

The Essence of “Merdeka Belajar” as a Transformational Culture Change in Indonesian Education

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Abstract: This study aims to review the essence of the "Merdeka Curriculum" in carrying out its role as a curriculum that transforms educational culture in Indonesia in accordance with the demands of the times in the era of "society 5.0." The research method used in this study is the library research method using a qualitative descriptive approach, where the source of the data used in this study is in the form of books or documents related to research. The primary data used in this study is the Merdeka Belajar guidebook and publications related to Merdeka Belajar delivered by the Minister of Education, Nadim Anwar Makarim, as the initiator of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum itself. Meanwhile, the secondary data in this study are books, journals, and articles with high reputation and credibility related to education and the Merdeka Belajar curriculum itself. The data collection technique used in this study is documentation; the data will be analyzed using qualitative descriptive techniques and validated using source triangulation. The findings of this study are as follows: 1) the purpose of holistic education, namely education that focuses on developing children's noble character rather than just their cognitive abilities; 2) freedom of learning mandates freedom of learning by placing students, teachers, and principals in a school institution as the main figures in the teaching and learning process; and 3) independent learning provides flexibility to schools in order to improve the quality of student learning through education.

Keywords: Merdeka Belajar, Cultural Transformation, Era Society 5.0.

Introduction

Currently, the world has entered the era of the "Industrial Revolution 4.0," which is an era where all things are based on digital, artificial intelligence, and interconnectedness, so that the world is increasingly integrated in globalization (Schwab, 2016). Thus, the industrial world requires a much different workforce, namely a workforce that is able to understand disruption, is innovative, creative, collaborative, understands technology, understands data, and has global capabilities. This is certainly a big challenge for the people of Indonesia. Therefore, the government is currently prioritizing the development of human resources in order to create a workforce that is ready to face all forms of challenges in an increasingly complex world (KPPIP, 2019).

One of the first steps taken in order to realize skilled, smart, and superior human resources is improving the education system. A strong education system is one that is able to understand the times and adapt to the changing times in the future. That is, education must be adapted to existing changes (Dwiningrum, 2021). Education must also develop and be adaptive to the currents of globalization and technological advances in order to meet human needs in the evolving phase of life (Siregar dkk., 2020). This is in accordance with the opinion of Hoyles & Lagrange (2010), which state that digital technology has a great influence on the world of education. Thus, the improvement of the education system is needed in order to produce the necessary future workers, or, in other words, in accordance with the needs of the industry and the demands of the times.

Development policies that emphasize education as an investment in the future are very important to build superior human resources (Rasyid, 2015). Education is also considered a benchmark for the progress of a nation because a developed nation has quality human resources. This is also in line with the opinion of the Head of the Pancasila Ideology Development Agency (BPIP), Yudian Wahyudi, who emphasized that youth are leaders of national movements so that there is no developed nation without an educated elite (Ditjen, 2021). Therefore, to meet the demands of the world, the Ministry of Education and Culture has designed new innovations in the field of education in order to improve the quality and character of superior human resources, namely through the Merdeka Belajar policy.

The Merdeka Belajar policy, which has now developed into a prototype of an independent curriculum, comes from a concern in the Indonesian education system that tends to prioritize administrative culture, namely, a culture where teachers are faced with a pile of bureaucracy and administration that distracts them from carrying out their core functions as facilitators for participants. educated. In addition, the learning carried out in the classroom uses more memorization methods and listening to the teacher's lectures, so the creativity of a student is not honed and directed according to the request for their respective talents. Meanwhile, good education should be education that contains a learning culture and a culture of innovation, namely a culture of many questions, many tries, and many works so as to be able to create humans who have a growth mindset (Kemendikbud RI, 2020)

Several studies have been discussed related to the Merdeka Belajar policy from various perspectives. For example, Sholihah (2021) conducted research on independent education from the perspective of Ki Hajar Dewantara and discovered that Ki Hajar Dewantara's thoughts on education are very relevant to the Merdeka Belajar policy, particularly in terms of addressing the right of every student to receive learning in accordance with their potential. the research conducted by Sasikirana & Herlambang (2020), which

emphasized that the Merdeka Belajar policy with all the policies in it is considered ideal enough to prepare a resilient generation and be able to answer world challenges in the era of the industrial revolution 4.0 and the era of society 5.0. The same thing was also conveyed by Rodiyah (2021), who stated that the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy with the OBE (outcome-based education) learning system is considered capable of creating the graduates needed in accordance with technological developments.

According to the research findings, it can be understood that the Merdeka Belajar policy is considered very relevant and ideal in order to produce superior human resources, character, and global capabilities so as to be able to answer industrial needs and world challenges in the future. Then the question is: what exactly is the essence of Merdeka Belajar? And why is Merdeka Belajar? thus creating a curriculum-based policy that will bring many changes, both physically and non-physically, to the Indonesian education system. As a result, the essence of Merdeka Belajar, which is expected to be a form of transformation in Indonesian educational culture, will be discussed in greater depth in this research.

Materials and Methods

This type of research is library research (literature), where the source of the data used in this research is in the form of books or documents related to research (Hadi, 2002). The primary data used in this study is an independent learning guidebook and publications related to independent learning delivered by the Minister of Education, Nadim Anwar Makarim, as the initiator of the independent learning curriculum. Meanwhile, the secondary data in this study are books, journals, and articles with high reputation and credibility related to education and the independent learning curriculum. The data collection technique used in this study is a documentation technique that is analyzed using qualitative descriptive techniques and validated using source triangulation.

Results and Discussion

1. Merdeka Belajar as a Transformational Culture Change in Indonesian Education

Humans have their own level of complexity, consisting not only of cognitive factors but also of several other factors such as emotional, spiritual, talent, and so on that also affect human character (Aisyah, 2015). That is, the formation of human beings through education is not enough just to update the system; it requires an educational culture that can build and develop all the potentials from various sides possessed by a person. In other words, education should be able to produce human resources who have complete competencies according to the competencies needed in the 21st century. According to Wijaya et.al., (2016), the competencies needed by humans in today's industrial era include skills and learning to innovate in life and career, as well as technology and information media skills.

However, the Indonesian education system has so far not led to competency development as expected. Most educational institutions in Indonesia tend to still prioritize an education system with certain standards that have been established, so that their educational activities focus too much on the administrative side. A large part of the educational focus only focuses on the development of cognitive aspects as a benchmark for its main achievement. The impact of this kind of educational culture has an effect on the learning methods used in schools, which are still very monotonous. This is because educators are too busy with various administrative matters to achieve standardization. Because of the numerous regulations and bureaucracy that a teacher must follow in a school, teachers eventually prefer teaching methods such as lecture and memorization under the guise of making it easier for teachers to teach (Ainia, 2020). In addition, the success rate of students is also only measured by ranking, which can actually cause a distance between smart and ordinary students (Ratri et.al., 2020).

These things, according to the Minister of Education, need to be addressed because the

product of an education is a human being who can develop all his potential, which requires a growth mindset to realize these ideals (Amelia & Mustaqin, 2021). That is, it can be understood that one of the main goals in education is to create a human being who has a growth mindset, whatever his or her passion. Thus, a student who has a growth mindset in himself will continue to be a learner throughout his life and learn everything. However, this growth mindset cannot be achieved if teachers only focus and spend a lot of time and energy on educational administration; a transformational cultural change is needed in Indonesian education (Nadiem Makarim through Kemendikbud RI, 2020). Changes in educational culture must also be carried out from various angles, such as changes to minimize administrative affairs, curriculum flexibility, teacher education, upgrading or teacher training in schools, and good cooperation between the community, teachers, education units, students, and parents.

The Minister of Education and Culture, in his speech commemorating National Teacher's Day, said that the concept of Merdeka Belajar is freedom of thought and freedom of innovation (Sekretariat Guru dan Tenaga Kependidikan, 2019). Therefore, it is hoped that with this policy, students will not only be consumptive but also participate in education, dare to fail, try new things, and be creative. With the lack of administrative and bureaucratic affairs, teachers have a lot of time to upgrade themselves and focus on their functions as facilitators so that they have a good quality of interaction with their students. The policies related to Merdeka Belajar under Kemendikbud RI (2019) are as follows:

- a. The National Standardized School Examination (UASBN) will be replaced by an assessment administered by the school (school examination).
- b. The National Examination (UN) will become a test of character, reading, and math skills.
- c. Simplification of the Learning Implementation Plan (RPP). This administrative simplification is intended to give teachers more time to prepare for and evaluate the learning process.

- d. An expanded zoning system for learners of affirmation and achievement pathways in New Learner Admissions (PPDB).

2. The Essence of Merdeka Belajar

According to the several explanations that have been previously presented, it can be understood that the Merdeka Belajar policy that has been initiated by the Indonesian Minister of Education, Nadiem Makarim, was inspired by the thoughts of Ki Hajar Dewantara, who also considered the balance between aspects of creation, taste, and karsa. Through thinking about education, Ki Hajar Dewantara has made a significant influence and contribution to the development of the national education system, even today. Education from the perspective of Ki Hajar Dewantara rests on the principle of freedom, in which he believes that man has the freedom given by God Almighty to govern his life while still adhering to the prevailing religious norms and teachings. In this concept, according to Ki Hajar Dewantara, a student must have an independent spirit that has been ingrained in him from the earliest possible time, both physically and inwardly. This is important so that Indonesian society is no longer a nation that continues to be desecrated by other nations and can independently determine the direction of its goals (Devian et al., 2022).

The main ideas of Ki Hajar Dewantara about education are:

- a. Educational curriculum that emphasizes the function of educators as described in Pamong and Among, where the task of teachers and parents is to care for, lead, grow, or hinder children in developing the potential and interests of each child or their self-nature, the conditions and culture in which the child grows or the nature of nature, and the needs and developments of the times or the nature of the times (Noventari, 2020).
- b. The flexibility and relevance of the educational curriculum, where teaching and learning can be tailored to the needs of each child, and its results for society

- c. A contextual curriculum, where teaching and learning are tailored to the individual needs of the child and the local culture.
- d. Learning freedom, e.g., where the teaching and learning process in general aims to develop children's interests and talents.
- e. The main objectives of education are to focus on developing noble character and the One True Godhead, in addition to only focusing on mastering science.
- f. A shared vision and mutual cooperation between teachers, parents, and educational figures in education management, namely to improve the quality of student learning and independence, as well as the welfare of Indonesia.

These principles underlie the Independent Learning Policy, launched by the current Minister of Education, Nadiem Makarim. Some of the most essential episodes of Merdeka Belajar are almost entirely inspired by the thoughts of Ki Hajar Dewantara, which include the following points. First, Merdeka Belajar mandates the purpose of holistic education, namely education that focuses on developing the noble character of children, not only on cognitive abilities. In the Merdeka Belajar policy, education aims to shape Indonesian children as lifelong students who have global competence and behave according to Pancasila values or referred to as the profile of Pancasila students who have the competence to have faith in God Almighty, critical reasoning, creative, working together, and global diversity (Sholihah, 2021).

Second, Merdeka Belajar mandates freedom of learning by placing students, teachers, and principals in a school institution as the main figures in the teaching and learning process. In this case, the school is given broad authority to determine the teaching and learning process focused on improving the quality of student learning, especially in the character development of literacy and numeracy students. So that teachers in schools are no longer burdened with national standardization standards determined by the central government under the pretext of quality assurance, and on the other hand, teachers can focus more on students and on the process of developing learning in the classroom (Satriawan et

al., 2021). Third, independent learning allows schools to improve the quality of student learning by implementing educational regulations that are no longer rigid and binding (Istiq'faroh, 2020). Merdeka Belajar allows schools the flexibility to implement a curriculum that focuses on the needs and development of each child's learning process and is relevant to the characteristics of the school and the region (contextual) in each school.

Fourth, Merdeka Belajar emphasizes the spirit of mutual cooperation involving the central and local governments, schools, and parents of students, based on the principle of Tut Wuri Handayani, for the common goal of providing quality educational services for all students (Jamaludin et al., 2022). In this case, the school's main task is to improve the quality of student learning. The local government is in charge of providing the necessary support for schools, and the central government is in charge of providing support to local governments and schools. The four points above clearly illustrate the importance of transforming educational culture in Indonesia towards a better Indonesia in the future. Besides, schools that implement learning as educational institutions as well as agents of value transformation must also carry out their functions in providing values based on the principle of independence (Zafi, 2018). The transformation of education carried out in the independent learning curriculum essentially aims to create a better educational culture, one that no longer focuses on bureaucracy, standardization, or other administrative matters but instead focuses on developing all the potential and character of students to the breaking point.

Conclusions

The Merdeka Belajar policy, which was launched by the minister of education, Nadiem Makarim, is a form of application of the concept of education initiated by Ki Hajar Dewantara, one of the National Heroes in the field of education. The Merdeka Belajar Curriculum comes from a concern in the Indonesian education system, which tends to prioritize administrative culture, which is a culture in which teachers are faced with a pile of

bureaucracy and administration in order to obtain validation data and according to standardization that has been determined by the central government, which indirectly also distracts them from carrying out their core function as a TOR facility for students. Merdeka Belajar's main essence is to change some basic views, paradigms, and basic assumptions that have been cultivated in the world of education in order to transform in a better direction according to the demands of the times, particularly during the industrial destruction. 4.0. Some of the most important aspects of Merdeka Belajar are as follows: 1) the purpose of holistic education, namely education that focuses on developing the noble character of children, not only their cognitive abilities; 2) freedom of learning, which mandates freedom of learning by placing students, teachers, and principals in a school institution as the main figures in the teaching and learning process; 3) independent learning, which allows schools to improve the quality of student learning by implementing educational regulations that are no longer rigid and binding; 4) Merdeka Belajar emphasizes the spirit of mutual cooperation involving the central and local governments, schools, and parents, based on the principle of Tut Wuri Handayani, for the common goal of providing quality educational services.

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