

The Implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in Indonesia Early Childhood Education (PAUD): A Literature Review

Pricilia Tupalesy^{1*}

*Corresponding Email: priciliatupalesy@gmail.com

¹ English Education Postgraduate Study Program, Pattimura University, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This research explores the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in early childhood education (PAUD) in Indonesia, which aims to promote holistic development by fostering creativity, critical thinking, and independence. Using a qualitative literature review, this research analyzes existing studies to evaluate the effectiveness, challenges, and impact of the curriculum. Findings show that the curriculum improves learning outcomes, especially in language and social skills, through flexible and adaptive teaching methods. However, challenges such as inadequate teacher training, resistance to change, and unequal access to technology hinder its implementation. This study recommends comprehensive teacher training, clear communication of the curriculum's benefits, and continuous evaluation to overcome these challenges and improve the quality of early childhood education in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Kurikulum Merdeka, Early Childhood, Education, Creativity, Critical Thinking*

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the main areas that is very influential in human life. Guterres' study, (2022,) said that in the 2022 Summit, the UN Education transformation emphasized that education must change to remain relevant and effective in the face of rapid progress. That is why the curriculum changes from time to time. Curriculum changes aim to prepare future generations and equip children with the knowledge, skills, and competencies essential to face future challenges (Gouédard et al., 2020).

Indonesia introduced the Merdeka Curriculum, a new educational framework designed to foster students' independence and creativity. Implemented from early childhood to high school, the curriculum aims to empower students to explore their interests and talents (Sulistiyowati & Wulandari, 2024). Merdeka Curriculum is a transformative approach in the educational framework in Indonesia, especially in the realm of early childhood education (PAUD). Angin and Rahayu (2024), in their research, said that this curriculum is designed to empower educators and learners and encourage a learning environment that emphasizes creativity, critical thinking, and independence in early childhood. The shift towards the Merdeka Curriculum reflects a broader

global trend in education that emphasizes the importance of holistic development, where the focus is not only on academic achievement but also on children's emotional and social growth (Nasution, & Indrasari, 2024).

Implementing the existing curriculum requires students to pursue high grades in lessons and have expertise in their respective fields (Selian & Irwansyah, 2018). This can be a factor in students' inability to express themselves freely. According to Ristek (2021), in the context of the independent curriculum, learning is directed to stimulate students to learn without feeling forced or pressured. Therefore, the Merdeka Curriculum was created to allow students to express themselves. This adaptability is especially important in Early Childhood Education (PAUD) environments, where children come from various backgrounds and have different learning styles. Research has shown that when teachers are empowered to customize their approaches, this results in more effective learning experiences and better engagement from students (Nurzen, 2022)

Despite its promising framework, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is not without challenges. Nasution and Indrasari (2024) said that Educators often face obstacles such as inadequate training, limited resources, and resistance to change from traditional teaching methods. Overcoming these challenges is critical to the successful implementation of the curriculum, as teachers play a crucial role in translating curriculum objectives into effective classroom practices.

As said earlier, the early childhood education sector has also been asked to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at the early childhood education level aims to enable early childhood to learn more freely while playing, which is often referred to as independent play. The essence of this independent learning is to create a fun learning atmosphere without any pressure to get certain grades (Sudaryanto et al, 2020). However, a comprehensive evaluation is needed to assess the long-term impact of this curriculum on children's overall development and their readiness to face future educational challenges.

In conclusion, this literature review aims to explore various aspects of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation in Early Childhood Education (PAUD), examining its effectiveness, challenges, and overall impact on early childhood. By analyzing existing research, this study seeks to provide insights into how the Merdeka Curriculum can be effectively implemented to improve the quality of early childhood education in Indonesia.

METHOD

This research used a qualitative literature review approach that focused on analyzing existing scientific works to analyze and identify patterns in the implementation of The Merdeka Curriculum in Early Childhood Education, especially in Indonesia. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative

research means an inquiry process for understanding based on different methodological traditions of inquiry that explore social or human problems. Then the method used is a literature study through content analysis. To collect data, researchers searched for various relevant studies as well as previous studies, identifying information related to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Indonesia, especially in Early Childhood Education. The search was conducted on December 10, 2024, using the Scopus and Google Scholar databases. These two databases were chosen because they provide credible and high-quality information, ease of data extraction, and relevance to the research topic. The data sources were primary and secondary data. The process of research activities began with collecting literature data, reading, and analyzing data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in early childhood education (PAUD) has yielded promising results, as evidenced by various studies that highlight its effectiveness in enhancing learning outcomes, fostering creativity, and promoting critical thinking among young learners. The literature indicates that the curriculum's emphasis on flexibility and adaptability allows educators to tailor their teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of students, ultimately leading to improved engagement and academic performance (Angin & Rahayu, 2024; Hasna, 2023).

Effectiveness of Kurikulum Merdeka

Research indicates that the Kurikulum Merdeka significantly enhances learning outcomes among early childhood learners. As noted by Angin and Rahayu (2024), the curriculum fosters creativity, critical thinking, and independence, which are essential skills for navigating a rapidly changing world. The emphasis on holistic development aligns with Vygotsky's Social Development Theory, which posits that social interaction plays a fundamental role in cognitive development. By creating an environment that encourages exploration and inquiry, the Kurikulum Merdeka supports the idea that children learn best when they are actively engaged in their learning processes (Veryawan, 2023).

Initial studies suggest improvements in language development and social skills, with children in more interactive learning environments demonstrating greater enthusiasm for learning (Hasna, 2023). This aligns with the principles of constructivist learning theories, which advocate for learning as an active, contextualized process of constructing knowledge rather than passively receiving information. The curriculum's focus on independent play and exploration allows children to develop essential life skills, preparing them for future educational challenges.

Teacher Preparedness and Professional Development

Despite the positive outcomes associated with Kurikulum Merdeka, challenges related to teacher preparedness remain a significant concern. Many educators report feeling unprepared to implement the curriculum effectively due to a lack of training and resources (Hasna, 2023). This finding is consistent with the literature, which emphasizes the need for comprehensive professional development programs that equip teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge (Nurzen, 2022). Addressing these gaps in teacher training is essential for ensuring the successful implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka and maximizing its benefits for early learners.

Barriers to Implementation

The literature also highlights several barriers to the successful implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka, including resistance to change from traditional teaching methods and concerns about the curriculum's effectiveness (Nurzen, 2022). Educators may hesitate to embrace new practices due to fears of deviating from established norms, which can hinder the adoption of innovative teaching strategies. To overcome these challenges, targeted support and clear communication about the curriculum's benefits are essential for fostering a positive attitude toward its implementation (Albar & Nugroho, 2024).

Technology Integration

The integration of technology into the Kurikulum Merdeka framework presents both opportunities and challenges. As digital tools become increasingly prevalent in education, they can enhance the learning experience by providing interactive and personalized learning opportunities (Angin & Rahayu, 2024). However, disparities in access to technology can exacerbate existing inequalities in education, particularly in rural and underserved areas (Nasution, & Indrasari, 2024). Ensuring equitable access to technological resources is crucial for all students to fully benefit from the curriculum and to foster an inclusive learning environment.

Long-term Impact on Early Learners

While initial studies indicate that Kurikulum Merdeka has a positive impact on early learners, comprehensive evaluations are necessary to assess the long-term effects of this curriculum on children's overall development and readiness for future educational challenges (Veryawan, 2023). Ongoing research is needed to monitor the effectiveness of the curriculum over time and to identify best practices for its implementation in various PAUD settings.

In summary, the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in early childhood education shows significant promise in enhancing learning outcomes and fostering holistic development among young learners. However, addressing challenges related to teacher preparedness, resistance to change, and equitable access to resources is essential for maximizing the curriculum's potential. Continued research and support are necessary to ensure the successful implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka, ultimately improving the quality of early childhood education in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in early childhood education (PAUD) in Indonesia shows significant potential to improve learning outcomes and promote overall development among young children. While preliminary findings suggest improvements in areas such as language development and social skills, challenges related to teacher readiness, resistance to traditional teaching methods, and equitable access to technology must be addressed to maximize the effectiveness of the curriculum. To ensure the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, it is recommended that a comprehensive professional development program be established to equip educators with the necessary skills and knowledge. In addition, targeted support and clear communication about the benefits of the curriculum should be provided to foster a positive attitude towards its implementation. Finally, ongoing research and evaluation are essential to monitor the long-term impact of this curriculum on children's overall development and their readiness to face future educational challenges, to contribute to the continuous improvement of early childhood education in Indonesia.

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