



Merdeka Curriculum: Characteristics and Potential in Education Recovery after the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The implementation of the education process is currently a new challenge for all the education community due to the recovery phase after the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this research is to describe the implementation of an Merdeka Curriculum at the school level as an effort to improve the quality of education after the COVID-19 pandemic. The type of research used is in the form of qualitative research. Research data in the form of written data sourced from various scientific works that are relevant and trustworthy. The data obtained were then analyzed descriptively and described systematically. Based on this, it is known that the Merdeka Curriculum has good characteristics and is very supportive as a form of efforts by all parties to restore the quality of education, especially after going through a long pandemic period. This is also supported by the conditions of learning in schools, most of which experience the same problem, namely the occurrence of learning loss conditions among students.

Keywords: Merdeka Curriculum; Education Recovery Efforts; Post COVID-19 Pandemic

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1. Introduction

The curriculum is a framework that compiles and directs the education system in an institution so that it has the same goals to be achieved. The implementation of the curriculum in Indonesia to date has undergone several changes and modifications. These changes are caused by the conditions and external demands that need to be produced in order to be able to compete in people's lives, both nationally and internationally (Machali, 2014; Martin & Simanjorang, 2022). Starting from 1947 to 2020, Indonesia has used 10 types of curriculum, including the Lesson Plan Curriculum (1947), Unraveled Lesson Plan Curriculum (1952), 1964 Curriculum, 1968 Curriculum, 1975 Curriculum, Active Student Learning Methods Curriculum (1984), Curriculum 1994 & 1999 Curriculum

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Supplement, Competency-Based Curriculum (2004), Education Unit Level Curriculum (2006), and 2013 Curriculum. The changing educational paradigm certainly cannot be separated from the condition of society which will experience changes over time (Idris, 2011; Rizaldi, et al., 2020). Until early 2022 after the COVID-19 pandemic which required all activities including the learning process to be carried out online, the Indonesian Minister of Education initiated a policy regarding the use of a new curriculum called the Merdeka Curriculum as an alternative in restoring the condition of education in Indonesia.

The emergence of a new curriculum in the midst of the Indonesian education system will certainly be a new focus or study, especially for educational institutions. This is because of course it will have a direct impact on the learning process carried out in schools (Rizaldi, et al., 2021; Setiawati, 2022). The socialization process is one of the efforts made by the government to accelerate the introduction of an Merdeka Curriculum as one of the government's efforts to improve learning conditions in Indonesia, especially after going through the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic has had a very real impact on the educational process that is occurring in all parts of the world, including Indonesia (Siahaan, 2020). The learning paradigm has changed significantly where all learning process institutions are carried out online or known as learning from home. This is what makes teachers have to be able to adapt to using technology and familiarize learning with project-based at home (Nurhayati, et al., 2020a). This sudden adaptation process makes teachers and students unable to follow the learning process and achieve the goals previously set optimally. Therefore, the government seeks to introduce and familiarize teachers and students so that they do not only rely on one-way learning systems and are carried out in classrooms. This was one of the ideas for the emergence of an Merdeka Curriculum in the learning process after the COVID-19 pandemic.

An merdeka curriculum is a curriculum with diverse intra-curricular learning where the content will be more optimal so that students have enough time to explore concepts and strengthen competencies (Anwar, 2022; Purnwanto, 2022; Rahima, 2022). Teachers have the flexibility to choose various teaching tools so that learning can be adapted to the learning needs and interests of students (Kasnowo & Hidayat, 2022; Martati, 2022). The Merdeka Curriculum has basically begun to be implemented in almost some universities in Indonesia. This is supported by Hasim (2022) who stated that the government's policy in creating and introducing an merdeka curriculum was considered very appropriate to overcome problems related to the learning process that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. In addition, according to Priantini, et al., (2022) also emphasizes that the use of an merdeka learning curriculum is in accordance with efforts to create a quality education climate so that it can give birth to a generation that is ready to adapt to the current developments.

It's just that this curriculum has not been widely applied at the school or madrasa level. The government itself targets that the merdeka curriculum will be implemented comprehensively by 2024 at all levels of education in Indonesia, starting from primary and secondary schools (Bahri, 2022; Barlian & Solekah, 2022). One of the things that is facilitated and emphasized in the Merdeka Curriculum according to Jojor & Sihotang (2020) is to place more emphasis on project-based learning that can be done by students in various conditions (not only focus in class). This is supported by Marisa (2021) who states that the concept of independent learning is very suitable today because society 5.0 tries to combine the development of technological advances that can help solve problems and the social needs of individual life.

Based on these problems, a study was conducted to examine the characteristics and potential of implementing an Merdeka Curriculum as an effort to restore the education process, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Method

This research is a type of research using qualitative descriptive method. This method is based on the philosophy of postpositivism to examine the condition of natural objects (conditions as opposed to experimental research) (Sugiyono, 2016). In the postpositivism approach the researcher is the key instrument with data collection techniques carried out by triangulation (combined), data analysis is inductive, and research results emphasize meaning rather than generalization (Wijaya, 2013; Rukin, 2019). Qualitative descriptive research is used with the aim of providing an overview, explaining, and studying a condition, individual, group, or event. The data obtained in this study are in the form of an arrangement of words or statements that describe the actual conditions.

This study was conducted to describe and relate to the characteristics and potential of implementing an Merdeka Curriculum as a form of education recovery efforts that occurred in Indonesia after the COVID-19 pandemic. Data is collected through a literature review process from various sources, especially articles in research journals, scientific writings, magazines, and other relevant and valid sources. The data obtained were then explained descriptively using scientifically structured language. In general, the steps taken by researchers in the literature review process are as follows.

1. Identify the topic or theme of the problem study that is being paid much attention or is a topic that is developing in the community.
2. Determine the method in collecting data related to the research carried out.
3. Conducting a literature review process from various scientific sources to solve the observed problem topics.
4. Develop a framework related to the results of the literature review in the form of discussion

5. Make a conclusions (Adapted from Rizaldi, et al., 2020b).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Issues that Cause the Emergence of the Merdeka Curriculum Paradigm

The curriculum is a guide that directs and moves the education system in a country (Stevenson & Baker, 1991). Each country, including Indonesia, develops different curriculum criteria according to the characteristics of its society. The curriculum developed in Indonesia itself refers to Presidential Regulation no. 8 of 2012 concerning the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework and Permendikbud No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System (Suwandi, 2020; Zaini, 2015). There are two essential concepts that need to be considered in implementing a curriculum, namely those relating to the profile of graduates and learning outcomes or commonly known as Graduate Competency Standards.

However, from the different needs that exist in each country, all countries must refer to the same goal, namely to produce competent Human Resources, especially those with 21st Century skills or Industry 4.0, namely 4C (Critical Thinking, Creative, Collaboration, and Communication) and good literacy (Nurhayati, et al., 2020b). Literacy that is being studied in the 21st century does not only focus on the ability to read, write, and count but also the ability to use technology and data based on internet networks (Anggraeni, 2019). One of the statements made by Damhauser (2019) related to the conditions of the 21st Century that the form of concern in the form of a low literacy culture of society will have an impact on the development experienced by a country in competing globally (in Suryaman, 2020). This competition requires the Indonesian people not only to master local skills but also various international skills.

The form of response taken by the Indonesian state to these external demands is to develop and implement the 2013 curriculum in the learning process in schools. This curriculum has been implemented and used for a long time even today. The purpose of this curriculum is to facilitate students to become the main part in the learning process (Rumapea, 2014). It's just that the obstacle faced by almost the entire world community today, including Indonesia, is the existence of a pandemic that causes significant changes in the learning system. This change requires the learning process to be carried out through a virtual process or using technological assistance in the form of an internet network (Fatimah & Rizaldi, 2022; Risalah, et al., 2020).

This condition gave rise to the simplification of the 2013 curriculum which gave every teacher the opportunity not to convey or teach all the material at an educational level. The government provides space for teachers to deliver material that is considered essential in supporting the learning process in the future (Fatmawati, 2021). Changes that occur in the curriculum are natural because one of the characteristics that must be

possessed in a curriculum is that it must be flexible and dynamic in accordance with conditions that exist in society.

Based on the implementation of the 2013 curriculum simplification policy in schools for approximately one year of implementation, data were obtained that almost most of the students experienced learning loss conditions in the learning process by implementing a learning system from home. The decline in activity and learning outcomes was caused not only by student factors but also from teachers and supporting infrastructure (Maulyda, et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic condition requires teachers and students to use gadgets as tools or media to be able to communicate during the learning process. This is the main obstacle that causes many students to be unable to participate in learning because they do not have access to connect to online-based learning. This is supported by data displayed by the Ministry of Education that the level of learning loss in pandemic conditions is higher than during the learning process before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following up on this condition, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology provides a new rule whereby schools can implement face-to-face learning processes while still paying attention to various health protocols (Rizaldi, et al., 2022). This policy is one of the beginnings of efforts to improve the quality of the learning process that occurred after the COVID-19 pandemic. To maximize the process of improving the learning process, a new curriculum model emerged which is called the merdeka curriculum.

3.2. Characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum

The Merdeka curriculum is a curriculum model that refers to the formation of a Pancasila student profile with the aim of strengthening the character and various skills of students as an important component in the implementation of learning (Nurasiah, et al., 2022). The merdeka curriculum is basically a continuation of the emergency curriculum which was implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. This curriculum was designed by the government as one of the policies to increase the percentage of learning recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The profile of Pancasila students is a form of embodiment of Indonesian students, namely being competent lifelong students and having character according to the values of Pancasila, with six main characteristics, namely faith, fear of God Almighty, noble character, global diversity, mutual cooperation, independence, reasoning critically, and creatively (Ismail, et al., 2021; Juliana & Bastian, 2021). The emergence of the term Pancasila student profile is due to changes in the identity pattern of students during the COVID-19 pandemic. This change in pattern is felt to be able to directly affect the level of participation and learning achievement of students in schools. A real example that can be seen is that during the home or online-based learning period, the tendency of students to

use gadgets is not focused on learning needs but focuses on meeting their own needs with peers (Rizaldi, et al., 2021b). This is what parents often complain about while accompanying their children in learning from home. Therefore, the most awaited desire by parents is to be able to return to the face-to-face learning process at school.

In the development process, the Merdeka Curriculum framework refers to the competencies that students need to master, the characters that need to be developed and built, and the materials that students need to learn and master. In addition, the Merdeka Curriculum also regulates the principles that must be considered by teachers in designing the learning process and its assessment. So based on these conditions, in general the framework contained in the Merdeka Curriculum refers to:

1. Curriculum Structure
2. Learning Outcomes
3. Learning Principles and Assessment.

The Merdeka Curriculum has several main characteristics that can support the process of learning recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia, including:

1. Project-based learning to develop various soft skills and character of Pancasila students.

Referring to the 2013 curriculum model on the basis of the objectives to be achieved, it has emphasized the character development of students, it's just that it has not provided or placed a special portion in the curriculum structure. Meanwhile, in the Merdeka Curriculum, around 20 – 30 percent of the lesson hours will be used to develop various character profiles of Pancasila students, such as faith, piety, noble character, love of mutual cooperation, spirit of global diversity, independence, critical and creative thinking.

The use of project-based learning in the Merdeka Curriculum is expected to be able to provide opportunities for students to learn through an experiential process, integrate various essential competencies with various disciplines, and try to provide or provide a more flexible learning structure according to the needs of their respective schools. respectively. The Ministry of Education and Culture provides several main theme options that need to be developed as topics and learning objectives by teachers in schools, including

- a. Wake up your soul and body
- b. Engineering and Technology to Build the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia
- c. Unity in Diversity
- d. Sustainable Lifestyle

- e. Local culture
- f. Entrepreneurship
- g. Voice of Democracy

2. Focus on Essential Material

The application of this context aims to create an in-depth learning process related to the material being studied by students. The form of deepening can be in the form of discussion, group work, the use of problems and projects in investigating and solving a given problem. This is certainly different if the demands of the material being studied are too high, it will encourage the emergence of a one-way learning method in the form of lectures (from teacher to student).

Basically it is not a problem for teachers to use the lecture method, it's just that the percentage used is not more and dominant than the model or method that provides opportunities for students to prove and discover. In addition, the Merdeka Curriculum aims to focus on essential materials in each subject, to provide space and time for students to develop basic competencies such as literacy and numeracy in depth.

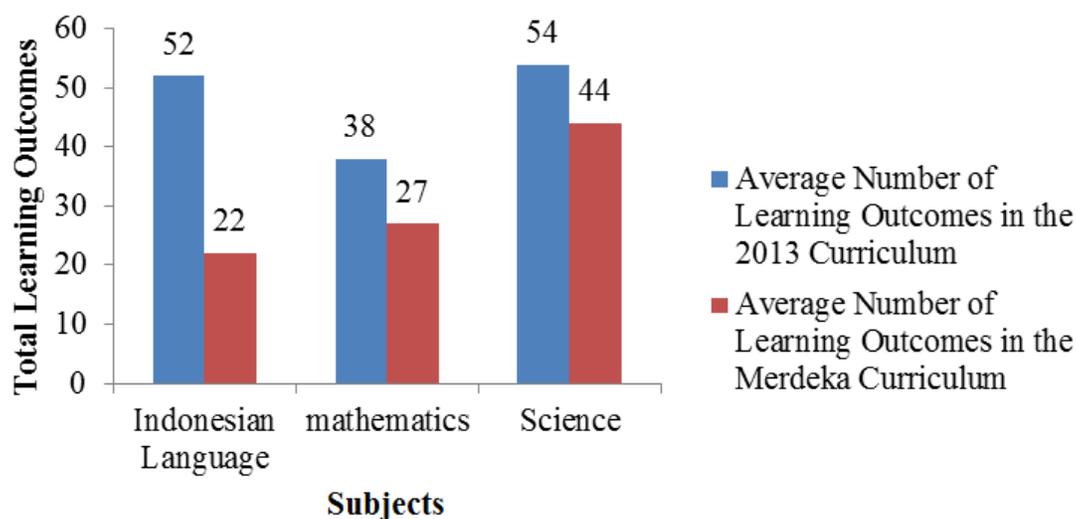


Figure 1. Comparison of the Competencies of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum

Based on the picture above, it can be seen that the Merdeka Curriculum has an average level of less amount of material studied compared to the 2013 curriculum. This difference will certainly have an impact on teachers in the distribution of teaching hours for each material to be delivered. This condition provides more opportunities for teachers to explore

the abilities of students by creating various problem conditions in the learning process. In contrast, if the material being taught is very dense, the teacher will focus on how all the material can be delivered so that it will ignore the real purpose in a learning process.

3. Flexibility in Curriculum Design in Schools

An interesting feature of the Merdeka Curriculum is that it is flexible, adapted to the conditions and characteristics of the school environment in question. If in the 2013 curriculum the learning objectives must be achieved within an interval of one year, then in the Merdeka Curriculum it is known by using the term phase consisting of 2-3 years. In addition, in the 2013 curriculum, the implementation of lesson hours is regulated within an interval of one week, while in the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers are given up to one year of time to regulate and implement lesson hours. This condition is expected to be able to give freedom to schools and teachers to innovate.

3.3. Potential for Merdeka Curriculum Implementation

The implementation of every new policy in Indonesia is in dire need of good and sustainable socialization, especially to the community. This is to provide an overview to the public, especially those in the educational environment regarding the importance of an Merdeka Curriculum as a form of government mitigation in overcoming the problem of learning loss after being in the COVID-19 pandemic for a long time. Without good cooperation between the government and education implementers, especially schools, it will be very difficult to create a learning climate or conditions that are in accordance with the expectations of an Merdeka Curriculum.

If we refer to the characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum, there is a very big chance that this curriculum is eagerly awaited by the entire educational community, especially teachers and students, to be applied in the context of actual learning. Freedom in determining and shaping the learning environment without the demands of the achievement of complex learning materials provides opportunities for teachers and students to deepen the material being studied. This condition can indirectly improve students' ability to understand the context being studied compared to if they study a lot of material but it is not meaningful for students because of limited time.

In addition to emphasizing holistic learning, the Merdeka Curriculum is very suitable to the demands of the needs of the people in Indonesia in dealing with the current conditions in the 21st Century (Suwandi, 2020). In today's society, people are not only required to have high academic abilities, but also have good skills in social life. These skills currently often appear in every educational agenda or seminar topics such as critical thinking, creative, cooperative, and communicative skills (Mardhiyah, et al., 2021). Mastery of these four skills will later help students to create good literacy skills in reviewing every issue and information that develops in society.

This is a very good guide or reference for students in Indonesia to be more selective and critical. This is in line with the statement from Zakirah (2020) that it is unavoidable that information that is spread in the community today can be easily accessed by the community and even children. The lack of information filtering in the digital world will certainly have positive and negative impacts (Sumiati & Wijonarko, 2020). The tendency to bring negative impacts will be more dominant if there is no good supervision from all circles, especially from the individual concerned. Based on this condition, it is hoped that later by implementing an Merdeka Curriculum, students can get used to learning from an early age to be selective in receiving and reviewing various information received.

Besides being related to the context of the material and skills that are supporting factors for the implementation of an Merdeka Curriculum, another important thing is related to the plan to create a profile of Pancasila students. This goal is to restore students' identities and characteristics after they are felt to have changed due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The application of online learning or learning from home without good supervision by parents gives children the freedom to use gadgets. According to Rizaldi, et al., (2021b) that the role of parents is very important in accompanying children during the learning process from home. Whether or not the learning objectives are achieved during the COVID-19 pandemic will be seen from the extent to which parents are involved in assisting children in learning.

4. Conclusions

The Merdeka Curriculum is one form of government policy that can be used as an alternative to anticipate the occurrence of learning loss conditions in the learning process. This can be seen from several characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum which is very suitable for learning conditions after the COVID-19 pandemic, such as focusing on essential materials, being project-based to shape the character of Pancasila students, and being flexible according to the needs and character of each school. So if you refer to its potential in the current Indonesian education system, it will be one of the good things to be applied in the future.

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