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Development of The Merdeka Curriculum in Educational Units and Implementation of The Merdeka Curriculum in 21st Century Learning

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ABSTRACT

The essence of the Merdeka Curriculum is education based on the nature of the environment and the times, where each student has their own talents and interests. The goal of Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) is to effectively reduce learning delays caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Although the 2013 Curriculum is still available, schools can prepare themselves to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. Thus, each educational unit can decide the right time to start implementing and applying the new curriculum independently according to their readiness. The idea of the essence of Merdeka Belajar is to create a joyful learning atmosphere without the burden of achieving specific grades (Sudaryanto et al., 2020). Therefore, before schools implement the new curriculum, an analysis needs to be conducted to take active steps. By taking these steps, it is expected that schools can better understand the Merdeka Curriculum, from preparation and implementation to the evaluation of the learning process. This will greatly assist in accelerating the development of the Merdeka Curriculum according to KKNI in these schools.

Keywords: *Development of the Merdeka Curriculum, Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, 21st Century Learning*

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important components in education that is often overlooked is the curriculum. The curriculum is complex and multidimensional, serving as the starting point to the endpoint of the learning experience, and it is the heart of education that must be evaluated innovatively, dynamically, and periodically in accordance with the development of the times. The current technological era demands that society continuously develop skills and knowledge in response to advancements in science and technology. The world of education must be prepared to face the changes and developments that occur, so as to equip the next generation with the skills to compete in a more advanced world. One effort that educational units can undertake is to continually improve the existing educational curriculum. The curriculum is a series of learning plans that students must follow through a set of subjects to achieve specific goals. Fatirul & Walujo (2022) state that the curriculum, as a learning plan, is an educational program designed to teach students. The designed program includes various activities that can support the learning process of students, resulting in changes and developments in both behavior and skills of students in accordance with educational and learning objectives.

The educational curriculum is dynamic. This is because, in its development, the curriculum must adapt to the needs and characteristics of students according to their times. The design of curriculum development must consider the needs, opinions, learning experiences, and interests of students as the primary factors, making the students themselves the center of education. The educational curriculum in Indonesia has evolved several times, starting in 1947 with the 1947 Learning Plan Curriculum and developing into the Merdeka Curriculum today. There have been 10 changes to the educational curriculum in Indonesia, occurring in 1947, 1952, 1964, 1968, 1975, 1984, 1994, 2004, 2006, 2013, and 2022.

The development of the educational curriculum in Indonesia is designed and formulated based on the Indonesian National Qualification Framework (KKNI). This qualification framework aims to establish quality standards for student learning outcomes at various educational and training levels in Indonesia, from elementary to higher education. KKNI serves as a standard for educational units to plan a curriculum that is relevant to the needs of society and to produce graduates with the skills and knowledge required by the workforce. The fundamental principle developed in KKNI is to assess an individual's performance in scientific, expertise, and skill aspects according to learning outcomes. Curriculum development is periodically updated to align with advancements in science and technology and the progress of the times (Julaeha et al., 2021). In the 21st century, teachers can innovate in teaching to make learning more meaningful and enjoyable.

The development of the educational curriculum in Indonesia has progressed to the Merdeka Curriculum. This curriculum is an extension and implementation of the emergency curriculum devised in response to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The principle of this new curriculum is fully student-centered learning, promoting the concept of Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn). This concept is defined as a method that allows students to choose subjects that interest them. Schools have the right and responsibility to develop the curriculum according to their needs and characteristics. The policy of curriculum selection is expected to accelerate the stages of national curriculum reform. It can be said that the policy of providing schools with curriculum choices is one of the efforts in change management.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

This research method uses library research by examining various existing writings, including books, journals, articles, and other relevant sources. The steps include collecting various sources, reading and analyzing the available sources, and then noting the relevant core ideas to form conclusions, which are then written down. It can be concluded that the type of data used is descriptive qualitative. Descriptive qualitative data is used to study the relationships of attitudes, activities, views, and processes occurring concerning a phenomenon and aims to describe the object or subject according to reality (Hamzah, 2021). This research employs qualitative research techniques with a descriptive approach. Qualitative research generates information or knowledge in the form of descriptive information, including written and verbal information. It involves collecting actionable information, primarily through information gathering and reviewing previous studies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Indonesian National Qualification Framework (KKNI)

The development of education curriculum in Indonesia is formulated and designed based on the Indonesian National Qualification Framework (KKNI). KKNI serves as a standard for educational units to design curricula that are relevant to the needs of society and to produce graduates with the skills and knowledge required by the workforce. The basic principle developed within KKNI is to assess an individual's performance in scholarly, expertise, and skill aspects according to learning outcomes. Designing an educational curriculum naturally involves several stages to ensure that students' learning outcomes align with the intended learning objectives.

Fatirul & Walujo (2022) outline 10 steps in the design stage of the Education Curriculum based on KKNI, including:

1. Identifying Learning Outcomes for a subject/course and formulating them into specific Learning Outcomes for the Subject/Course, which are more specific, and sub-Learning Outcomes for the Subject/Course, which are the planned final abilities.
2. Conducting learning analysis to provide an overview of what will be learned by students;
3. Conducting a learning needs analysis to determine the scope of the material and the learning tools needed;
4. Determining achievement indicators for sub-learning outcomes of the subject/course as objectives for each lesson;
5. Establishing assessment criteria and developing assessment instruments based on achievement indicators;
6. Selecting and developing learning forms, teaching methods, and assignments for students in the learning process;
7. Developing learning materials in the form of teaching materials and appropriate learning resources;
8. Developing and arranging formative evaluations;
9. Making improvements;
10. Developing and arranging summative evaluations to determine students' achievement results.

Curriculum Freedom

Freedom to Learn is part of the new policy established by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia (Kemendikbud RI). According to Nadiem, the curriculum policy related to Freedom to Learn must undergo an initial breakthrough with educators before it is communicated or implemented with students. Additionally, Nadiem also stated that regarding teacher competencies, regardless of their level, without a translation process from existing basic competencies and its close relationship with the curriculum, learning will not occur.

The implementation of a learning system that emphasizes the formation of students' character means that the assessment forms are not solely academic but rather focus more on the individual characteristics of each student. Thus, the new policy system related to the Merdeka Curriculum is expected to shape students who possess life skills that can be implemented in societal life.

The development policy from the 2013 Curriculum Revision to the Merdeka Curriculum is based on the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia Decree Number 56/M/2022 dated February 10, 2022, concerning Guidelines for the Implementation of Curriculum in the Framework of Learning Recovery. The decision from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology serves as the basis, legal umbrella, and reference for the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in schools, madrasahs, as well as educational institutions located in Indonesia.

According to Fred Percival & Henry Ellington, curriculum design involves the development of planning, validation, implementation, and evaluation processes. There are several key aspects in the curriculum. Meanwhile, Saylor proposes 8 principles as guidelines in curriculum design, as follows:

Facilitating and encouraging the selection and development of all types of learning experiences fundamental to achieving learning achievements. Incorporating all meaningful learning experiences in efforts to achieve educational goals, especially for learners guided by educators. Providing opportunities for educators to use learning principles in selecting, guiding, and developing various learning activities in schools.

Allowing educators to adapt experiences to the needs, capacities, and maturity of learners. Encouraging educators to consider various learning experiences of learners acquired outside of school and linking them to learning activities in school. Providing continuous learning experiences so that learners' activities develop in line with previous experiences and continue to progress to subsequent experiences.

The curriculum should be designed to assist learners in developing character, personality, experiences, and democratic values that underpin culture.⁸. Realistic, feasible, and acceptable.

In the field of curriculum, there are at least 3 design patterns, as follows:

1. Subject-centered design, which is a curriculum design centered on instructional materials.
2. Learner-centered design, which prioritizes the role of students.
3. Problems-centered design, which is a curriculum design centered on the problems faced in society.

Each design developed becomes a curriculum plan that includes various elements of the curriculum, namely objectives, content, learning experiences, and evaluations that are in line with the core of each design model. Meanwhile, the development design of the Merdeka Curriculum refers to the learner-centered design pattern.

In its implementation, there are stages to be carried out in the curriculum development

implementation. Here are some steps that can be taken in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum development.

1. Orientation/Needs Phase

This phase encompasses the awareness of the need to address educational issues in schools. In relation to the implementation of existing curriculum development, it is crucial for the school community to recognize the importance of ongoing curriculum enhancement.

2. Initiation

Initiation is the initial step in implementing changes, which can originate from either outside or within the school. Schools can also undertake initiation as a learning community, allowing the school members to deepen their understanding of various aspects that need to be comprehended and executed in accordance with innovative ideas.

3. Implementation

Implementation refers to the changes adopted by the school as school policy. Curriculum development is more effective when it is integrated with relevant school policies.

4. Institutionalization or Sustainability

When changes are continued, this phase can only be effectively carried out through sustained commitment, communication, and cooperation among the school community. In line with this, the sustainability of the proposed curriculum development also depends on these factors. The existing curriculum development must be maintained so that the program can run continuously. Sustainability is also a key factor in the success or failure of the proposed curriculum. This is especially relevant given the frequent curriculum developments occurring in Indonesia's education sector.

5. Maintenance

This phase can be either strengthened or weakened, depending on the commitment to the sustainability of curriculum implementation. The continuity of curriculum development is determined by the maintenance efforts undertaken. In practice, this maintenance can be achieved through proper monitoring of the implementation of curriculum development.

Curriculum development is also necessary for educational units, tailored to the characteristics of the educational unit, the needs of the students, and the progress of the times. The implementation of the independent curriculum must first undergo an adaptation process based on the curriculum's basic framework, which includes: (1) National Education Goals, (2) Pancasila Student Profile, (3) Curriculum Structure, (4) Principles of Learning and Assessment, and (5) Learning Outcomes. The operational curriculum of the educational unit should be aligned with the planning and organization of learning according to the context of the educational unit, making the learning process more meaningful.

The following are the steps for developing an independent curriculum in educational units:

- a. Understanding the characteristics of the educational unit
- b. Formulating the vision, mission, and goals of the educational unit
- c. Conducting planning that includes the ATP, assessments, teaching modules, teaching media, as well as the educational unit's priority programs
- d. Mapping out the learning process: including curriculum content, learning load, intramural, extracurricular, and co-curricular programs (Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project/P5)

- e. Planning a system for mentoring, evaluation, and professional development

To accelerate the development of the independent curriculum in educational units, the role of teachers as learning leaders is crucial and needs to be optimized. A teacher must be able to adapt and utilize technology. One of the technologies used in education is the PMM (Platform Merdeka Mengajar), which can be used for self-directed learning. PMM is a digital platform that provides various services and learning content to support the implementation of independent learning. Additionally, PMM is expected to enhance the quality of learning and expand access to education for students, particularly for 21st-century learning (Muadz, 2023).

Educational Technology

Educational technology is the systematic design of human resources, methods, and media to achieve educational goals. It encompasses instructional technology, which focuses on the development and use of media and learning processes to enhance learner performance, and management technology, which focuses on the use of technology to manage and improve the overall education system.

Several educational technology experts provide perspectives on the domains or fields of educational technology, and generally, there are several common domains among different experts. Here are the five domains of educational technology according to several educational technology experts:

1. Michael Molenda - Instructional Technology, which includes the design, development, use, and evaluation of technology in the learning process.
2. Seels & Richey - Educational Technology, which includes the utilization of resources, processes, and technological principles to enhance the effectiveness of the learning process.
3. Januszewski & Molenda - Learning Technologies, which includes the use of technology to support, enhance, and facilitate the learning process for students.
4. David H. Jonassen - Cognitive Tools, which includes the development and use of technology to help students construct knowledge and solve problems effectively.

Educational technology theory is a collection of principles and theoretical concepts that govern and explain how technology can be applied in learning and teaching. Some commonly discussed theories in educational technology include:

- a. Constructivist Theory - This theory states that learning involves the construction of knowledge by learners rather than just the reception of information from teachers or media. Therefore, the use of technology should be designed to support the knowledge construction by learners.
- b. Cognitive Theory - This theory posits that learning occurs through cognitive processes such as attention, observation, and information processing. Hence, the use of technology should be designed to enhance these cognitive processes.
- c. Social-Cognitive Theory - This theory recognizes that learning occurs not only individually but also through social interactions. Therefore, technology should be used to facilitate better social interactions in learning.
- d. Systems Theory - This theory views education as a complex system composed of many variables. Therefore, the use of technology should be applied systematically and holistically to achieve optimal educational goals.
- e. Change Theory - This theory states that the use of technology in education can trigger changes in

the way we learn and teach. Hence, the use of technology should be considered holistically, including social, cultural, and organizational aspects.

CONCLUSION

The development and renewal of the educational curriculum are very important and necessary. In Indonesia, a new educational curriculum called the Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Curriculum) is being developed. As the name suggests, this development focuses on the students' ability to receive learning, making Merdeka Belajar (Independent Learning) a method where students can choose and determine their own way of learning. Although learning follows the students' learning capabilities, educational units still have standard learning achievement goals. These standards represent the achievement of graduation in terms of the learning outcomes and skills of students, which have been established and mutually agreed upon. This agreement on the learning achievement goals is the most important foundation for the development of subsequent learning activities. Therefore, the development of the Kurikulum Merdeka must refer to the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI) as a guide for learning development, ensuring that the graduation achievement goals remain constant and unaltered.

This stage will greatly assist educators in developing their abilities and skills, thereby improving the evaluation results from previous stages. A comparison of the two types of curriculum development steps according to KKNI and Kurikulum Merdeka shows that the number of steps used in developing the new curriculum may vary, but it does not eliminate the essence and essence needed in developing the curriculum according to KKNI. Based on the results of this comparison, there may be matches or similarities in information related to the definition of educational technology and the theories encompassing it. Therefore, it can be concluded that both methods of curriculum development fulfill the principle based on the observation and processing of information, involvement, and social interaction aspects required. This is expected to enable students to culture and grow optimally according to the nature of each unique child with various characteristics and individual specialities. Additionally, both methods also consider unforeseen future circumstances, thus equipping students with competencies that enable them to adapt to changing times. Curriculum development is essential for educational units and must adapt to changes and developments over time because a good curriculum is one that is in line with its time.

Based on the conclusions of the above studies along with research findings, there are certain things to consider in accelerating the development of the independent curriculum in educational units. One such step is the optimization of the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM). This will also affect the achievement of learning objectives effectively and efficiently. Therefore, there is a need for regular socialization both online and offline among relevant parties, such as teachers, school officials, students, and parents. This is because educators must adapt to the changing times, making it essential for them to be able to operate and utilize PMM in teaching. Modern development certainly involves teachers as the most important individuals in the organized and initiated implementation of the independent curriculum. Learning efficiency must also be maintained for the noble goal of continuing the independent study plan of the independent curriculum and ensuring that all properly made programs can be followed by all students in Indonesia. Of course, all of this serves to further develop the Indonesian education system.

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