
The Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Independent Curriculum) in Strengthening Students' Character in Indonesia

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Abstract

Keywords: The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia is a fresh innovation in the educational system, from the teaching methods to the learning results. The goal of the autonomous character, soft curriculum is to develop kids' character by giving them skills, pancasila opportunity to study informally, quietly, joyfully, and while paying attention to their inherent abilities. The Merdeka Curriculum gives students the ability to autonomously plan and create learning

students' profile strategies that suit their needs and environment. The Pancasila students' profile, which includes faithful, devoted to god almighty, and, noble, globally diverse, mutual cooperation, independent, critical reasoning, and creativity, is used in this project-based curriculum to develop soft skills and character while focusing on key concepts and being implemented flexibly. In order to produce superior human resources and character developed in accordance with existing characteristics with various activities and stages that ultimately result in students with character and collaboration, it is anticipated that this curriculum will strengthen learning outcomes, strengthen character, and collaborate with various parties both nationally and internationally.

Abstrak

Kata Kunci: *Penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka di Indonesia merupakan suatu inovasi baru dalam sistem pendidikan, mulai dari metode pengajaran hingga hasil Merdeka kurikulum, character, soft skills, pancasila students' profile* *pembelajaran. Tujuan kurikulum otonom adalah mengembangkan karakter anak dengan memberikan kesempatan belajar secara informal, tenang, gembira, dan tetap memperhatikan kemampuan bawaannya. Kurikulum Merdeka memberikan siswa kemampuan untuk secara mandiri merencanakan dan membuat strategi pembelajaran yang sesuai dengan kebutuhan dan lingkungannya. Profil peserta didik Pancasila yang meliputi beriman, bertaqwa kepada Tuhan Yang Maha Esa, dan berakhlak mulia, majemuk mendunia, gotong royong, mandiri, berpikir kritis, dan kreatif, digunakan dalam kurikulum berbasis proyek ini untuk mengembangkan soft skill dan karakter dengan tetap fokus pada pendidikan. konsep-konsep kunci dan diimplementasikan secara fleksibel. Untuk menghasilkan sumber daya manusia yang unggul dan berkarakter yang dikembangkan sesuai dengan karakteristik yang ada dengan berbagai kegiatan dan tahapan yang pada akhirnya menghasilkan peserta didik yang berkarakter dan berkolaborasi, diharapkan kurikulum ini dapat memperkuat hasil pembelajaran, memperkuat karakter, dan berkolaborasi dengan berbagai pihak baik. secara nasional dan internasional..*

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Introduction

Indonesia has been experiencing a learning crisis, and it has not improved from year to year, and even in the last 15 years, it has not shown significant improvement. Several studies are shocked by the declining results of the nation's children's education reports, especially when traced to simple things like reading literacy. Unisco states that Indonesia ranks quite low in terms of world literacy. Only 0.001% of 1000 Indonesians are avid readers, meaning that out of 1000 people, only one person is an avid reader (Sutrawan, 2023). PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) states that for the reading category, Indonesia is ranked 72 out of 77 countries (Magiszha, 2019). This analysis shows that Indonesians interest in reading is very low. The learning crisis has hit this country, which is indicated by the low learning outcomes of students (Bachtiar, 2022).

Another issue is the difficulty of harmonizing Indonesia's extremely diffuse education system, which could lead to significant learning discrepancies across different regions (Magiszha, 2019). The education situation has gotten worse as a result of this imbalance. The worldwide COVID pandemic, which has had a severe influence on education, particularly in Indonesia, with the loss of learning and widening achievement gaps, has made this condition worse. In order to avoid this, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology established the Emergency Curriculum, a unique curriculum designed to minimize learning loss during the pandemic. The findings are very positive: in 31.5% of the schools using the emergency curriculum, the pandemic's effects on literacy and numeracy can be reduced by 73% and 86%, respectively. (kemdikbud, 2023).

The success of this emergency curriculum demonstrates the necessity for more thorough curriculum reforms. (Pusat Informasi Guru, 2023). Therefore, it is anticipated that the existence of a universal curriculum will promote and allow teachers from different regions to have a clear framework for imparting subject matter. By issuing Decree of the Minister of Education, Culture and Research

Number 56/M/2022 concerning the implementation of the curriculum in the context of learning recovery, Mr. Nadiem Anwar Makarim, Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, initiated the Merdeka Curriculum.

The existence of the Merdeka Curriculum, which enhances the previous curriculum, offers hope for the restoration of students' learning by taking into account the importance of learning and each student's individuality. This curriculum has at least three benefits, including: First, it focuses on the core of learning and essential material so that there is a more meaningful deepening and development of competencies; second, there is independence for teachers and students; teachers are free to teach according to the achievements and development of students; and third, it gives teachers and students opportunities to engage in independent learning so that they can explore every topic and subtopic; and finally, it is designed to help students develop their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. location and time, also included is a Project on the Independent Curriculum (Maharani, 2022).

Method

In order to create scientific studies that can be further improved, this research involves library research (literature study), which collects data from a variety of sources, including books and journal articles pertaining to the problems to be explored. Mestika (2004) defined library research or literature study as a set of activities linked to library data collection methods, reading, recording, and processing items from the library collection only – field research is not necessary. The application of the autonomous curriculum in fostering students' character in Indonesia is the topic of study in this essay

The primary sources for describing the variables of this paper include textbooks, scholarly articles, ebooks, and other written works that are related to the study problem and are collected as part of the data gathering process for this study. According to Sugiono (2010), information for literature research is

gathered from a variety of sources, including indexes, reviews, journals, and reference books as well as abstracts of study findings. Additionally, the author examines the information provided by Miles and Huerman (2014), which includes three concurrent streams of operations, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or verification, to ultimately provide findings from the issues raised in

Result and Discussion

Merdeka Curriculum Concept

The Merdeka Curriculum, which was developed as a new strategy that theoretically incorporates both institutions and students in the learning process, is one of the solutions to the educational problems caused by the post-COVID-19 education crisis. It is intended that this curriculum will bring about improvements in Indonesian education that place a greater emphasis on the growth of character and abilities based on learner competencies (Indarta et al., 2022). This viewpoint is in keeping with the beliefs of Ki Hajar Dewantara, known as the "Father of Indonesian Education," who held that the establishment of independence should come first. (Kompasiana, 2022).

Every student in the Merdeka curriculum is encouraged to become more active in their studies in accordance with the necessary methods. To put it simply, students are given independence or freedom to explain how to learn according to their individual needs rather than just following the curriculum that the government has already approved in a passive manner (Kemdikbud, 2022a). This idea is anticipated to raise educational standards and foster creativity and innovation in Indonesian classrooms. With content-based learning given top priority and optimization, this curriculum offers a more varied intracurricular learning system that gives students enough time to comprehend the topics (Pijar, 2022).

The independent curriculum policy gives teachers the chance to foster a welcoming learning environment and inspire a love of learning in their students,

preventing them from feeling overburdened by the teacher's lessons (Yusuf & Arfiansyah, 2021). With this curriculum, educators must be imaginative and inventive in their lesson plans. A teacher must exercise creativity in the design of instruction by utilizing the many techniques and educational media accessible to produce independent learning. The independent curriculum, according to Nadiem Makarim, Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, aims to raise the standard of education and make learning enjoyable for students in Indonesia because it is done in a laid-back, calm, and joyful way and takes into account their natural talents (Kemdikbud, 2023). The traits of an independent curriculum that is appropriate for the times and the will of society imply this objective.

According to the website for Kemendikbud, the Merdeka curriculum has three characteristics: Soft skills and character development come first, followed by a focus on the essential material and flexible learning. (Kemdikbud, 2022 a). To establish a Pancasila learner profile that strives to develop students' talents and character, soft skills and character development are cultivated. In order to ensure that the supplied material, such reading and numeracy, receives in-depth competency, subject matter is focused on the subject matter (essence). Differentiated instruction takes into account the context, local material, and learner aptitude to make learning more adaptable.

Development of Character and Soft Skills

Enhancing soft talents and developing character The project of enhancing the Pancasila learner profile is a project-based learning initiative that translates national education goals into the Pancasila learner profile. Education in Indonesia is referred to by this term. A new approach to education in Indonesia is called "strengthening the Pancasila learner profile," and it focuses on developing students' character through project-based learning activities in the hopes that, in the future, these students will contribute to the development of a society that upholds the moral principles that are ingrained in each of the Pancasila precepts.

(Asiati & Hasanah, 2022), integrated into extracurricular, co-curricular, and intracurricular Pancasila learner profile strengthening projects.

The Pancasila Learner Profile Strengthening Project serves as the primary resource for education policy, as well as a guide for teachers in developing students' character and competency. The Pancasila Learner Profile Strengthening Project aims to develop Pancasila learners who can act in accordance with the values of Pancasila, which are comprised of six dimensions: 1) faith, devotion to God Almighty, and noble character; 2) global diversity; 3) mutual cooperation; 4) independent; 5) critical reasoning; and 6) creativity (BGP Sulut, 2023; Kurikulum Kemdikbud, 2022). This dimension clarifies the abilities and character traits that Indonesian students need to develop. These are the essential elements of character development that interact and build upon one another, necessitating simultaneous and whole-hearted growth rather than partial development. (Irawati et al., 2022).

The key elements of the Pancasila student profile according to Suhendi et al., (2021) can be seen in the table below:

No	Main Characteritics	Key Elemens
1	Faith, Devotion to God Almighty, and Noble character	(a) Religious morality; (b) personal character; (c) morality to humans; (d) morality to nature; and (e) state morality
2	Global diversity	Knowing and appreciating culture, intercultural communication skills in interacting with others, reflection and responsibility for the experience of diversity
3	Mutual Cooperation	Collaboration, caring and sharing
4	Independent	Self-awareness and self-regulation
5	Critical reasoning	Obtain and process information and

		ideas, analyze and evaluate reasoning, reflect on thoughts and thought processes, and make decisions
6	Creativity	Generate original ideas and produce original works and actions

In order to make learning engaging and applicable to learners' daily lives, the project on improving the Pancasila learner profile offers possibilities for learning in a pleasant, interactive setting (Mery et al., 2022). The Pancasila learner profile strengthening project also offers possibilities for students to learn from their surroundings and to use information as a means of developing their character. In this profile project activity, students will have the chance to learn about a variety of topics or pressing issues, such as anti-radicalism, mental health, culture, entrepreneurship, technology, and democratic life, in order to put what they have learned into practice and adapt to their social needs (Sari et al., 2023)



The effort to improve the Pancasila learner profile will use three basic components in its implementation: lifelong learners, competency, and Pancasila ideals. This curriculum demonstrates a blend of reinforcing the unique identity of the Indonesian nation, specifically Pancasila as a benchmark for Indonesian students' character, with competences that are in line with the demands of developing Indonesian Human Resources. According to Arafat (2022), the effort to enhance the profile of Pancasila students is actually carried out with reference to eight topics, namely: (1) local knowledge; (2) engineering and technology; (3) entrepreneurship; (4) *bhinneka tunggal ika*; and (5) a sustainable lifestyle. (6) Develop the body and the soul. (7) The voice of democracy; and (8) Work.

Focus on the essential material

The term "essential materials" refers to significant knowledge or subject matter that students must learn and comprehend. They are ongoing resources that are present at all academic levels or stages. As it is geared toward the fundamental competencies that must be well mastered, this feature concentrates on the quality of ongoing learning for pupils. The teacher's involvement is crucial in identifying the key content, selecting which learning is crucial, and ensuring that it is incorporated in the fundamental reading and numeracy skills. The Pancasila learner profile is strengthened by teachers' creation of learning objectives, curricular frameworks, learning pathways, and projects. This is because the program is set up to ensure that students fully comprehend each lesson's concept and how it is applied in practice. (Bastian, 2023).

The Merdeka Curriculum also emphasizes giving necessary information, which is thought to be significant information that needs to be learned in depth. There is no high learning burden on pupils because teachers and students have more time to complete the learning process in the classroom by concentrating on the relevant topics. Students' choice of subject specialization gives them the chance to select a cross-disciplinary area of interest, allowing them to experience the value of learning independently of the educational system. Learning about

students' passions for particular subjects can help motivate them to learn. (Jojobor & Sihotang, 2022).

When putting the independent curriculum into practice, the teacher serves as a learning facilitator backed by professional, pedagogical, personality, and social competencies. These skills will allow the teacher to accomplish the policy's learning and implementation goals (Pendi, 2020). The Merdeka Curriculum's core principles can also inspire students to study and grow personally, cultivate a loving attitude toward the learning environment, boost students' self-confidence and abilities, and help them effortlessly fit in with their surroundings. (Ainia, 2020). For both instructors and schools, the core of Merdeka Curriculum can realize liberating and autonomous education. (Sherly et al., 2021),

Flexible learning

As stated in Kepmendikbudristek No.56 of 2022 concerning Guidelines for Implementing the Independent Curriculum, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum provides flexibility for education units in designing an operational curriculum in accordance with the vision-mission and learning needs of students which can encourage an effective teaching and learning process so as to improve the quality of learning. (bpmpjogja, 2023). Focusing on the fundamental skills that the education unit has determined are necessary for success gives teachers and students freedom in the learning process (Kurniati et al., 2022). Students are more receptive to discovering their gifts and potential when learning is enjoyable because the teacher, as the primary actor in delivering the subject matter, has the option to choose the learning style (Purwanto, 2022)

The Merdeka Curriculum can therefore accommodate diversity, adapt to students' learning needs, and alter the context of educational units based on the potential of different regions because it is developed with more flexibility and focuses on essential material and the development of students' characters and competencies (Wiguna & Trisningrat, 2022). In addition, Wiguna and Trisningrat explained that teachers can adapt the context and local content of an area and differentiate instruction based on the students' abilities. For instance, an

operational curriculum that is suitable for education units in Pamekasan is different from an operational curriculum that is suitable for education units in pesantren. One of the features of pesantren education units is the reinforcement of religious content so that subject references can be drawn from certain yellow books that are tailored to the academic levels and skills of the students.

According to Minister of Education, Research, and Technology Nadiem Makarim, the Merdeka Curriculum offers benefits when put into practice. Because this curriculum focuses on developing learner competencies and vital content, it is first simpler and deeper. Secondly, because students can select their courses based on their interests, abilities, and objectives, educators and students will be more independent. Teachers can adapt their lessons to the stages of learners' development and achievement. Thirdly, schools have the power to design curriculum and oversee instruction based on the needs of students and educational units. (Kemdikbud, 2022b).

Implementation of the Project on Strengthening the Pancasila Students Profile in School Learning

The Merdeka Curriculum offers benefits because, in its application, it is more engaging and relevant, and learning through project activities will give students more opportunities to actively examine real challenges, including environmental, health, and other issues (Kemdikbud, 2022b). According to each person's personality and originality, this curriculum can provide a space for them to grow and develop. On February 17, 2022, acting director of the Center for Curriculum and Learning at Kemdikbud RI Zulfikri Anas stated during the silatrurahmi merdeka belajar event that teachers are free to select the format, experience, and necessary materials that are appropriate for achieving learning goals. Since each student appears to have their own curriculum, pupils are given the most freedom to discover their individuality (Kemdikbud, 2022c).

Nadiem Makarim established the Merdeka Curriculum as the ideal curriculum from the previous Curriculum, namely the 2013 Curriculum, by taking four strategic steps. First, in 2020, the National Standardized School

Examination (USBN) will be changed to an exam that is organized by schools themselves with an assessment of learner competencies in various forms that is more comprehensive and offers flexibility to teachers and schools in its implementation. Second, in an effort to motivate educators and institutions of higher learning to enhance the standard of instruction based on practices, the National Exam (UN) will be replaced in 2021 by a Minimum Competency Assessment (MCA) and Character Survey that places a strong emphasis on literacy, numeracy, and character. Third, reducing the Learning Implementation Plan (RPP)'s (which consists of) 13 components to just 3 main components containing educational goals, instructional activities, and evaluation. Fourthly, making the new learner admission policy more flexible to prevent inequity and disparity (Mustafiyanti et al., 2023).

The Merdeka Curriculum with the project of strengthening the Pancasila student profile is unique because its application is not integrated in the learning of each subject but has a special portion in each subject hour allocation, giving students the chance to develop their knowledge, skills, and attitudes competencies by learning from their friends, teachers, and even local community leaders in analyzing hot issues that occur in the surrounding area. (BGP Sulut, 2023). Similar to this, Zulfikri Anas, acting head of the Center for Curriculum and Learning at Kemdikbud RI, stated that the independent curriculum enables a climate of positive collaboration between students where students with different competencies can work together so that learners can understand each other's strengths and share with each other in order to produce competent and characterized outputs that refer to the Pancasila students profile (Kemdikbud, 2022c).

The project to strengthen the Pancasila students' profile is implemented in accordance with Kepmendikbudristek No. 56/M/2022 concerning Guidelines for Curriculum Implementation, which specifies that it is a project-based co-curricular activity intended to strengthen efforts to achieve competence and character in accordance with the Pancasila students profile, which is compiled

based on the Graduate Competency Standards. In terms of content, activities, and implementation time, the project to enhance Pancasila students' profiles is implemented flexibly. The Pancasila students' profile strengthening project is created independently from intracurricular projects; learning objectives, material, and activities do not need to be related to intracurricular objectives and subject matter. Education units can plan and coordinate projects to raise the Pancasila students' profile by involving the community and/or the workplace. The Pancasila learner profile enhancement project's guiding principles are as follows: 1) Holistic, 2) Contextual, 3) Learner-Centered, and 4) Exploratory (Hartono, 2022).

The Merdeka Curriculum can be implemented in one of three ways by educational institutions for the 2022–2023 academic year. First, applying some of the Merdeka Curriculum's components and tenets while keeping the current education unit curriculum in place Secondly, applying the Merdeka Curriculum with the aid of the supplied instructional resources Third, put the Merdeka Curriculum into practice by creating your own teaching resources. "With Merdeka Belajar, there will be no forced implementation (Merdeka Curriculum) for the next two years," Nadiem declared. (Kemdikbud, 2022b)

The Merdeka curriculum has three options for implementation that can be used in different educational units, namely: 1) independent learning, where schools or education units continue to use the 2013 curriculum or simplified K13/EEmergency Curriculum by applying the parts and principles of the Merdeka Curriculum; 2) independent change, where education units begin to use the Merdeka Curriculum in the 2022/2023 school year by referring to the teaching tools prepared; and 3) independent implementation. The PAUD levels, grade I and grade IV SD/MI, grade VII SMP/MTs, and grade X senior high school teaching materials that have been provided; and 3) Independent Sharing, whereby schools implement the Merdeka Curriculum and create some teaching materials on their own at the PAUD levels, grade I and grade IV SD/MI, grade

VII junior high school, and grade X senior high school beginning in the 2022/2023 academic year (Ditsmp.kemdikbud, 2022).

According to the advancements in science, information, and technology as well as the demands of the moment, curriculum is periodically developed (Inayati, 2022). Particularly in the twenty-first century, a teacher conducting the teaching and learning process is expected to be able to innovate learning, have teaching abilities that can balance contemporary conditions, and be able to design learning that is interesting, fun, and meaningful in order to produce superior human resources and character.

Conclusion

The development of the Merdeka Curriculum was prompted by a persistent learning crises, one of which was Indonesians' low interest in reading, which was made worse by learning loss brought on by the COVID pandemic. The Merdeka Curriculum enhances the 2013 curriculum, which was created with the intention that teachers can foster a friendly environment, pique students' interest in learning, and let students discover their individual talents.

The Merdeka curriculum has three qualities: 1) the growth of character and soft skills; 2) the concentration on key information; and 3) flexible learning. Soft skills and character development In Indonesia, education is defined by the Pancasila students' profile and project-based learning activities that aim to develop students' moral character in line with the values and precepts of Pancasila, which are integrated into extracurricular and extracurricular activities. The profile of Pancasila students consists of six dimensions, namely: 1) faith, devotion to God Almighty, and noble character; 2) global diversity; 3) mutual cooperation; 4) independence; 5) critical reasoning; and 6) creativity.

The Merdeka curriculum carries out learning activities by concentrating on crucial content focused toward fundamental competencies that must be known. In order for Pancasila students to understand the idea of a profound lesson and how it is applied in real life, the teacher's duty is to establish learning

outcomes, curriculum structure, learning flow, and projects to strengthen the profile of those students.

The Merdeka Curriculum gives educational institutions the flexibility to create an operational curriculum that adheres to their vision, mission, and students' learning needs by adjusting to their requirements and the context of educational institutions based on the potential of certain locations. Teachers can also implement differentiated learning based on the learning styles of their students and alter the context and regional material.

The Merdeka Curriculum is created in accordance with the advancements in science, information, technology, and societal demands. In order to develop exceptional human resources and character, teachers are expected to be able to innovate learning, have teaching abilities that can balance current situations, and design learning that is fascinating, fun, and meaningful.

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