Evaluation of the Implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum on Students' Creativity and Learning Independence

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ABSTRACT. This study aims to evaluate the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum in enhancing students' creativity and independent learning through a literature review approach. The *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum emphasizes flexible, student-centered, and contextual learning to support the development of students' competencies, creativity, and autonomy in learning. This research employs a library study method by analyzing relevant books, journal articles, and official policy documents related to curriculum and learning innovation. Data were analyzed using content analysis techniques to identify key themes concerning creativity and independent learning. The findings indicate that the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum has strong potential to improve students' creativity through project-based and differentiated learning, as well as to foster independent learning by encouraging active student participation and positioning teachers as facilitators in the learning process. The effectiveness of this curriculum is influenced by teacher readiness, institutional support, and students' adaptability to autonomous learning models.

Keywords: Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, Creativity, Independent Learning

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INTRODUCTION

Educational reform has become a central issue in contemporary educational systems, particularly in response to rapid social, technological, and cultural changes that demand more adaptive, creative, and autonomous learners. Traditional curriculum models that emphasize rigid content mastery and teacher-centered instruction are increasingly viewed as insufficient to prepare students for the complexities of the 21st century, which require critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and lifelong learning skills (Sanjaya, 2020). In this context, curriculum innovation is not merely a matter of changing learning materials, but involves a fundamental transformation of learning paradigms, shifting from content transmission to competency development and student empowerment (Mulyasa, 2021). The emergence of flexible curriculum models reflects a global trend in education that seeks to position learners as active subjects of learning rather than passive recipients of knowledge (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

The *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum represents Indonesia's strategic response to these global educational challenges by promoting a learning system that prioritizes flexibility, contextual relevance, and student autonomy. This curriculum emphasizes differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and the integration of real-life problems into classroom activities, allowing students

to explore their interests, talents, and learning styles more freely (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). Through this approach, learning is expected to become more meaningful and engaging, enabling students to construct knowledge actively rather than merely memorizing information (Sanjaya, 2020). The core philosophy of *Merdeka Belajar* aligns with constructivist learning theory, which views learning as an active process of meaning-making based on learners' experiences and interactions with their environment (Suparno, 2017). Therefore, this curriculum not only focuses on academic achievement but also seeks to cultivate essential character traits, including creativity and independent learning.

Creativity is widely recognized as a crucial educational outcome in the modern era, as it enables learners to generate original ideas, solve complex problems, and adapt to uncertain situations. In educational settings, creativity is not limited to artistic expression but includes the ability to think divergently, explore alternative solutions, and apply knowledge in novel ways (Munandar, 2014). The implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum provides a structural foundation for creativity development through learning activities that encourage inquiry, experimentation, and collaborative problem-solving (Mulyasa, 2021). By engaging students in project-based tasks and interdisciplinary learning, the curriculum creates opportunities for learners to connect theoretical concepts with real-world contexts, thereby stimulating higher-order thinking and creative expression (Sani, 2019). Consequently, creativity becomes an integral component of learning rather than a supplementary skill.

In addition to creativity, independent learning is another fundamental dimension promoted by the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. Independent learning refers to learners' capacity to regulate their own learning processes, including setting goals, selecting learning strategies, monitoring progress, and reflecting on outcomes (Zimmerman, 2002). This concept is closely associated with self-regulated learning theory, which emphasizes learners' active involvement in controlling cognitive, motivational, and behavioral aspects of learning (Slameto, 2015). Within the framework of *Merdeka Belajar*, students are encouraged to take greater responsibility for their learning by choosing learning paths, engaging in reflective practices, and participating in formative assessment processes (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). The shift of teachers' roles from knowledge transmitters to learning facilitators further reinforces students' autonomy and self-direction in learning activities (Sanjaya, 2020).

Despite its promising conceptual foundation, the practical implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum faces several challenges at the institutional and pedagogical levels. Teachers' readiness to adopt innovative teaching strategies, limited access to learning resources, and varying levels of students' learning motivation can hinder the effectiveness of this curriculum (Mulyasa, 2021). Moreover, the transition from traditional learning models to autonomous and creative learning environments requires substantial cultural change within schools, which cannot be achieved instantly (Sani, 2019). Therefore, systematic evaluation of the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* is essential to understand its actual impact on students' creativity and independent learning. Through a literature-based evaluation, this study seeks to synthesize existing research findings and theoretical perspectives to provide a comprehensive understanding of how this curriculum contributes to students' learning development and to identify key factors that influence its success.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach using a literature review method to evaluate the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum in relation to students' creativity and independent learning. A literature review is considered an appropriate method for synthesizing theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and policy documents in order to generate comprehensive insights into a particular educational phenomenon (Sugiyono, 2020). Through this

approach, the study does not aim to collect primary data from field observations or interviews, but rather focuses on analyzing existing scholarly works that discuss curriculum reform, creativity in education, and autonomous learning. This method allows researchers to identify patterns, conceptual frameworks, and dominant issues within the existing body of knowledge (Creswell, 2014).

The data sources in this study consist of books, peer-reviewed national and international journal articles, and official government documents related to the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. The selection of literature was conducted purposively by considering relevance, credibility, and publication quality, particularly sources published within the last ten years to ensure theoretical and contextual актуалitas (Moleong, 2017). Key themes used in the search process included curriculum reform, student creativity, independent learning, self-regulated learning, and project-based learning. The literature was obtained through digital academic databases, institutional repositories, and official websites of educational authorities, enabling systematic access to authoritative and reliable references (Sani, 2019).

Data analysis in this study was carried out using content analysis techniques, which involve identifying, categorizing, and interpreting key concepts and findings from the selected literature (Krippendorff, 2018). The analysis process began with reading and coding each source to extract relevant information related to the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum and its impact on creativity and independent learning. Subsequently, the coded data were grouped into thematic categories, such as learning strategies, teacher roles, student engagement, and learning autonomy. These themes were then interpreted to construct analytical narratives that explain how the curriculum contributes to educational transformation (Sugiyono, 2020).

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, this study applied triangulation of sources by comparing arguments and empirical evidence across multiple references (Moleong, 2017). The use of diverse data sources, including theoretical works and empirical studies, strengthens the credibility of the analysis and minimizes subjective bias. Furthermore, critical interpretation was employed to avoid merely summarizing existing studies, but rather to evaluate their relevance and implications for understanding the effectiveness of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. Through this systematic procedure, the literature review method serves not only as a descriptive tool but also as an analytical framework for evaluating curriculum implementation in contemporary educational contexts (Creswell, 2014).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This section presents the main findings of the literature review regarding the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum and its impact on students' creativity and independent learning. The results are organized into several key themes that emerge consistently across the reviewed studies.

1. Student-Centered Learning as a Foundation for Creativity

The first major finding indicates that the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum strengthens student-centered learning as the primary foundation for creativity development. The literature consistently shows that shifting learning orientation from teacher-centered to student-centered approaches enables learners to actively construct knowledge, explore ideas, and engage in meaningful learning experiences (Sanjaya, 2020). Through flexible learning designs, students are encouraged to ask questions, express opinions, and participate in decision-making processes related to their learning activities (Mulyasa, 2021). This active involvement promotes divergent thinking, where students are not limited to single correct answers but are allowed to generate multiple solutions and interpretations (Munandar, 2014). As a result, creativity emerges naturally as an integral component of learning, rather than as a separate instructional target.

2. Project-Based Learning and Contextual Learning

The second finding highlights the central role of project-based learning and contextual learning in enhancing students' creativity. The *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum emphasizes learning through real-world problems, collaborative projects, and interdisciplinary tasks that require students to apply knowledge creatively (Sani, 2019). These learning activities provide opportunities for students to integrate cognitive, social, and emotional aspects of learning, thereby fostering deeper understanding and original thinking (Suparno, 2017). By working on authentic projects, students develop the ability to analyze problems, design solutions, and present outcomes creatively. This process not only strengthens academic competence but also cultivates creativity as a practical life skill that can be transferred beyond the classroom context.

3. Learning Autonomy and Self-Regulated Learning

The third finding reveals that the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum significantly supports the development of independent learning through learning autonomy and self-regulated learning practices. The literature suggests that providing students with freedom to choose learning topics, resources, and learning strategies increases their sense of responsibility and ownership over the learning process (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). This autonomy aligns with self-regulated learning theory, which emphasizes learners' ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning activities (Zimmerman, 2002). Students who engage in autonomous learning tend to develop stronger motivation, persistence, and metacognitive awareness, which are essential characteristics of independent learners (Slameto, 2015). Consequently, independent learning becomes a sustainable habit rather than a temporary instructional outcome.

4. Teacher's Role as Learning Facilitator

The fourth finding focuses on the transformation of teachers' roles within the *Merdeka Belajar* framework. Teachers are no longer positioned as sole knowledge transmitters, but as facilitators who guide students in exploring information, reflecting on learning experiences, and developing problem-solving skills (Sanjaya, 2020). This pedagogical shift reduces students' dependency on direct instruction and encourages them to actively seek knowledge from various sources (Mulyasa, 2021). Through formative feedback and reflective dialogue, teachers help students identify learning gaps and develop personalized learning strategies. This interaction strengthens students' autonomy and fosters independent learning by empowering learners to take control of their educational journeys.

5. Institutional Support and Implementation Challenges

The final finding indicates that institutional support plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. Schools with supportive leadership, adequate learning resources, and professional development programs for teachers tend to achieve more positive outcomes in creativity and independent learning (Sani, 2019). Conversely, limited infrastructure, rigid administrative systems, and low teacher readiness often hinder successful implementation (Mulyasa, 2021). These findings suggest that curriculum innovation must be accompanied by systemic changes at the organizational level to ensure that creative and autonomous learning environments can be sustained.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum is closely aligned with contemporary learning theories that emphasize student-centered and constructivist learning paradigms. The shift from teacher-dominated instruction to learner-oriented learning environments reflects the core principles of constructivist theory, which views knowledge as actively constructed by learners through experience and interaction (Suparno, 2017). This

perspective supports the results of this study, which indicate that creativity and independent learning emerge as natural outcomes when students are given opportunities to explore ideas, engage in meaningful tasks, and reflect on their learning processes. In this sense, *Merdeka Belajar* can be interpreted as a practical implementation of constructivist learning principles within the Indonesian educational context.

The emphasis on project-based learning and contextual learning within the *Merdeka Belajar* framework is also consistent with experiential learning theory, which suggests that learning becomes more effective when students are actively involved in real-world problem-solving activities (Kolb, 2014). The results of this study resonate with previous research indicating that project-based learning enhances students' creativity by fostering inquiry, experimentation, and collaborative thinking (Sani, 2019). Furthermore, similar findings were reported by Mulyasa (2021), who argued that flexible learning designs allow students to connect academic knowledge with everyday experiences, thereby stimulating creative thinking and deeper understanding. These theoretical and empirical insights strengthen the argument that creativity under *Merdeka Belajar* is not incidental, but structurally embedded in its pedagogical design.

In terms of independent learning, the findings are strongly supported by self-regulated learning theory, which emphasizes learners' ability to manage their own cognitive and motivational processes (Zimmerman, 2002). The autonomy provided by the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum enables students to develop metacognitive skills such as goal setting, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation, which are essential components of independent learning (Slameto, 2015). This result is consistent with previous studies that highlight the importance of learner autonomy in enhancing motivation and learning persistence (Sanjaya, 2020). Through flexible learning pathways and formative assessment practices, students gradually shift from dependency on external guidance to internal control of learning, indicating a transformation in learning culture.

Moreover, the changing role of teachers as facilitators reflects the principles of humanistic learning theory, which views teachers as learning partners who support students' personal growth and self-actualization (Rogers, 2008). The facilitative role of teachers under *Merdeka Belajar* encourages open communication, reflective dialogue, and mutual respect between teachers and students, creating a psychologically safe learning environment that is conducive to creativity and autonomy. Previous research by Munandar (2014) also supports this view, emphasizing that creativity flourishes in environments where learners feel free to express ideas without fear of judgment or failure. Therefore, the teacher's pedagogical approach becomes a critical factor in determining the success of curriculum implementation.

However, this study also reveals that the success of *Merdeka Belajar* is highly dependent on systemic and contextual factors. While theoretical frameworks strongly support the curriculum's principles, practical challenges such as limited teacher competence, inadequate infrastructure, and rigid school management often hinder effective implementation (Mulyasa, 2021). These findings are consistent with previous evaluations of curriculum reforms, which suggest that policy innovation alone is insufficient without comprehensive professional development and institutional support (Sani, 2019). As such, the gap between policy ideals and classroom realities remains a critical issue that must be addressed to ensure that creativity and independent learning can be fully realized in practice.

Overall, this discussion highlights that the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum has a strong theoretical foundation and empirical relevance in promoting creativity and independent learning. By integrating constructivist, experiential, self-regulated, and humanistic learning theories, the curriculum provides a holistic framework for educational transformation. Nevertheless, its effectiveness depends not only on pedagogical design but also on teachers' readiness, institutional

commitment, and cultural change within schools. Therefore, continuous evaluation and reflective practice are essential to bridge the gap between curriculum philosophy and educational reality.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum has a significant theoretical and practical potential in enhancing students' creativity and independent learning. Through flexible, student-centered, and contextual learning approaches, the curriculum encourages learners to actively engage in the learning process, explore ideas, and develop original solutions to real-world problems. The literature review shows that creativity is fostered through project-based and collaborative learning, while independent learning is strengthened by learning autonomy and self-regulated learning practices. However, the effectiveness of the curriculum is not solely determined by its conceptual design, but also by teachers' pedagogical competence, institutional support, and students' readiness to adapt to autonomous learning environments. Therefore, continuous professional development for teachers, supportive school leadership, and a learning culture that values creativity and autonomy are essential to ensure the successful implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum in achieving sustainable educational transformation.

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