contribution to shaping students into adaptive and resilient individuals prepared for future challenges. Evaluations that emphasize spiritual values, social competence, and practical skills have provided students with meaningful and relevant learning experiences. This approach enhances learning motivation and critical thinking abilities, indicating that Mathematics evaluation under the Merdeka Curriculum effectively promotes students' overall quality in a holistic manner.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Interviews with Mathematics teachers indicated that internal factors supporting learning evaluation include teachers' commitment to consistently implementing the principles of the *Merdeka Curriculum*. Teachers made efforts to design assessment instruments that suited students' needs and provided regular feedback. From the students' perspective, their enthusiasm for learning through more contextual approaches became a key strength that facilitated the implementation of evaluation. Classroom observations revealed an interactive and conducive learning atmosphere, especially when students worked in groups. Documentation analysis reinforced this finding, showing students' reflection notes that indicated an increase in learning motivation.

Nevertheless, both internal and external factors posed challenges in the implementation of Mathematics learning evaluation. Internally, teachers still faced limitations in utilizing learning technology, as not all educators had sufficient digital competence. Externally, the school's limited facilities—such as the availability of projectors and internet access—presented obstacles of their own. Interviews with students also revealed that some of them experienced difficulties adjusting to project-based evaluations, which required intensive collaboration. Documentation of school activities further indicated the existence of gaps between curriculum planning and classroom practice.

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These findings are consistent with previous studies stating that the success of Merdeka Curriculum implementation is highly determined by teacher readiness, the availability of facilities, and adequate learning environment support. Effective evaluation requires a combination of teachers' internal commitment and external support in the form of infrastructure that facilitates the learning process. In addition, students' difficulties in adapting to the new evaluation model highlight the importance of intensive guidance so that they not only understand concepts but are also skilled in applying them. This aligns with the view that authentic assessment can only succeed if it is supported by continuous teacher guidance and the availability of relevant learning resources.

DISCUSSION

Evaluation of Mathematic Learning

The findings of this study indicate that the mathematics learning evaluation strategies at SMPN 1 Cikidang are already aligned with the principles of the *Merdeka Curriculum*. Teachers implemented formative assessments through contextual problems, discussions, and observations of students' attitudes during learning. These strategies positioned evaluation not only as an end result but also as part of the learning process. Classroom observations showed that students were more active when given real-world, problem-based evaluations. Thus, the evaluation strategies supported the creation of more participatory learning.

In addition, documentation of learning tools demonstrated that teachers developed assessment rubrics emphasizing a balanced focus on attitudes, skills, and knowledge. Educators acted as facilitators, guiding students to achieve competencies rather than merely complete exercises. Interviews with students confirmed that they felt more valued because their effort and creativity were also assessed. These findings are consistent with the perspective that authentic assessment helps students connect academic concepts with learning experiences (Maryani, 2019). In other words, the evaluation strategies implemented by teachers were in line with the policy direction of the *Merdeka Curriculum*.

Effectiveness of Learning Evaluation Implementation

In terms of effectiveness, Mathematics learning evaluation at SMPN 1 Cikidang has contributed to improving student quality, particularly in the spiritual aspect. Teachers assessed honesty, discipline, and responsibility as part of the learning evaluation. Observations showed that students were more orderly and respectful when working in groups. Students also admitted feeling more motivated to learn because assessment included positive attitudes, not merely exam results. This demonstrates that evaluation effectively balances academic mastery with character development.

The vocational skills aspect also developed through simple project-based evaluations, such as calculating household expenses or measuring the area of the schoolyard. Documentation of student reports revealed that they were able to apply mathematical concepts in real-life situations. Teachers stated that these evaluations helped students think critically and gain confidence in presenting their work. This effectiveness is consistent with the view that contextual assessment enhances students' 21st-century skills, including communication, collaboration, and problem-solving

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(Setiawan, 2020). Thus, the implementation of evaluation at SMPN 1 Cikidang has proven relevant in holistically improving students' learning quality.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

The internal factors supporting the implementation of evaluation include teacher commitment, student enthusiasm, and flexible school administrative support. Interviews with teachers confirmed that they strive to adapt evaluation instruments to students' needs despite limited resources. Classroom observations revealed that students were actively engaged in evaluation activities, demonstrating high motivation. However, external factors such as limited technological facilities and insufficient support from the learning environment remain major obstacles. In line with these findings, research indicates that the success of curriculum implementation is strongly influenced by teacher readiness and the availability of facilities and infrastructure (Lestari, 2018).

Furthermore, several students stated that project-based evaluations felt challenging because they required collaboration and creativity skills that they were not yet accustomed to practicing. School documentation also showed a gap between curriculum planning and its implementation in the field. These challenges demand intensive guidance from teachers and ongoing training for educators. This aligns with the view that authentic evaluation requires continuous support to help students develop optimally (Pratama, 2022). Therefore, the success of evaluation at SMPN 1 Cikidang largely depends on the combination of internal and external supporting factors that complement each other.

CONCLUSION

The research findings indicate that the evaluation strategy for Mathematics learning based on the Merdeka Curriculum at SMPN 1 Cikidang has been implemented in line with educational policies that emphasize authentic assessment. Teachers applied evaluations that balance knowledge, attitudes, and skills, enabling students to become more active and motivated. Project-based evaluations also proved effective in linking mathematical concepts with real-life situations relevant to students' daily lives. Thus, the evaluation strategy supports the achievement of more meaningful learning.

In addition, the implementation of evaluation has contributed to improving student quality in aspects of spirituality, discipline, and vocational skills. Supporting factors include teacher commitment, student enthusiasm, and the school's flexible management. However, challenges such as limited facilities and the readiness of some students still need to be addressed through intensive guidance. Therefore, strengthening infrastructure and enhancing teacher competence are key to optimizing Mathematics learning evaluation based on the Merdeka Curriculum.

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