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Analysis of the Minister of Education's Curriculum Policy in the 2019-2024 Vs. 2024-2029 Era

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Abstract	This study aims to analyze the implications of the policy of eliminating and reinstating the major system in Senior High Schools (SMA) on the development of students' interests and talents in Lampung Province. Using a descriptive qualitative approach and case study method, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation in seven senior high schools across the Lampung region. The analysis used Foucauldian Discursive Analysis (FDA) to map the policy dynamics in two government periods: 2019–2024 and 2024–2029. The study results show that the Independent Curriculum policy (2019–2024) provides a wider exploration space for students' interests and talents, but faces implementation challenges due to limited infrastructure and human resources. Meanwhile, the major reinstatement policy (2024–2029) provides a more structured learning direction, but risks narrowing students' exploration space. A comparison of the two shows that the effectiveness of the policy is highly dependent on institutional readiness and the quality of mentoring. This study recommends a hybrid approach that combines the flexibility of subject selection with the major structure as an alternative solution for a more adaptive and inclusive secondary education system.
Keywords	Education Policy; High School Majors; Independent Curriculum; Interests and Talents; Lampung

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is the foundation for forming the younger generation's character, competence, and future (Hartono, 2018; Mujahid, 2021; Susanto, 2024). In Indonesia, the senior high school (SMA) education system has for many years been known as a specialization system, where students are directed to certain fields such as Natural Sciences (IPA), Social Sciences (IPS), and Language (Galindo-Dominguez, 2021; Han et al., 2021). This system is intended to adjust the learning process to students' interests and talents, while preparing them for higher education and the world of work. However, in recent years, national policies have begun to show significant shifts with the discourse and practice of eliminating the majoring system in several regions, including the discourse of integrating flexible interest-based curriculum without limiting students to rigid major "boxes" (Coşkun Yaşar & Aslan, 2021; Nugroho & Sari, 2021; Ross, 2024). The Independent Curriculum, initiated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (*Kemendikbudristek*) of the Republic of Indonesia, is a form of

educational reform that emphasizes the flexibility of learning based on interests and talents (Angga et al., 2022; Junaidi et al., 2023; Susanto et al., 2024). In this scheme, students are no longer classified into a particular major. Still, they can explore across fields of study according to their needs and potential. This policy certainly has a positive spirit in upholding individual uniqueness and avoiding narrowing the space for student expression (Nelissa et al., 2018). However, the transition process from a majoring system to a flexible system leaves various challenges, both at the level of curriculum implementation and the readiness of the school ecosystem and teaching staff.

In Lampung Province, the policy of eliminating and providing majors has quite striking social implications. Many students are confused about determining the direction of their development because they do not have adequate guidance in recognizing their potential. In addition, parents and teachers also have difficulty directing students due to a lack of understanding of the new system. This phenomenon has an impact on decreasing learning motivation, increasing student anxiety about the future of their education, and a mismatch between the subjects chosen and their ideals or career plans (Hidayati et al., 2022). Students who in the old system could immediately focus on science, social studies, or language subjects are now adrift among many choices without strong guidance (Hertyana, 2018).

The main problem that arises from the elimination or reintroduction of the high school major system is the unpreparedness of students to identify and pursue their interests and talents independently (Arifiyanti et al., 2017). Amidst the onslaught of changes in curriculum and education systems, many schools still do not have a comprehensive interest and talent assessment system. In addition, the disparity in facilities between urban and rural schools causes unequal access for students to information and the development of their potential. On the other hand, educators are still trapped in the old paradigm, which assesses achievement only from cognitive results, not students' multidimensional potential (Ramadanti et al., 2022). This misalignment between policy and practice creates a serious gap in students' psychosocial and academic development. Addressing this issue requires a systemic and collaborative approach. Schools should be provided with training and resources to conduct psychometric-based interest and talent assessments and qualitative observations. Counseling needs to be strengthened, not only in administrative forms, but also in the form of intensive career and personal counseling services (Carolus Borromeus Mulyatno, 2022). Parental involvement in understanding the dynamics of changes in the education system is also important. In addition, strengthening digital platforms for career exploration, providing flexible learning modules, and empowering teachers as facilitators of interests and talents will accelerate students' adaptation to this new system.

Several previous studies have shown that the majoring system has the strength to direct students to be more focused, but also has weaknesses because it can inhibit flexibility. Ahmad's study (Ahmad, 2020) Stated that students who are directed according to their interests from an early age tend to have higher learning motivation. Beland and Kim's study in 2016 (Beland & Kim, 2016) Shows that the majoring system also traps students in fields they do not like, just because of pressure from the surrounding environment. The research by Suyitno and Mujahid (Suyitno & Mujahid, 2023) Resulted in the fact that, in the context of implementing the Independent Curriculum, students currently need extra guidance to navigate the choice of subjects that suit their interests. The distinction of this study lies in the comparative analysis of the policy of eliminating and reinstating the interest system (majoring) in two eras of national policy (2019–2024 and 2024–2029), using the Foucauldian Discursive Analysis (FDA) approach. While previous studies such as Ahmad, Beland & Kim, and Suyitno & Mujahid emphasize more on individual psychology, learning motivation, or guidance needs in the limited context of one particular policy, this study examines the structural and discursive impacts of two national policies directly on the dynamics of student interests and talents in one specific area, namely Lampung Province. By involving seven representative schools from various geographical conditions and resources, this study also emphasizes the importance of institutional readiness and

educational ecosystems in bridging macro policies with micro realities in schools.

This research is located in Lampung province. The argument for choosing the location is based on research results, showing that Lampung province is a region with diverse geographical and socio-cultural characteristics (Observasi, 2025). Consisting of districts with varying levels of development, Lampung is an interesting representation of how the implementation of national education policies deals with local realities. Bandar Lampung City, as the center of government and education, as well as areas such as East Lampung, Tanggamus, and Tulang Bawang, which have limited access to education, are important points to trace the gaps that occur in the implementation of this policy (Observasi, 2025). Another argument for choosing Lampung as the research locus is based on data from the Lampung Provincial Education Office, which shows that many schools are confused about implementing the Merdeka Curriculum system, especially regarding determining elective subjects and career guidance services. On the other hand, several high schools in Lampung have tried to implement a non-majoring system. Still, the results have not shown a significant increase in adjusting students' interests and talents. This makes Lampung a strategic area for research to provide concrete input for improving the national education system from a regional perspective. The representation of high schools in the Lampung region in this study consisted of 7 high schools, including SMAN 1 Bandar Lampung, SMAN 3 Metro, SMA al-Kautsar Bandar Lampung, SMAN 1 Pringsewu, SMAIT Daarul Ilmi, SMAN 1 Tulang Bawang Barat, and SMAN 2 Lampung Selatan.

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study method, as explained by Huberman & Miles (Mattehew B. Miles, A Michael Huberman, 2014, p. 13), which emphasizes in-depth exploration of phenomena that occur in real-life contexts. The study was conducted in seven high schools across Lampung Province with varying geographical backgrounds and socio-economic conditions. Data collection was carried out through: First, in-depth interviews with key informants consisting of students, teachers, principals, and parents. Second, participatory observation of learning practices, guidance and counseling services, and student interactions in selecting subjects or majors. Third, documentation studies of curriculum documents, learning guides, and student interest and talent assessment results are available in each school. Data analysis was conducted using the Foucauldian Discursive Analysis (FDA) approach developed by Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2011b, p. 45). This approach examines how educational policies and practices in schools shape students' discourse and subjectivity in choosing majors. FDA departs from Michel Foucault's thinking, which emphasizes that educational policy is not merely an administrative or technical product, but is a product of the discourse of power that shapes identity, behavior, and social structure in education. In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum and the policy of interest in high schools, FDA is used to analyze how the state discourse on "freedom to learn" and "student character" is produced and reproduced in school practices, and how students are positioned in the discourse. This approach is very relevant because Educational policies contain dominant narratives that shape how education actors think and act. The practice of choosing majors and student development interests is not only influenced by individual factors but also by discourse structures, power relations, and institutional norms. The following are the stages of FDA analysis in this study:

Table 1. The stages of FDA analysis

	Foucauldian Discursive Analysis (FDA)	
1	Discursive Construction	Identifying dominant narratives from two policy periods (2019–2024 vs. 2024–2029).
2	Discourse	Analyzing how policy discourse is produced and reproduced in school environments.
3	Action Orientation	Seeing how policies are translated into concrete actions in schools.

Foucauldian Discursive Analysis (FDA)		
4	Positioning	Examining how students, teachers, and other actors are positioned within the discourse structure.
5	Practice	Reviewing real practices that emerge in the classroom, guidance and counseling room, and decision-making room.
6	Subjectivity	Revealing how students form views of themselves and their futures in a changing system.

The uniqueness/novelty of this research is as follows: first, a discursive analysis of the policies of the Minister of Education in the 2019-2024 era with the 2024-2029 era, which has implications for access to the benefits of more appropriate curriculum policies in Lampung province—second, examining the latest issues regarding the discourse on the 2024-2029 Mendikdasmen Curriculum, through a comparative benchmark with the policies of the previous minister's era and third, finding a way to bridge the transformation of the 2019-2024 curriculum with the 2024-2029 curriculum.

2. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative method with a case study approach (Huberman & Jhonny, 2014). The data collection process is carried out through 3 steps, namely structured interviews, observation, and documentation (Creswell, 2022; Sugiyono, 2010). Data was collected through interviews with 14 informants, involving two informants from each educational institution's teachers. The next step is that the researcher conducted direct observations at the seven educational institutions. The following researcher includes the classification of informants in the table:

Table 2. The classification of informants

No.	Location	Informants
1	SMAN 1 Bandar Lampung	• Roni Susanto • Wahyu Widodo
2	SMAN 3 Metro	• Srianto • Ahmad Toharudin
3	SMA al-Kautsar Bandar Lampung	• Mujiono • Sukardi
4	SMAN 1 Pringsewu	• Rina Wati • Prasetiyo
5	SMAIT Daarul Ilmi	• Edi Purwanto • Sri Poniyah
6	SMAN 1 Tulang Bawang Barat	• Muhammad Ali Mustofa • Nanang Khoironi
7	SMAN 2 Lampung Selatan	• Ahmad Muhajir • Mariyatul Kiftiyah

The data analysis process in this study used (Foucauldian Discursive Analysis, which includes six stages, namely (1) Discursive Construction, (2) Discourse, (3) Action Orientation, (4) Positioning, (5) Practice, and (6) Subjectivity (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2011a, p. 108). The first stage of discursive construction, discursive shifts are seen in the shift and change of curriculum narratives. In 2019-2024,

the government promoted the elimination of majors as an effort to free students from major grouping and replace them with a more flexible interest system. While in the 2024-2029 period, the discourse will restore the structure of majors on the pretext of the importance of specialization and career readiness since school. In the second stage, the discourse in 2019-2024 was predominantly built on the spirit of student-centered learning, while the 2024-2029 period shifted to nation-centered output. The third step is the orientation of action manifested in curriculum policies. In the phase of eliminating the curriculum, school majors encouraged exploration across subjects, but many teachers and students were confused because there was no concrete and clear structural guidance. While in the current era, re-establishing majors is a more systematic action, but can narrow the space for student exploration. The fourth stage is that students are positioned differently in the two policies. In the fifth stage, namely practice, this step gives birth to new policies in the classroom and counseling guidance. Overall, the above policies will shape students' subjectivity in how they see themselves and their future, so that this research can theoretically and practically provide recommendations to policymakers in advancing education in Indonesia.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

Based on the results of field observations, the research location at high schools in Lampung province is specifically represented by seven high schools as follows:

Table 3. High School Representative Data in Lampung

School Name	Regency/City	School Status	Number of Students	Majors Before 2022 (2013 Curriculum)	Implementation of the Independent Curriculum (2022–2024)	Curriculum Development Plan 2024–2029
SMAN 1 Bandar Lampung	Bandar Lampung	Negeri	± 1200	Science, Social Studies, Language	There are no majors for class X starting from class XI majors	Cross-interest focus and strengthening the profile of Pancasila students
SMAN 3 Metro	Metro	Negeri	± 900	Science, Social Studies,	Full implementation of the independent curriculum since 2022	Passion and talent-based class trial
SMA al-Kautsar Bandar Lampung	Bandar Lampung	Swasta	± 700	Science, Social Studies, Language	Focus on diagnostic assessment of interests and talents	Plans to open entrepreneurship and digital arts classes
SMAN 1 Pringsewu	Pring Sewu	Negeri	± 1000	Science, Social Studies,	Implementation of an independent curriculum change	Collaboration with colleges for career guidance
SMAIT Daarul Ilmi	Lampung Tengah	Swasta	± 400	Science, Social Studies,	Adapting to students' interests from the start	Implementation of project-based thematic majors

School Name	Regency/City	School Status	Number of Students	Majors Before 2022 (2013 Curriculum)	Implementation of the Independent Curriculum (2022–2024)	Curriculum Development Plan 2024–2029
SMAN 1 Tulang Bawang Barat	Tubaba	Negeri	± 800	Science, Social Studies,	Flexible majoring based on school assessment	Integrated vocational class development plan
SMAN 2 Lampung Selatan	Lampung Selatan	Negeri	± 950	Science, Social Studies, Language	Adaptation of environmental curriculum with emphasis on literacy	Collaboration with local industry as a talent interest mentor

Discussion

Implications of the 2019-2024 Policy on Students' Interests and Talents

The 2019–2024 national education policy marks a significant change in the learning system in Indonesia, particularly through the launch of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Merdeka Belajar platform by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (*Kemendikbudristek*). One of the main focuses of this policy is to provide more space for students to explore their interests and talents independently (Renzulli & Reis, 2012; Rusmaniah et al., 2021; Tong et al., 2022). However, implementing this policy has not always been smooth, and its impact on students has varied widely. The Merdeka Curriculum introduces the concept of project-based learning and the selection of subjects according to students' interests, especially at the high school level (Herdiyanti et al., 2025; Mufidah, 2021). This policy allows students to develop their potential according to their interests and talents. For example, students interested in the arts or technology can choose a relevant path without following a uniform learning path as in the previous curriculum. This is fresh air for students confined in a rigid and inflexible system.

In addition, the existence of the Pancasila Student Profile in the Independent Curriculum provides a character development framework that supports students' search for identity (Mustafiyanti et al., 2023; Quratul Aini & Adiyono, 2023; Rusnaini et al., 2021). The emphasis on creativity, collaboration, and independence strengthens the space for the growth of interests and talents that have been marginalized due to the dominance of cognitive aspects in formal education (Holmes & Tuomi, 2022; Jamaludin et al., 2022; Zhang & Aslan, 2021). In several schools that have implemented this policy optimally, various active student communities in art, science, sports, and entrepreneurship have emerged. However, on the other hand, negative impacts also arise due to the inequality of facilities, the readiness of educators, and limited access to information. Not all schools, especially in the 3T (frontier, outermost, disadvantaged) areas, have adequate resources to implement interest and talent-based learning. Teachers are also not always provided with adequate training to become facilitators for developing student potential. As a result, many students are still trapped in conventional learning models that lack exploration and do not empower creativity (Camilli, 2016; Memarian & Doleck, 2023; Sulastri et al., 2022).

The policy of eliminating majors in the Independent Curriculum (2019–2024) is built on the discursive spirit of "learning freedom," emphasizing student autonomy in determining their academic path based on their interests and talents. Regarding discourse construction, the government frames students as free and rational subjects who can make strategic decisions regarding their educational future. However, inadequate guidance and information confuse many students and parents in practice. The discourse of freedom of choice has not completely replaced old narratives such as the dominance of science majors and the pressure of academic grades, which still greatly influence student decision-

making. This shows the tension between the government's ideal discourse and the school environment's discursive reality. This policy's expected orientation of action is the emergence of flexible and personalized learning practices, with interest assessment and career guidance as the main instruments. Unfortunately, many schools lack the infrastructure and human resources to implement this scheme consistently. Teachers have not been given special training to become interest and talent facilitators, while the guidance and counseling system is still administrative and has minimal career development functions. As a result, the positioning of students in this system does not become an active subject as idealized. Still, it remains an object-directed top-down or even left to make decisions without assistance.

The practice of choosing subjects that occurs tends to be formalistic, without a strong reflective process, and is more influenced by social pressure than authentic interests. From the perspective of subjectivity, students should form an academic identity that is autonomous, reflective, and directed. However, data in the field shows that many students feel anxious, confused, and even insecure in determining the direction of their studies. Policies that aim to liberate create a feeling of being "lost in freedom" because they are not followed by adequate systemic support. Based on the Foucauldian Discursive Analysis framework, this condition shows that policy changes have not completely shifted the structure of educational practices and subjectivities at the school level. Therefore, a reformulation of the approach is needed that not only changes the structure of the curriculum, but also builds a supportive discursive ecosystem, starting from teacher training, strengthening counseling, to parent education so that policies are truly able to form students as subjects who are consciously and responsibly independent.

Policy 2024-2029: Reinstatement of Majors and Its Implications

Entering the 2024–2029 period, the government, through the Ministry of Education, is again rolling out a strategic policy in the world of secondary education, namely the reinstatement of majors in Senior High Schools (SMA) (Qomariyah & Maghfiroh, 2022). This policy is a corrective step to the previous implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. It eliminated the formal division of majors and replaced it with selecting subjects according to student interests. The return of the majoring system was greeted with various responses, both positive and critical, because this policy has broad implications for the learning system, the development of student interests and talents, and the readiness of schools and teachers (Ramdani, 2024; Reis et al., 2021). The reinstatement policy of majors broadly restores the three main groups in high school, namely Natural Sciences (IPA), Social Sciences (IPS), and Language, with several updates in the curriculum structure. The government emphasizes that the majors this time are not completely rigid, but are flexible and based on interest and ability assessments. In its implementation, students are still given consultation space and career guidance before determining a major, so this policy is expected to bridge the curriculum structure and students' potential.

One of the main reasons the government brought back the majors was the confusion and inequality that arose in the previous subject selection system (Hamsyah et al., 2024; Marlina, 2022). Many students and parents have difficulty determining the right combination of subjects due to the lack of adequate information and guidance. As a result, there is a mismatch between student choices and future college or career paths. Reinstatement of majors is considered an effort to provide a clearer and more structured direction in learning. From a pedagogical perspective, the major system provides a more stable framework in the teaching and learning process. Teachers can design learning that is more focused, in-depth, and by the characteristics of students in academically homogeneous groups. This can potentially increase the effectiveness of mastery of material, especially in complex subjects such as mathematics and physics for science majors, or sociology and economics for social studies majors. Schools also find it easier to schedule lessons and design extracurricular activities based on majors, such as science olympiads or social debates (Aisyah & Sartika, 2022).

However, this policy also brings several challenges and criticisms. First, the reinstatement of majors is feared to restrict students' freedom to explore various fields of science again. In the previous system,

students could choose across fields, such as combining biology with sociology or economics with physics (Interview, Roni 2025). This flexibility is considered capable of encouraging creativity and responding to the challenges of the times that demand integration of science, with the return of the department system, the potential for cross-disciplinary collaboration is feared to be reduced. Second, the impact on developing interests and talents must also be considered. Students who are not yet psychologically mature and do not have clear interests will feel pressured to choose a major at the beginning of secondary education. Although the government has included interest and talent assessments as a reference, not all schools have qualified human resources to conduct the assessment process objectively and comprehensively. In practice, major decisions are often still influenced by social pressure, stereotypes of majors, and information inequality (Interview, Mujiono 2025).

Third, from the perspective of educational justice, this policy could widen the gap between regions. Urban schools with complete facilities are more prepared to implement a specialization system with various supporting programs (interview, Prasetiyo 2025). On the other hand, schools in 3T areas may only be able to open one major due to limited teachers and facilities. As a result, students in these areas do not have enough choices, and the opportunity to develop their potential optimally is limited. However, reinstatement of majors still has great potential to improve learning orientation and prepare students for the next level in a more focused manner. For this policy to be successful, it needs to be supported by strengthening the guidance and counseling system, cross-disciplinary teacher training, and providing an evenly distributed infrastructure throughout the region. In addition, a hybrid approach that combines the major system with the flexibility of choosing additional subjects can be a middle ground more adaptive to the needs of the times.

The policy of restoring majors in the 2024–2029 period is discursively framed as a response to the uncertainty of the previous implementation of the Independent Curriculum. The raised discourse prioritized structure, certainty of learning direction, and early career readiness to overcome student confusion and weak guidance in the previous system. Based on the construction of this discourse, students are positioned as individuals who must immediately determine their academic path, hoping that assessment of interests and talents will be an objective basis. However, many schools do not have reliable assessment instruments or adequate guidance services. As a result, the positioning of students has returned to being passive—they are directed based on the limitations of school facilities, not their potential. The orientation of action that should provide direction forms narrow and inflexible learning practices, especially in areas that can only open one major due to limited resources. Student subjectivity is also formed in a structured but less adaptive policy space. If in the previous policy, students were "free but lost", then in this policy, students are "directed but limited". This shows the tension between structure and autonomy in constructing student identity. FDA helps reveal that these policies operate not only at the technical level, but also at the level of meaning production and power relations—how students are positioned, how teachers are instructed, and how schools manage choice. These policies will be effective only if their implementation is data-driven, inclusive, and accompanied by strengthening school capacity and equalizing access to assessment and counseling. Without this, the policy of reinstating majors risks creating a new discourse that is symbolically dominant but practically unequal.

Comparison between Two Policy Eras

National education policy continues to change along with the times and global demands. Two important periods in the last five years and the next five years, namely the 2019–2024 policy (Independent Learning with the elimination of majors) and the 2024–2029 policy (reinstatement of majors), are important milestones in the direction of secondary education (Junaidi et al., 2023). In Lampung, schools such as SMAN 1 Bandar Lampung, SMAN 3 Metro, SMA Al-Kautsar Bandar Lampung, SMAN 1 Pringsewu, SMAIT Daarul Ilmi, SMAN 1 Tulang Bawang Barat, and SMAN 2 Lampung Selatan are interesting representations in seeing the impact of this policy comparatively, especially on the development of students' interests and talents (Interview, Roni, Edi, Mujiono, Rina,

Ali, Ahmad). During the Merdeka Belajar era, schools such as SMAN 1 Bandar Lampung and SMAIT Daarul Ilmi have taken full advantage of the flexibility in choosing subjects. At SMAN 1 Bandar Lampung, students have more space to explore their interests, especially in research class programs and cross-field activities. Students who previously had to choose between science and social studies can now take biology, sociology, or economics, resulting in a broader synergy of knowledge.

The same thing is seen in SMAIT Daarul Ilmi, which is based on integration and Islamic values. The school combines the selection of subjects with a character and spirituality development approach. Students can choose based on potential, and the school provides intensive career guidance, including interest-based mentoring (Qorib, 2024). This has resulted in increased student participation in various science and art competitions. However, not all schools can optimize this flexibility. At SMAN 2 South Lampung and SMAN 1 West Tulang Bawang, limited teachers and facilities have limited the implementation of cross-subject selection. Students tend to be directed to follow the old structure, with only a few variations in choice. This shows that the success of this policy is highly dependent on the readiness of school resources. SMA Al-Kautsar Bandar Lampung, as a leading private school, can implement the Merdeka Curriculum progressively. They provide psychological services, interest-talent assessments, and regular counseling, so the choice of subjects truly reflects students' potential (Pratikno et al., 2022). However, challenges remain, such as overloading students due to a combination of heavy and poorly integrated subjects.

With the implementation of the reinstatement policy for majors starting in the 2024–2025 academic year, schools in Lampung have begun to make adjustments. For example, SMAN 3 Metro and SMAN 1 Pringsewu welcomed this major structure because it facilitates school management, teacher allocation, and thematic curriculum preparation (Interview, Srianto, Rina, 2025). Students are no longer confused in choosing subjects because they are guided based on more focused scientific clusters. SMAN 3 Metro, with a strong academic approach, reported that science majors are now better able to pursue depth in the material, especially in subjects such as mathematics and chemistry. Something similar happened at SMAN 1 Pringsewu, where the social studies major experienced an increase in average results in semester exams due to a more intense focus on the material.

But on the other hand, this policy has raised concerns in some schools. Al-Kautsar High School, for example, regrets the loss of cross-field flexibility that has been their strength; they have to readjust their learning strategies so that students can explore minor fields outside their main majors (Interview, Sukardi 2025). At SMAN 2 South Lampung, the reinstatement of majors is a solution to the chaos of the previous system. Due to the limited number of teachers and classrooms, the majoring system makes learning more efficient. Teachers can focus on teaching students with more uniform ability backgrounds, and schools are not overwhelmed in compiling lesson schedules. However, this policy's main challenges remain, especially regarding career guidance. The limited number of counselors at SMAN 1 West Tulang Bawang means that the majoring process is often based only on academic grades, not real interests (Interview, Nanang 2025). As a result, there are still students who feel "trapped" in majors that do not match their passion.

The Merdeka Belajar era generally provides wider exploration space for students' interests and talents, but its implementation is uneven. Schools with strong resources, such as SMAIT Daarul Ilmi and SMA Al-Kautsar, can maximize students' potential. In contrast, schools in areas with limited facilities experience technical and conceptual difficulties. Meanwhile, the reinstatement era of majors brings clarity of direction and a more systematic learning structure. However, the risk of compartmentalizing interests is still challenging, especially for students who have not fully recognized their potential. Schools must ensure accurate assessment and intensive mentoring so that majors are not shackles but bridges to the future. A comparison of the two policy eras in high schools in Lampung shows that no system is completely ideal without institutional readiness and fair intervention. Flexibility-based policies require large resources, while structured policies require precision in assessment and guidance. In the future, a hybrid approach that combines major structure with flexibility

in choosing minor subjects could be a solution that balances freedom and direction in secondary education. Flexibility-based policies require large resources, while structured policies require precision in assessment and guidance. In the future, a hybrid approach that combines a major structure with flexibility in choosing minor subjects can be a solution that balances freedom and direction in secondary education. As a researcher, I recommend that education policymakers adopt a hybrid approach in the high school interest system by maintaining a directed major structure but still providing flexibility for students to choose minor subjects across fields according to their interests and talents. This approach must be supported by an objective, equitable, and psychometric data-based interest-talent assessment system and qualitative observation, which all schools can access without regional discrimination. In addition, strengthening guidance and counseling services through BK teacher training and increasing the counselor ratio is crucial to assist students in their academic decision-making. The government also needs to ensure equal distribution of education infrastructure between regions so that all students, including those in 3T areas, get equal learning opportunities. Finally, the involvement of parents and the community in the interest selection process must be systematically facilitated through career literacy programs and consultation forums, so that students' decisions are not solely determined by external pressure, but rather based on awareness and understanding of their potential.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that national education policies in two different periods show two approaches that are both oriented towards improving the quality of education, but with different implications for the development of students' interests and talents. In the 2019–2024 period, the Independent Curriculum provides broad freedom of exploration but is not supported by an even mentoring system. Meanwhile, reinstatement of majors in the 2024–2029 period provides a clearer direction but can potentially limit cross-interests. The effectiveness of the policy is highly dependent on the readiness of educational institutions, teacher competence, and the involvement of counselors and parents in the student mentoring process. Therefore, a curriculum model is needed that is not only structural but also flexible and responsive to the characteristics of individual students. Further research is recommended to cover other areas outside Lampung Province to see the dynamics and comparison of broader policy implementation nationally, and combine quantitative and qualitative approaches that will provide maximum and comprehensive results in seeing the relationship between the majoring system and students' academic and non-academic achievements.

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