



Implementation of the Learning Process Standard at the Elementary School Level: A Qualitative Case Study of Planning, Implementation, and Assessment Practices at SDK Harapan Denpasar

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the implementation of the national learning process standard at SDK Harapan Denpasar, an inclusive private elementary school in Bali. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, then analysed through an interactive qualitative model. The findings show that learning planning is well aligned with Learning Objectives and Learning Outcomes, integrates Problem-Based Learning, and considers students' developmental characteristics. Learning implementation follows structured classroom stages, utilizes concrete media and digital technology, and applies differentiated activities for students with special needs despite the absence of a shadow teacher. However, assessment practices remain dominated by summative evaluation, while diagnostic and formative assessments are conducted informally and lack structured documentation. The study concludes that planning and implementation have reflected the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, but assessment practices need further improvement to strengthen inclusive and differentiated learning.

INTRODUCTION

Elementary education occupies a foundational position within the national education system. Children who pass through this stage are commonly described as being in a developmental window sometimes labelled the golden age, a period in which cognitive, social, and emotional capacities are unusually receptive to structured stimulation. Because this window is finite, what happens inside elementary classrooms carries consequences that extend well beyond the acquisition of discrete facts; it shapes habits of thought, social conduct, and the foundational literacies on which later schooling depends. Framed this way, elementary schooling is never merely a matter of transferring information from teacher to learner. It is simultaneously an exercise in character formation, and the quality of that exercise depends heavily on the presence of genuine two-way interaction between teacher and student and among students themselves.

The Indonesian government has long recognised that such interaction does not occur reliably without a common frame of reference for what counts as adequate teaching. Government Regulation Number 19 of 2005 concerning National Education Standards defines the process standard as the set of provisions within the National Education Standards that governs how learning is to be carried out at each education unit so that graduates reach the intended competency standard. The regulation situates four components under this umbrella: planning, implementation, assessment of learning outcomes, and supervision of the learning process. Because the process standard forms part of the National Education Standards, its application is mandatory for every formal education unit at the basic and secondary levels, irrespective of whether the unit uses a package system or a credit semester system.

The introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum has reshaped how the assessment component of the process standard is understood in practice. Assessment is no longer treated primarily as a mechanism for producing an end-of-term score; it is reconceived as an ongoing effort to understand what learners need. Diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment are meant to function as an integrated cycle that supports differentiated instruction, a demand that becomes especially pressing in schools that also serve students with special needs within a single, non-segregated classroom.

Policy language, however well constructed, cannot by itself reveal how planning, implementation, and assessment interact once they reach an actual classroom. Regulatory text describes intention; only direct observation can describe practice. This consideration motivated the present study, which was carried out at SDK Harapan Denpasar, a private elementary school in Denpasar that operates an inclusive programme alongside its regular curriculum. The school was selected because its dual character, serving both mainstream and special-needs learners inside the same classrooms, makes it a particularly informative site for examining how the process standard is negotiated under conditions of genuine diversity.

Problem Statement

Three questions guided the inquiry: (1) how is learning planned for elementary-aged students at SDK Harapan Denpasar; (2) how is that planning

translated into classroom implementation; and (3) how is the resulting learning process assessed.

Purpose of the Study

The study sought to describe and analyse the planning, implementation, and assessment of learning at SDK Harapan Denpasar in relation to the national learning process standard and to the assessment principles embedded in the Merdeka Curriculum.

Significance of the Study

Theoretically, the study contributes an empirically grounded account of how the process standard operates inside an inclusive elementary classroom, a context that is comparatively under-represented in the existing literature. Practically, the findings are intended to give classroom teachers material for reflection on their own assessment habits, to give school leaders evidence they can use when planning professional development, and to give postgraduate students first-hand experience of conducting structured educational observation.

Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study was deliberately narrow. It examined a single school, over a limited observation window, and focused on classroom-level enactment of the process standard rather than on school-level administrative compliance or on comparisons across multiple institutions. This narrowness was a methodological choice rather than an oversight: a case study design trades breadth for depth, and the intention here was to describe planning, implementation, and assessment with enough granularity that the resulting account could be useful to practitioners, not merely to auditors checking a regulatory box. Readers should therefore treat the findings as an in-depth portrait of one school's practice rather than as a representative sample of elementary schools in Denpasar or in Indonesia more broadly. Where the discussion later draws connections to patterns reported in other studies, those connections are offered as points of resonance rather than as claims of statistical generalisability.

A further limitation concerns the observational window itself. Classroom practice is not static; it shifts across the school year as topics change, as teachers adjust to the composition of a given cohort, and as external pressures such as examination schedules rise and fall. The snapshot captured here should accordingly be read as characteristic of the period in which data were collected rather than as a permanent description of the school's practice. These limitations, rather than weakening the study's value, help to clarify exactly what kind of claim the findings can support and set the stage for the directions for further research proposed in a later section of this article.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The National Learning Process Standard

Government Regulation Number 19 of 2005 and its subsequent amendments establish the process standard as the regulatory floor beneath

which no education unit may fall. Scholars who have examined the standard's implementation generally converge on the view that its four components, planning, implementation, assessment, and supervision, are not independent checklist items but mutually reinforcing stages of a single instructional cycle. Fahmi (2021), for instance, argues that improvements in the quality of classroom instruction are most durable when the process standard is treated holistically rather than satisfied piecemeal, since weaknesses in one component, assessment being the most common example, tend to undermine gains achieved in the others.

Problem-Based Learning in Elementary Classrooms

Problem-Based Learning, first systematised in professional education by Barrows in the 1980s and subsequently adapted for general schooling, positions an authentic, ill-structured problem at the centre of instruction rather than treating problems as end-of-chapter exercises. Learners are expected to analyse the situation, identify what they do not yet know, and construct a solution with the teacher acting as facilitator rather than as the primary source of information. In elementary contexts the model is typically softened: problems are drawn from situations children can recognise from daily life, group work substitutes for the fully independent inquiry expected of older learners, and the teacher intervenes more frequently to keep discussion productive. Muhammad (2017) notes that the success of any instructional model at the elementary level depends heavily on how the teacher exercises classroom leadership, since young learners require more scaffolding to sustain the kind of self-directed reasoning that Problem-Based Learning presumes.

Cognitive Development and the Concrete-Operational Stage

Jean Piaget's stage theory remains the most frequently cited developmental framework in elementary pedagogy. Children roughly between the ages of seven and eleven are typically located in the concrete-operational stage, during which logical operations such as classification, seriation, and conservation become available to the child but remain tied to tangible referents. Abstract propositions that cannot be anchored to a physical object, a diagram, or a lived experience are correspondingly harder for children in this stage to process. The pedagogical implication most often drawn from this theory is that instruction should be rich in manipulatives, models, and other concrete representations, using them as a bridge toward the more abstract reasoning that later stages will demand.

Digital Technology as a Concrete Medium

A growing body of work treats digital media not as a replacement for concrete learning aids but as a further instance of them. Farida (2019) observes that well-chosen digital resources, including short animations and interactive simulations, can render abstract or physically inaccessible phenomena visible to learners, thereby performing much the same cognitive function as a traditional manipulative while adding flexibility of time and place. The same literature cautions, however, that unsupervised or poorly curated use of digital media carries risks, particularly around attention and screen time, and recommends that

parents and teachers coordinate their guidance of children's digital literacy rather than treating it as the school's responsibility alone.

Differentiated Instruction and Inclusive Education

Differentiated instruction, as articulated by Tomlinson and adopted widely within the Merdeka Curriculum's assessment framework, holds that content, process, and product can each be adjusted to match a learner's readiness, interest, or profile without lowering the overall ambition of instruction. In an inclusive classroom that enrolls students with special needs alongside regular learners, differentiation becomes less a refinement of good teaching and more a structural necessity. The absence of a dedicated shadow teacher, a role recommended in Indonesian inclusive-education guidance to provide individualised support for students with special needs, places additional weight on the classroom teacher's own capacity to adjust tasks and expectations without formal specialist assistance.

Diagnostic, Formative, and Summative Assessment under the Merdeka Curriculum

Contemporary assessment theory, exemplified by Black and Wiliam's widely cited work on formative assessment, distinguishes assessment of learning, which certifies what a student has achieved, from assessment for learning, which uses evidence gathered during instruction to adjust teaching in real time. The Merdeka Curriculum formally imports this distinction through its tripartite structure of diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment. Diagnostic assessment, administered before or at the start of a unit, is meant to reveal a learner's starting point; formative assessment, embedded throughout instruction, is meant to generate the feedback loops that Black and Wiliam identify as central to learning gains; summative assessment retains its traditional certifying function at the close of a unit or term. In principle the three forms operate as an integrated cycle; in practice, as several observational studies of Indonesian schools have noted, summative assessment tends to be the form most consistently and formally implemented, while diagnostic and formative assessment are more often practised informally, if at all.

This gap between the intent of the curriculum and its enactment is not unique to Indonesia; comparable tensions have been documented wherever formative assessment reforms have been layered onto school systems whose administrative habits were built around summative reporting. Black and Wiliam themselves noted, in the broader body of work that followed their original review, that formative practice tends to be adopted unevenly even among teachers who endorse it in principle, because it demands a kind of moment-to-moment pedagogical judgement that is harder to standardise, harder to document for accountability purposes, and harder to fit into the time constraints of an ordinary lesson than a scheduled written test. Diagnostic assessment faces a related obstacle: unless a school builds a simple, reusable instrument into its standard lesson-opening routine, teachers under time pressure tend to substitute an informal, conversational check of readiness, which is faster to conduct but leaves no record that can be compared across lessons or shared among colleagues who teach the same cohort.

Synthesis and Conceptual Framework

Taken together, the strands of literature reviewed above suggest a coherent expectation for what a well-functioning elementary classroom operating under the process standard and the Merdeka Curriculum should look like. Planning should visibly connect Learning Objectives to Learning Outcomes and should select instructional strategies, whether Problem-Based Learning or an alternative, according to the cognitive demands of the material rather than by default. Implementation should translate that planning into a concrete-rich, technology-supported classroom experience that remains responsive to the developmental stage of the learners present and that extends genuine, if informally structured, differentiation to students with special needs. Assessment should close the loop by supplying the diagnostic and formative evidence that makes the next cycle of planning responsive to actual, rather than assumed, learner needs. This expectation forms the conceptual lens through which the empirical findings of the present study are interpreted in the sections that follow, and it is the same lens used to identify where SDK Harapan Denpasar's practice is strongest and where it still departs from the standard's full intention.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a qualitative descriptive case study design. A case study was judged appropriate because the research questions asked how planning, implementation, and assessment operate within a bounded, real-world setting rather than seeking to test a hypothesis or to generalise numerically across a population of schools.

Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted at SDK Harapan Denpasar, a private inclusive elementary school in Denpasar, Bali. Participants included classroom teachers responsible for planning and delivering instruction, the general companion teacher who supports students with special needs in the absence of a dedicated shadow teacher, and, indirectly, the students present during the observed lessons.

Data Collection Techniques

Three techniques were combined to allow triangulation. Classroom observation was used to document the opening, core, and closing phases of instruction as they actually unfolded, including the strategies teachers used to manage attention and the nature of the feedback given to students. Semi-structured interviews with classroom teachers explored the reasoning behind instructional choices that observation alone could not explain, such as why a particular strategy was selected for a given topic. Documentary review of lesson plans and related planning artefacts was used to check the correspondence between what was planned on paper and what observation showed being enacted in the classroom.

Data Analysis Technique

Data were analysed using the interactive model associated with Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Field notes, interview transcripts, and planning documents were condensed into categories corresponding to the three research questions, displayed in narrative form to allow patterns to be compared across data sources, and cross-checked against one another before conclusions were drawn. Credibility was supported through source triangulation, that is, comparing what was said in interviews against what was actually observed and against what the written lesson plans specified.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION*Planning of Learning*

Lesson planning at SDK Harapan Denpasar was found to be organised around a deliberate alignment between the Learning Objectives (Tujuan Pembelajaran) set for each lesson and the broader Learning Outcomes (Capaian Pembelajaran) prescribed for the phase. Teachers reported that Problem-Based Learning was the strategy most frequently written into plans, particularly for material that demanded analysis or problem-solving, but that its use was not treated as compulsory for every topic; material oriented toward reinforcing basic concepts was more often planned around other, less inquiry-heavy approaches. This selective use suggests that teachers at the school are applying Problem-Based Learning as one tool among several rather than as a mandated formula, a pattern consistent with Muhammad's (2017) observation that instructional models succeed at the elementary level only when adapted to the teacher's judgement of what a given lesson requires.

A second and equally salient feature of planning was its explicit calibration to the concrete-operational profile of elementary learners. Teachers described deliberately building lessons around manipulable objects and visual representations rather than relying on verbal exposition alone, a practice directly consistent with the Piagetian expectation that logical reasoning at this age remains anchored to concrete referents. Digital media, including short animations and interactive simulations, were incorporated into this same planning logic; teachers treated such media not as a novelty but as a further concrete representation, selected deliberately according to which concepts were judged difficult to observe directly. This positioning of technology as a concrete instructional aid, rather than as a stand-alone activity, aligns with Farida's (2019) account of how digital resources can extend, rather than replace, the logic of physical manipulatives, provided their use is guided rather than left unsupervised.

Planning documentation also revealed attention to students with special needs, although this attention was structured informally. Rather than producing individualised written assessment or instructional plans, teachers relied on differentiated tasks developed and adjusted in the course of ordinary lesson preparation. This finding is consistent with the broader observation in the inclusive-education literature that differentiation is frequently practised as an implicit professional skill rather than as a formally documented process,

particularly where schools lack a dedicated shadow teacher and must rely on the classroom teacher's own judgement.

Implementation of Learning

Observed lessons followed the conventional three-phase structure of opening, core, and closing activities, broadly consistent with what had been written into the lesson plans, although teachers exercised visible flexibility in response to the classroom's mood and pace on a given day. The opening phase combined routine elements, greeting, prayer, attendance, with an apperception segment in which teachers revisited prior material and posed questions intended to connect existing knowledge to the day's topic. Notably, this opening did not include any written diagnostic instrument; readiness was probed conversationally rather than measured formally, a gap discussed further below.

During the core phase, Problem-Based Learning was applied on lessons that called for analysis, with teachers presenting an everyday problem and students working individually or in groups toward a solution while the teacher circulated to guide and reinforce reasoning. On lessons built around more foundational content, teachers substituted other approaches, again illustrating the flexible rather than formulaic use of the model. Digital media appeared consistently as a support for concept explanation, and was paired with physical teaching aids so that the two modes of representation reinforced one another. Teachers also monitored the emotional and attentional state of the class, introducing brief ice-breaking activities, most often a short video, when students appeared fatigued or disengaged. This responsiveness suggests an implicit but genuine attentiveness to what motivational and self-regulation theory would describe as maintaining an optimal state for learning, even though teachers did not frame their practice in those theoretical terms.

Students with special needs were included in mainstream lessons under a differentiated approach in which the content, process, and expected product of a task were scaled to each learner's cognitive profile. This work was carried out jointly by the classroom teacher and the general companion teacher, without the involvement of a specialist shadow teacher, meaning the burden of individualisation fell primarily on generalist staff. Feedback during the core phase was almost entirely verbal and delivered in the moment rather than recorded in any structured instrument.

The closing phase consisted of an oral and, in some cases, written reflection in which students articulated what they had understood and where they had struggled, followed by a jointly constructed summary of the lesson. In upper grades this summary was written by each student into a personal notebook that was kept rather than collected, functioning as a tool for reinforcing understanding and cultivating independent study habits rather than as an instrument for teacher assessment. Taken together, the implementation phase at SDK Harapan Denpasar displays the hallmarks of student-centred instruction, purposeful use of technology as a concrete aid, and a working, if informally structured, commitment to inclusion.

Assessment of the Learning Process

The clearest gap between stated principle and observed practice emerged in assessment. Consistent with what teachers described in interviews, assessment at SDK Harapan Denpasar was dominated by summative instruments, written evaluations and assignments collected at the end of a unit and used primarily to populate report-card grades. This pattern mirrors what several observational studies of Indonesian schools have reported: summative assessment, being administratively necessary and procedurally familiar, tends to be implemented far more consistently than the diagnostic and formative components that the Merdeka Curriculum otherwise emphasises.

Formative assessment was present in an attenuated, undocumented form. Teachers did circulate during lessons, offer guidance, and help students who were struggling, activities that in principle constitute the raw material of formative assessment. However, none of this feedback was captured in a rubric, observation checklist, or other structured record. Diagnostic assessment showed a similar pattern: no pre-test or comparable instrument was observed at the start of any lesson, and readiness was instead inferred informally through the apperception discussion described earlier. Following Black and Wiliam's account of formative assessment, the absence of structured documentation is not a merely administrative shortcoming; it removes the evidentiary basis on which subsequent instructional adjustments could otherwise be made deliberately rather than intuitively, and it is precisely this evidentiary basis that differentiated instruction depends on to be targeted rather than generic.

For students with special needs, assessment took the form of adjusted task difficulty, with cognitive expectations scaled down relative to regular learners. As with instructional differentiation, this adjustment was enacted directly in the classroom rather than recorded in an individualised written assessment plan. Attitudinal or affective outcomes were assessed almost entirely through general teacher observation rather than any dedicated instrument, leaving this domain the least systematically documented of the three assessment domains recognised under the Merdeka Curriculum, namely knowledge, skills, and attitude.

Cross-Cutting Discussion

Read together, the three findings sections suggest a coherent overall picture: SDK Harapan Denpasar has built planning and implementation practices that are genuinely responsive to learners' developmental stage, to the affordances of digital technology, and to the presence of students with special needs, but the assessment pillar of the process standard has not yet caught up to the same level of intentional design. Because assessment is the mechanism through which planning and implementation are meant to be continuously recalibrated, this imbalance represents the most consequential area for the school's future development.

It is worth pausing on why this particular imbalance is so common, since the pattern observed here echoes what other observational accounts of Indonesian elementary schools have reported. Planning and implementation are activities that a teacher largely controls within the boundaries of a single lesson and that produce visible, tangible artefacts, a lesson plan, a set of materials, a

sequence of activities, which makes them relatively straightforward to develop and refine through ordinary professional experience. Assessment, particularly the formative and diagnostic varieties, requires something additional: a habit of externalising and recording observations that would otherwise remain as tacit professional judgement inside the teacher's head. Building that habit typically requires either a structural nudge, such as a school-wide template or a shared rubric bank, or explicit training, since it does not tend to emerge spontaneously from the same reflective process that improves lesson delivery.

The inclusive dimension of the school's practice sharpens the stakes of this imbalance. Differentiated instruction, by definition, is only as accurate as the information it is based on; a teacher who differentiates tasks for a student with special needs using impression rather than documented diagnostic and formative evidence risks either under-challenging or over-challenging that student without a reliable mechanism for noticing the mismatch. The teachers observed in this study were clearly attentive and well-intentioned, adjusting tasks in real time and offering verbal encouragement and correction throughout each lesson. What was missing was not care but infrastructure: a shared, lightweight instrument that could turn each teacher's individual attentiveness into a cumulative record usable by the whole school, including any future shadow teacher the school might eventually be able to employ.

Finally, the strength of the school's planning and implementation practices should not be read as incidental to its assessment gap; if anything, the two are connected. Because teachers have invested consistent effort into building concrete, technology-supported lessons and into managing an inclusive classroom without specialist support, less capacity may remain for the additional, largely invisible labour of designing and maintaining formative and diagnostic instruments. This reading does not excuse the gap, but it does suggest that closing it will likely require support from the school as an institution, in the form of shared templates, protected planning time, or targeted training, rather than relying solely on individual teachers to add yet another responsibility to an already demanding role.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study set out to describe how the national learning process standard is realised in the planning, implementation, and assessment of instruction at SDK Harapan Denpasar. The findings show that planning is organised systematically around the alignment of Learning Objectives and Learning Outcomes, draws flexibly on Problem-Based Learning where the material calls for analysis, and is deliberately calibrated to the concrete-operational cognitive profile of elementary learners through the combined use of physical manipulatives and digital media. Implementation follows the standard opening-core-closing structure while remaining responsive to classroom conditions, positions the teacher as a facilitator, and extends differentiated support to students with special needs despite the absence of a dedicated shadow teacher. Assessment, however, remains dominated by summative testing; diagnostic assessment at the outset of instruction and formative assessment during instruction are practised informally

and largely undocumented. The overall picture is one of a school that has substantially internalised the planning and implementation demands of the process standard and of the Merdeka Curriculum's pedagogical philosophy, but whose assessment practices have not yet been developed to the same degree, leaving the diagnostic-formative-summative cycle incomplete in practice even where it is affirmed in principle.

Based on these conclusions, four recommendations are proposed. First, teachers are encouraged to develop simple, low-burden diagnostic instruments, such as short structured questions or quick concept checks, to be used at the start of a lesson so that readiness can be mapped more systematically than a purely conversational apperception allows. Second, formative assessment practised during instruction should be strengthened and documented through tools such as observation checklists, brief rubrics, or running anecdotal records, so that the verbal feedback teachers already give can be converted into evidence usable for later instructional planning. Third, the school is encouraged to provide targeted mentoring or training in integrated assessment design, with particular attention to differentiated and inclusive settings, given that current differentiation practices, while genuine, remain undocumented and dependent on individual teacher judgement rather than shared instruments. Fourth, the school's existing and evidently successful use of digital media as a concrete instructional aid should be sustained and further developed, with continued coordination between teachers and parents to safeguard students' digital literacy and attention. Implementing these recommendations would bring the assessment pillar of the process standard into closer alignment with the planning and implementation pillars that the school has already developed, supporting a more complete and self-correcting instructional cycle.

FURTHER STUDY

The present study was limited to a single inclusive elementary school observed over a bounded period, and its qualitative case-study design was not intended to produce findings generalisable beyond that setting. Several directions for further inquiry follow from this limitation. First, comparative case studies across multiple elementary schools, including both inclusive and non-inclusive settings, would help establish whether the imbalance between well-developed planning and implementation on one hand and underdeveloped formative and diagnostic assessment on the other is a pattern specific to SDK Harapan Denpasar or a more general feature of elementary practice under the Merdeka Curriculum.

Second, an intervention study that introduces a structured diagnostic instrument and a formative-assessment rubric into ordinary classroom practice, then tracks changes in differentiated instruction and learning outcomes for both regular and special-needs students, would offer more direct evidence about whether strengthening documentation actually improves the quality of instructional adjustment, rather than simply adding administrative burden. Third, given that the school currently relies on classroom teachers and a general companion teacher rather than a dedicated shadow teacher, future research could usefully examine how the presence or absence of specialist inclusive-

education staff affects both the depth of differentiation achieved and the workload experienced by generalist teachers. Finally, longitudinal research following a cohort of students across several years would help clarify whether the concrete, technology-supported instructional approach observed here produces durable gains in abstract reasoning as students progress toward the formal-operational stage.

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