

Curriculum and Educational Identity: Assessing the Role of Merdeka Curriculum in Student Character and Competency Building

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Abstract

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 curriculum is to develop kids' character by giving them opportunity to study informally, quietly, joyfully, and while paying attention to their inherent abilities. This research uses a qualitative case study approach from a literature study to examine the use of an integrated curriculum on students related to aspects of learning experiences, competencies, and learning interactions. The Merdeka Curriculum gives students the ability to autonomously plan and create learning 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.

Keywords

Merdeka Curriculum Character; Pancasila Students' profile; Integrated Curriculum

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1. 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. Unesco 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).

The curriculum plays a very important role in the process of learning and teaching languages by educational institutions. In the ever-evolving world of education, the curriculum plays a very important role in shaping students' educational identity and character. The curriculum is not just a list of subjects to be learned, but also a map that describes the values and competencies to be built in students. Through the curriculum, educational goals can be articulated and implemented, providing a clear direction for students' academic and character development. The importance of the curriculum in student character building lies in its ability to integrate moral and ethical values into the learning process. By promoting principles such as honesty, responsibility and social care, the curriculum can help shape individuals who are not only academically intelligent but also possess integrity and empathy. A well-designed curriculum will ensure that students' character develops along with their academic achievements, resulting in well-rounded and virtuous individuals.

On the other hand, the curriculum also plays a crucial role in building student competencies that include critical thinking skills, problem solving, and the ability to apply knowledge in real contexts. An innovative and adaptive curriculum is able to facilitate learning that is relevant to the challenges of the times, providing students with the tools and skills necessary to succeed in an increasingly complex and globalized world. In essence, character education is expected to form a whole human being (holistic) with character in addition to forming lifelong learners, who will actually be able to develop all the potential of students in a balanced manner (spiritual, emotional, intellectual, social, and physical) and also optimally. This answers the opinion that has been raised that education only emphasizes and is oriented towards "academic aspects" and does not develop social, emotional, creative, and even motor aspects. Students are only prepared to get good grades, but they are not trained to be able to live. In fact, this can be realized if the strengthening of character education is well programmed and planned, for example strengthening classroom-based character education, should be implemented by every teacher during learning. Habituation and cultivation of good values will be absorbed by students in the learning process.

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).

2. METHODS

The method used in this research is a literature study or literature review. Literature study is a research method that involves collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data from various written sources such as books, scientific journals, articles, research reports, and other sources relevant to the research topic. This method is very useful for building theoretical frameworks, identifying research gaps, and providing a foundation for further research. The literature study data collected is based on data from the search results of the literature study database on Google Scholar as a comparison which is then grouped based on the relevance of the questions and objectives of this article, then a summary of the results is made.

Research design

In this study, researchers looked for writing results that were sequentially considered from the most relevant, relevant, and moderately relevant. Furthermore, to determine whether the journal is good for review, the researcher uses the critical appraisal instrument from the Joanna Briggs Institute on research with Checklist for Case Control Studies, Checklist for Case Reports, Checklist for Case Series, Checklist for Cohort Studies Checklist for Diagnostic Test Accuracy Studies, Checklist for Economic Evaluations, Checklist for Prevalence Studies, Checklist for Quasi Experimental Studies (non-randomized experimental studies), Checklist for Randomized Controlled Trials, Checklist for Systematic Reviews, Checklist for Text and Opinion, Checklist for Analytical Cross Sectional Studies, Checklist for Qualitative Research. The instrument contains a checklist to see if there is suitability, harmony and accuracy of the title, design, sample, objectives, results and discussion. This checklist was then filled in based on the type of research and assessed. Then the researcher read the abstract, each journal first to provide an assessment of whether the problems discussed are in accordance with what is to be solved in a journal. Noting important points and their relevance to the research problem.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

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 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.

Discussion: 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) canbe seen in the table below:

Table 1. Key elements of the Pancasila students'profile

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; e) and state morality
2		Knowing and appreciating culture, intercultural communication skills in interacting with others, reflection and responsibility for the experience of diversity.
3	Global diversity Mutual Cooperation	Collaboration, caring and sharing.
4	Independent	Self-awareness and self-regulation
5		Obtain and process information and ideas, analyze and evaluate reasoning, reflect on thoughts and thought processes, and make decisions
6	Critical reasoning 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.

Discussion: 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 *silaturahmi 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).

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 cocurricular 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.

4. CONCLUSION

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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