

ANALYSIS OF A NEW LEARNING PARADIGM BASED ON KURIKULUM MERDEKA

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Abstract: In an effort to provide a safe and stable learning environment in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Kemendikburistek) has issued a policy of the Kurikulum Merdeka for all levels of education. The underlying philosophy of this initiative is the concept of Merdeka Belajar, which essentially means that students are given the freedom to explore their respective interests and talents. This policy is a transformative step for the realization of Excellent Indonesian Human Resources (HR) who have a Pancasila student profile. Merdeka Belajar has been launched for 21 episodes through the end of June 2022. As this is a relatively new policy, some are naturally skeptical. Furthermore, comprehensive discussion of why and how the Kurikulum Merdeka is implemented to date is limited. Therefore, this paper presents an analysis of the new learning paradigm seen from the Kurikulum Merdeka perspective and the creation of a systematic review of the relevant databases for the adoption of curriculum changes. There is strong evidence that the Kurikulum Merdeka is a viable way to overcome learning losses due to school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic. This work has the potential to become an important reference to increase commitment and cooperation from various parties in implementing policies for higher quality education.

Keywords: Kurikulum Merdeka; Merdeka Belajar; Curriculum; Freedom to learn; Freedom to teach; Learning loss

Introduction

In an effort to provide a safe and stable learning environment in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (Abidah, Hidaayatullaah, Simamora, Fehabutar, & Mutakinati, 2020; Sihombing, Anugrahsari, Parlina, & Kusumastuti, 2021), the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) has issued a policy of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* for all levels of education. The *Kurikulum Merdeka* question and answer pocket book (Kemendikbudristek, 2022a) states that student activities in the *Kurikulum Merdeka* consist of intracurricular, extracurricular, and Pancasila student profile strengthening projects. The Pancasila student profile (*Profil Pelajar Pancasila*, known as P3) is an effort to improve the quality of education by focusing on character building (Jati, Zuriyah, & Sunaryo, 2021; Zakso, Agung, Susanto, & Calvin Capnary, 2021). The Pancasila students exemplify noble character, critical and independent thought, creativity, cooperation, and global diversity. They possess the spirit and worldliness to continue learning throughout life, and exhibit behaviors that are in accordance with the values contained in Pancasila (Brata, Utomo, & Sukardi, 2022; Hidayah, 2021; Luluk Elyana, 2021; Sudarman, Noor Ellyawati, Riyo Riyadi, & Ratna Fitri Astuti, 2022). The Pancasila student profile strengthening project can be carried out by training students.

The underlying philosophy of this initiative *Kurikulum Merdeka* is the concept of *Merdeka Belajar*, which in essence means that students are given the freedom to explore their respective interests and talents (Defrizal, Redaputri, Narundana, Nurdiawansyah, & Dharmawan, 2022; Kemendikbudristek & Tohir, 2020; Mazid, Futaqi, & Farikah, 2021; Pangestu, Sulfemi, & Yusfitriadi, 2021; Prakoso, Ramdani, & Rahmah, 2021; Tedjokoesoemo, Nilasari, & Sari, 2020). This policy is a transformative step for the realization of Excellent Indonesian Human Resources (HR) who live consistent with the Pancasila student profile. *Merdeka Belajar* has been launched for 21 episodes through the end of June 2022. This new policy was launched by the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia (Nadiem Makarim) to produce students who exhibit independence, courage, courtesy, and competence. A new curriculum not only creates a new teaching system in the classroom but also teaches outside the classroom (Kodrat, 2021; Prakoso et al., 2021; Rohmad, 2020). This curriculum also contains four new policy points of the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, namely the National Examination (*Ujian Nasional* or UN) replaced by a Minimum Competency Assessment (*Asesmen Kompetensi Minimum* or AKM) and Character Survey, the National Standardized School Examination (*Ujian Sekolah Berstandar Nasional* or USBN) organized independently by schools, simplification of the Lesson Plan (*Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran* or RPP), and the implementation of a zoning system for the new student's admission. The *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum is developed to create different learning nuances, which are comfortable for teachers and students and adjust to the development of existing education. The curriculum is not only to improve students' cognitive abilities, but also to develop students' personalities to be more independent, cooperative, courageous, and polite. Character development is also assessed in accordance with the Pancasila student profile. Additionally, the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum is aimed at improving the quality of education in Indonesia so as to create human resources that are not only superior in academics but also have good character.

Several studies on the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* have been reported (Audina & Harahap, 2022; Fahad Achmad Sadat, 2022; Faizah, Permanasari, & Rustaman, 2021; Juita & Yusmaridi, 2021; Wulandari, Murwaningsih, & Marmoah, 2020; Zahro, 2021; Zakiyyah, Cahyani, & Fatnah, 2021). Evi Hasim 2020 conducted research on the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in learning activities (Evi Hasim, 2020). She shows that independent learning refers to the freedom of students to choose the field that suits their needs. Students can not only study in the classroom but can also study outside the classroom to improve other skills outside of their major that are beneficial for raising the standards and needs of the working world. Sihombing et al., 2021 conducted research on the survey on the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* on online learning (Evi Hasim, 2020). The research showed that the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* at the high school level was successful, i.e. the ranks of the principals and teachers concerned. Learning can run comfortably and pleasantly for students, teachers, and also the ranks of principals. Rusnaini's group (Sihombing et al., 2021). discussed the intensification of the Pancasila student profile and its implications for the personal resilience of students. The results showed that the Pancasila profile students must be noble, critical, independent, creative, cooperative, and

globally diverse, and have behaviors that are in accordance with the values contained in Pancasila. This Pancasila student profile has implications in shaping the personal resilience of students who are noble value, moral, worldly, egalitarian, and have competencies to compete in the real world. Further, Muji's group studied related to strengthening the Pancasila student profile in the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Muji, Gistituati, Bentri, & Falma, 2021). The results showed that the Pancasila students with a *Kurikulum Merdeka* could make teachers more innovative in planning projects according to student characteristics. Teachers also become more flexible in carrying out project-based learning activities. However, this *Kurikulum Merdeka* requires a strong commitment from teachers, cooperation, and sincerity in its implementation so that the needs of the Pancasila student profile can be successfully met.

As this is a relatively new policy, some are naturally skeptical (Astuti, Rosiawan, & Suyitno, 2022; Bahar et al., 2022; Purike, 2021; Rizka Zulfika, 2019; Zuhrohtun, Heriningsih, Sunaryo, & Sriyono, 2021). Furthermore, comprehensive discussion of why and how the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is implemented to date is limited. Therefore, this paper presents an analysis of the new learning paradigm from the perspective of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

Method

A systematic review was carried out on the relevant databases on the adaptation of curriculum changes from the perspective of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. This type of research is a literature study with a descriptive method. The goal is to describe the findings of the library taken from articles, Internet, and YouTube streaming related to the topic discussed. The lack of published literature on research topics is the reason researchers take references from the Internet and the official YouTube channels of policymakers. The data analysis technique used is based on the method described by Sugiyono et al. (Sugiyono, 2015). Among collected data with relevancy to a given article, this data is then reduced to produce a dataset that is in line with the research questions. Then, the data is presented visually, whereupon conclusions can be drawn. Figure 1 shows an illustration of the research flow used in this study.

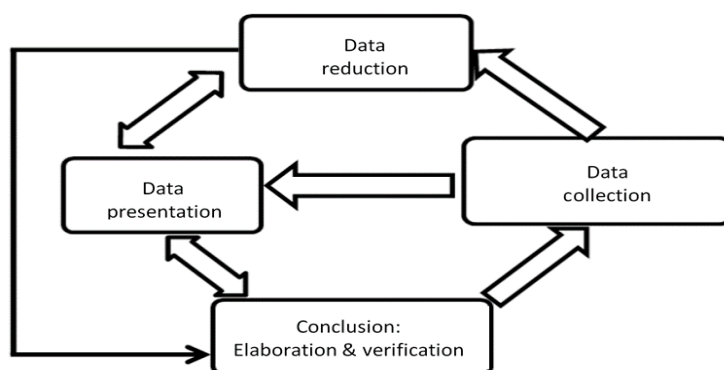


Figure 1. Illustration of the research flow

Results and Discussion

We found that the Kurikulum Merdeka or the so-called new paradigm curriculum is gradually adopted at all levels of education starting from early childhood education (*Pendidikan anak Usia Dini* or PAUD), kindergarten (*Taman Kanak-kanak* or TK), elementary school (*Sekolah Dasar* or SD), middle school (*Sekolah Menengah Pertama* or SMP), high school level (*Sekolah Menengah Atas* or SMA) and eventually college. To support this policy, several programs were launched by Kemendikbudristek such as activating school (*Sekolah Penggerak*), activating teacher (*Guru Penggerak*), and activating organization (*Organisasi Penggerak*).

Through the development of Pancasila Students, the *Sekolah Penggerak* Program aims to accomplish the goal of Indonesian education, which is to actualize an evolved Indonesia that is sovereign, independent, and individual. The *Sekolah Penggerak* Program places a strong emphasis on creating comprehensive learning outcomes for students, including character development and competencies such as literacy and numeracy for principals and teachers. The prior school reform program has been improved with the *Sekolah Penggerak* Program. The *Sekolah Penggerak* Program will push forward public and private schools in all learning environments in 1-2 steps. The *Sekolah Penggerak* Program is implemented gradually and is incorporated into the ecosystem until it is implemented in all Indonesian schools as has been targeted in 2024. At the college level, the *Kurikulum Merdeka* was carried out under the so-called *Kampus Merdeka* program. It provides opportunities for students to hone skills according to their talents and interests by going directly into the working world as preparation for future careers.

In order to actualize student-centered education, *Guru Penggerak*, who is the mind leader in independent learning, mobilizes the whole educational ecosystem. To achieve the Pancasila Student Profile, *Guru Penggerak* conducts student leadership programs and leads learning groups for teachers in classrooms. An instructor must spend nine months going through the selection and training required to become a *Guru Penggerak*. The future *Guru Penggerak* will get assistance from qualified teachers, facilitators, and assistants throughout the learning process. So far, the training for *Guru Penggerak* is on the 8th batch.

Parents, community and traditional leaders, organizations, academics, volunteers, and other stakeholders are often incorporated into Indonesian organizations. All interested parties must be dedicated to collaborating with the Ministry of Education and Culture to develop innovative teaching methods if Indonesian children are to receive the greatest education possible. These innovations must be effective in attaining our core objective, which is to raise the standard of instruction for Indonesian students.

One of the approaches to achieving the Independent Curriculum is to implement the initiatives indicated above. According to Minister of Education and Culture Nadiem Makarim, in order to hasten the transformation of Indonesian education, *Sekolah Penggerak*, *Guru Penggerak*, and *Organisasi Penggerak* are expected to support students' development of holistic-thinking skills based on Pancasila values and have a positive effect on teachers (Muji et al., 2021). Table 1 below describes the new paradigm of learning in the *Kurikulum Merdeka* as stated in *Keputusan Mendikbud Ristek Republik Indonesia Nomor 262/M/2022* (Kemendikbudristek, 2022b) and *Perubahan Atas Keputusan Menteri Pendidikan*,

Kebudayaan, Riset dan Teknologi Nomor 56/M/2022 (Kemendikbudristek, 2022c) about guidelines for implementing curriculum in the context of learning recovery (*Pedoman Penerapan Kurikulum dalam Rangka Pemulihan Pembelajaran*).

Table 1. Characteristics of Kurikulum Merdeka

No.	Characteristics
1.	The curriculum structure developed refers to the Pancasila Student Profile as a reference in the development of Content Standards, Process Standards, and Assessment Standards, or Curriculum structure, Learning Outcomes (<i>Capaian Pembelajaran</i> or CP), Learning Principles, and Learning Assessment. Additionally, the <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i> paradigm also provides freedom in developing work programs that can support the competence of its students, and the program can be adjusted according to the vision and mission, and resources available at the school.
2.	Learning outcomes are a series of knowledge, skills, and attitudes presented as a unified continuous process to build complete competencies. Therefore, the learning assessment developed must refer to the learning outcomes that have been determined.
3.	If in the previous curriculum the thematic learning process was only carried out at the elementary school level, the thematic learning of <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i> can be carried out at all levels of education. Thematic learning does not have to be subject-based, and schools can independently develop them.
4.	There are no class hours established each week as in the 2013 curriculum (known as K-13) (Iskandar, 2020; Nuraeni, MS, & Boeriswati, 2020; Warman, Suryaningsi, & Mulawarman, 2021). However, the class hours in the <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i> can be set per year so that schools can develop and regulate the implementation of learning. Subjects may not be taught in even semesters if in odd semesters they have been taught throughout the class hours are met, then it is not a problem and can be justified.
5.	Schools are given the flexibility to develop learning models that prioritize collaboration between subjects and create cross-subject assessments, such as project-based assessments. Meanwhile, junior high school and high school/ vocational school students can carry out at least three project assessments in one academic year. For example, one such project is centered around national character or nationalism. This aims to strengthen the Pancasila Student Profile.
6.	The subject of Information and Communication Technology, which was originally abolished in the previously used curriculum, has resurfaced in the <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i> to be delivered for the middle school level (<i>Sekolah Menengah Pertama</i> or SMP). For schools that do not have educators with an ICT/Informatics educational background, these subjects may be taught by general teachers who have the knowledge and desire to learn ICT. Kemendikburistek has prepared a teaching module that guides teachers and students in the teaching-learning process.
7.	Different from the previously used curriculum which taught natural science subjects (<i>Ilmu Pengetahuan Alam</i> or IPA) and social science subjects (<i>Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial</i> or IPS) from the SD 4 th grade, the <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i> combines these subjects into Natural and Social Sciences subjects (<i>Ilmu Pengetahuan Alam dan Sosial</i> known as IPAS). The IPAS subjects are taught from the SD 3 rd grade. The purpose of combining these subjects is to trigger students to manage the natural and social environment in a single unit. By doing so, students will be better prepared at SMP. Meanwhile, at the high school level SMA, the major choice will be carried out in 11 th and 12 th grades.

From Table 1, it is evident that Kemendikburistek facilitates more active and adaptive learning by providing flexibility for educators to carry out learning processes i.e., project-based learning. To achieve this, the correct models, approaches, strategies, and methods are needed in realizing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* and realizing the goals of National education.

Fundamentals of *Kurikulum Merdeka*

In order to shape school culture, educational services create 3 activities in schools: extracurricular, intracurricular, and Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (*Proyek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* known as P5) activities. P5 is a cross-discipline project that is contextual and based on community needs in the educational unit environment. As an educator, teachers are responsible for the intra-curricular and P5. However, P5 is only carried out by certain teachers who receive additional assignments as extra coaches. From the student's point of view, every student will learn subjects in intra-curricular activities and implement the Pancasila student profile character formation project in a separate activity. In fact, all activities will eventually lead to forming a Pancasila student profile with 6 dimensions such as (1) critical reasoning, (2) independence, (3) creativity, (4) mutual cooperation, (5) global diversity, and (6) nobility. These dimensions indicate that Pancasila student profiles are not only focused on cognitive abilities but also on attitudes and behavior according to Indonesian national identity and worldliness. Starting in the 2021/2022 academic year, there are four themes for the PAUD level such as, 'I love the earth' (sustainable lifestyle); 'I love Indonesia' (local wisdom); 'brotherhood' (*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*); and 'imagination and creativity' (engineering and technology). Whereas SD, SMP, and SMA levels contain eight themes such as sustainable lifestyle, local culture, unity in diversity, awakening the soul and body, voice of democracy, engineering and technology, entrepreneurship, and work (only for vocational high school, *Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan* or SMK). Those themes were proposed based on priorities in the 2020-2035 National Education Roadmap, Sustainable Development Goals, and other relevant documents. As mentioned in *Keputusan Mendikbud Ristek Republik Indonesia* Nomor 56/M/2022 (Kemendikbudristek, 2022c), P5 time allotment is about 20-30% of total credits learned in a year. To a certain extent, it is the core change in *Kurikulum Merdeka* which distinguishes it from other curricula, since it was neglected.

Nawacita Priority

The general *Kurikulum Merdeka* is one of the steps to realize the government's goal of educating the nation's people, though the national education system must be able to ensure equitable distribution of educational opportunities, quality, and efficiency. This is necessary to face challenges in accordance with the demands of changes in local, national, and global life. Therefore, it is necessary to carry out education renewal in a planned, directed, and sustainable manner. Joko Widodo, the president of Indonesia, proposed 9 development priorities for 2015-2019 known as Nawacita as a vision and mission in the 2014 presidential election campaign (Adinugroho, Sjahputri, Budiarto, & Muhamad, 2018; Hafidz, 2017; Hastangka & Budiman, 2020; Soleman & Noer, 2017). The 5th and 8th themes of Nawacita are improving the quality of life and revolutionizing the nation's character. They imply that it is crucial to form a highly competitive Indonesian population as the main provision to face global competition (Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2003). Kemendikbudristek determined 6 programs refer to the Nawacita, such as the Smart Indonesia Program (*Program Indonesia Pintar* or PIP), strengthening character education (Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter or PPK), vocational education revitalization, education zoning, cultural advancement, and school digitization.

Moreover, the government strives to improve the quality of life of Indonesians by improving the quality of education and training through the Teacher Mobilization and School Mobilization (*Guru Penggerak and Sekolah Penggerak*) programs, in order to realize the purpose of *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

Pancasila Student Profile

The *Kurikulum Merdeka* prioritizes the power of character. Particularly, the character of a Pancasila student is emphasized. According to Nadiem Makarim, Pancasila Student Profile includes the following

1. Have faith, fear God, and have a noble character so that students achieve a good moral foundation among fellow human beings, with national character;
2. Global diversity, so that students are able to maintain traditional cultural values, especially when interacting with other cultures;
3. Gotong Royong, which means that students are able to collaborate, care and share with the surrounding environment;
4. Independent, such that students exercise independence in carrying out life, especially in completing a job responsibly;
5. Critical reasoning, students need to exercise critical reasoning in order to analyze information, evaluate, and reach rational conclusions;
6. Creative, so Pancasila students must have an open mentality to innovation and creative thinking in the midst of global technological growth.

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that Pancasila ideology has been induced in Indonesian education, as a crystallization of the nation's values.

Conclusion

There is strong evidence that the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is a viable way to overcome learning losses due to school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic. The new learning paradigm in the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is project-based thematic learning. Support and hard work from various parties are needed to realize a better Indonesian education. This work has the potential to become an important point of reference for the continued efforts to increase commitment and cooperation from various parties in implementing policies for higher-quality education.

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