IMPLEMENTATION OF AN INDEPENDENT LEARNING CURRICULUM IN ENHANCING STUDENT CREATIVITY IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Rafika Nisa *[1]
STIT Ar-Raudhah Deli Serdang
rafika@stitarraudhah.ac.id

Marzaniatun
STIT Ar-Raudhah Deli Serdang
marzaniatunmarza@gmail.com

Farida Hanum
STIT Ar-Raudhah Deli Serdang
hanum5774@gmail.com

Al-Amin
Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya, Indonesia
al.amin-2024@feb.unair.ac.id

Abstract
The global education era has undergone a transformation in which educators and policymakers are increasingly emphasising the need for creative and independent thinkers in the 21st century. Therefore, the Implementation of Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in elementary schools emerges as a key strategy to foster creativity among learners. The study in this research uses the literature research method. The results showed that; First, Merdeka Belajar Curriculum contributes to the development of student creativity by providing opportunities to engage in independent learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving activities. Second, this curriculum also encourages students to explore their interests and passions, which in turn stimulates their creative thinking process. Therefore, teachers should facilitate this learning environment by providing guidance, support and resources that enable students to take charge of their learning journey. Third, every time the curriculum changes, new challenges arise, such as the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum. Such challenges include the need for teacher training in innovative teaching strategies, the need for sufficient resources, and overcoming traditional educational practices that may hinder the adoption of more progressive approaches.
Keywords: Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, student creativity, elementary school.

Introduction

With the rapid development of globalisation and digitalisation, the ability to think creatively is one of the vital skills that must be possessed by today's generation of children. Creativity is needed not only in the arts, but also important in facing challenges

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[1] Correspondence author

and solving problems in various aspects of life (Sitopu et al., 2024); (Guna et al., 2024); (Hairiyanto et al., 2024). Primary education, as the initial foundation of the learning process, shoulders a strategic role in awakening students' creativity from the start (Fiteriadi et al., 2024).

However, traditional educational approaches in Indonesia are often still focussed on cognitive aspects with monotonous teaching methods that do not consider the uniqueness and individual potential of students. The rigid curriculum, dominated by the disguise of standardised assessments, fails to provide adequate space for the development of students' creativity. This causes students to be passive, less innovative, and limited in their critical thinking skills (Mustafiyanti et al., 2023).

In response to this need, the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture introduced the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum as an effort to reform the education system. Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is an initiative of the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia which aims to provide greater freedom and flexibility in the teaching and learning process (Kember, 2021); (Lu, 2022). This curriculum is designed to overcome the limitations of the traditional curriculum, which is considered too rigid and does not support the development of students' individual potential. With Merdeka Belajar, teachers have the leeway to determine teaching methods that best suit the needs and characteristics of students, and encourage student-centred learning (Fitriyani et al., 2023). The main principles of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum are flexibility, personalisation, and inclusiveness, where each student is given the opportunity to learn according to their interests and talents (Wijayanti, 2023).

The Merdeka Belajar Curriculum also emphasises strengthening essential basic competencies such as literacy, numeracy, and character. This curriculum is designed to face the challenges and dynamics of an increasingly complex and future-orientated world. Character education, which includes values such as integrity, cooperation, and independence, is an integral part of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum (Yanti, 2023).

Creativity during primary education is very important because this period underlies children's cognitive and emotional development. Students at this age have a natural ability to think imaginatively and exploratively. By incorporating activities that stimulate creativity, teachers can create a solid foundation for the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Yulita. & Ain, 2021). Creativity not only helps students understand academic concepts, but also enables them to come up with new and innovative ways of completing tasks and facing challenges. It also instils curiosity and intrinsic motivation, which are key drivers of success in learning (F. A. Putri & Setiyawati, 2021).

Education based on creativity helps children develop important social and emotional skills, such as the ability to collaborate, flexible thinking and communication skills. In an environment that supports creativity, students learn to appreciate differences, accept mistakes as part of the learning process, and develop self-

confidence (Puspitasari & Utami, 2023). These skills are not only important for academic success, but also essential in everyday life and in the future workplace. Therefore, creating a learning environment that supports creativity in basic education is an important step to prepare young people who are adaptive, innovative, and ready to face global challenges (Nuryani & Faisal, 2023).

However, how effective is the implementation of Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in increasing student creativity in primary schools? This question is relevant for further study, considering that creativity is an ability that requires a supportive environment to develop. Through this literature review, researchers will explore various previous research results related to the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum and its impact on student creativity in elementary schools.

Research Methods

The study conducted in this research uses the literature research method. Literature research method is a research approach that requires researchers to collect, review, and interpret information obtained from various written sources such as books, journal articles, research reports, and other documents. The main purpose of this method is to understand existing developments and trends in a particular topic, identify research gaps, and build a strong theoretical foundation for new research. (Jelahut, 2022); (JUNAIDI, 2021).

Results and Discussion
Implementation of Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in Elementary Schools

Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is a learning approach introduced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia. It aims to give schools, teachers and students greater autonomy in organising the teaching and learning process (Novitasari et al., 2023). The main focus of this curriculum is to create learning that is more adaptive and relevant to the needs and interests of students. Within the framework of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, teachers have the freedom to determine the most appropriate teaching methods, while students are encouraged to be active and independent in their learning process (Gusteti et al., 2022).

The Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is based on several basic concepts, including flexibility, personalisation of learning, and authentic assessment. Flexibility is manifested in the timing and delivery of material that is not rigid, allowing teachers to adjust learning to the conditions and needs of students in the field (Fuadi et al., 2023). Personalisation of learning emphasises the importance of respecting and paying attention to the interests, talents and level of understanding of each student individually. Thus, learning can be more meaningful and motivating for learners. Meanwhile, authentic assessment focuses on measuring real and contextual abilities, so

that learning outcomes are not only numbers or grades but also understanding and practical skills that are relevant to everyday life (Fitriana, 2022).

The Merdeka Belajar Curriculum has been formulated with key fundamentals that are fundamental to the implementation of education. One of the crucial principles is flexibility, which allows teachers and students to adjust learning methods and materials according to their local context and needs. Equally important is the principle of personalisation in learning, where the approach chosen is tailored to the interests and abilities of each student, making room for the maximum development of individual talents (Indriani & Asfia, 2023). Collaboration is also a key principle, whether among students, between students and teachers, or with the surrounding community. This is to ensure that learning is holistic and contextualised, not just theoretical. In addition, emphasis on project-based learning and authentic assessment are also part of this curriculum's principles to produce meaningful and applicable learning (Siregar, 2024).

The primary goal of Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is to create an education system that is more responsive, creative, and relevant to the challenges of the 21st century. One of the goals is to increase students' independence and enthusiasm for learning, so that they do not only become passive learners but also become active learners who are critical and innovative (Lestari, 2024). The curriculum also aims to improve the quality of teaching by giving teachers more freedom to develop teaching approaches that are more contextualised and in line with students' needs (Nisa et al., 2021). Other goals include developing more comprehensive competencies in students, ranging from academic competencies to soft skills such as critical thinking skills, creativity, and the ability to collaborate. Thus, the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is expected to produce graduates who are not only academically prepared but also have relevant characters and skills in facing the dynamics of the global world (Nisa et al., 2023).

The implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum at this elementary school begins with the preparation of a simpler and more flexible Learning Implementation Plan (RPP), allowing teachers to focus on the core of education that empowers students. No longer hampering teachers with long administrative writing, but rather directed to design creative and contextual learning activities (N. A. Putri & Rezania, 2023). Teachers need to conduct a pre-assessment to understand the needs and potential of each learner, and then design learning experiences that suit these needs. In the process, teachers are given the freedom to use a variety of learning methods, including project-based learning, problem-based learning, and the use of digital technology (Miandoab, 2023).

One of the main approaches in the implementation of Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is project-based learning, where learners engage in real-life project assignments that are relevant to everyday life. This approach not only helps learners understand learning concepts more deeply, but also develops important skills such as co-operation, communication and problem-solving (Sudadio et al., 2024). In addition,

information and communication technology (ICT) is also utilised to support learning. The utilisation of educational applications, online learning platforms, and other digital tools helps facilitate more interactive and engaging learning, and enables wider access to learning, including in learning situations from home (Wardaya & Pambudi, 2024).

The implementation of Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in primary schools also encourages close collaboration between teachers, parents, and the community. Teachers are expected not to work alone, but to involve parents in the teaching and learning process and provide them with guidelines to support children's learning at home. The community can also be invited to take part in various school activities, such as collaborative projects or relevant extracurricular activities (Kyritsi & Davis, 2020). By involving various parties, this curriculum seeks to create an educational ecosystem that supports the growth and development of learners as a whole, both in terms of academics and character, so that they are ready to face future challenges (Rachmawati et al., 2020).

Creativity in Education

Creativity is the ability to generate ideas, solutions, or works that are original, useful, and meaningful, whether in the context of art, science, technology, or everyday life. Creativity involves thinking outside familiar boundaries, connecting seemingly unrelated concepts, and offering new perspectives that can solve problems or create something new (Tubagus et al., 2023); (Aslan & Shiong, 2023). Practically, creativity requires the courage to take risks, perseverance in exploring various possibilities, and the skill of turning abstract ideas into real products that can be enjoyed by others (Nurdiana et al., 2023).

One of the important factors that influence student creativity is the learning environment and facilities available. An environment that supports creativity should provide space and time for students to explore, experience trial and error, and collaborate with friends or teachers (Saleh & Solihin, 2023). Schools that provide facilities such as art spaces, science labs, well-stocked libraries, and access to digital technology can encourage students to explore different ideas and experiments. In addition, a classroom atmosphere that is open to new ideas and less rigid can help students feel freer to express and try new things without fear of mistakes or failure (Patphol, 2022).

Creativity in learning is essential as it helps students develop essential problem-solving and adaptability skills in a changing world. In an academic context, creativity allows students to view subject matter from multiple points of view, create new connections between seemingly unrelated concepts, and find innovative solutions to complex problems (Hutahaean et al., 2022). These abilities not only improve their understanding of the material, but also equip them with the critical thinking skills needed to face future challenges. Outside the classroom, creativity allows students to

adapt quickly to changing environments and situations, and to find new ways of carrying out daily tasks (Tirtoni & Suwarta, 2023).

In addition to academic benefits, creativity is also important for students' personal and social development. The creative process often involves co-operation and collaboration, which helps students hone their communication, team participation and empathy skills. Through creative activities, students learn to appreciate different perspectives and work alongside others to achieve a common goal. In addition, involvement in creative activities such as art, music or writing can provide personal expression that strengthens confidence and self-identity (Febrianti & Wardana, 2023). Thus, encouraging creativity in learning not only produces academically intelligent students, but also prepares them to be balanced individuals who are ready to face the dynamics of social life.

The Relationship between Independent Learning Curriculum and Student Creativity

Merdeka Belajar Curriculum was designed by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture to provide greater autonomy to schools, teachers, and students in determining the direction of learning (Sakdiah & Jamilah, 2022). One of the core pillars of this curriculum is flexibility, which allows adjustments to the learning process according to the talents and potential of each learner. A more open and less rigid learning environment facilitates creativity to flourish. By being given the freedom to choose topics in line with their interests, students can more easily explore their thoughts and bring new ideas to the learning process (Fransiska et al., 2023).

Merdeka Belajar Curriculum also emphasises a personalised learning approach, where the learning process is adjusted to the pace and learning style of each student. This approach opens space for students to try creative and innovative learning methods (Sulfadli & Supartinah, 2023). For example, students can choose individual projects relevant to their interests or engage in collaborative activities that encourage new ideas. By prioritising personalisation, this curriculum values the uniqueness of each student and gives them the freedom to develop creativity in the areas that most interest them (Wae et al., 2023).

In Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, the teacher's function moves from being a dominating teacher to a facilitator who supports the student learning process. Teachers are encouraged to create an energising learning environment that supports learners' creative exploration. This includes providing challenges that encourage thinking, facilitating in-depth discussions and providing constructive feedback. When teachers act as facilitators, they help students discover new ways to think and solve problems, ultimately developing their creative skills. In addition, teachers are also expected to support students' initiatives in creative projects and give them the freedom to experiment, which is crucial in the creative learning process.

The Effect of Independent Learning Curriculum on Student Creativity

Merdeka Belajar Curriculum introduces greater flexibility compared to the conventional curriculum. By allowing schools, teachers and students to determine learning materials and methods that suit their individual needs and interests, this curriculum directly encourages increased student creativity (Alwadaeen & Piller, 2022). Students can choose topics or projects that suit their interests, so they are more motivated to learn and renew. This freedom also allows students to explore different approaches to solving problems, which is key in developing creative thinking (Tika et al., 2022).

One of the important elements in Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is project-based learning, which involves collaborative and interdisciplinary activities. This kind of project allows students to integrate knowledge from various subjects and apply it in a real context (Maisyaroh et al., 2024). Through projects that demand collaboration, communication and problem solving, students learn to think creatively and come up with innovative solutions. Project-based learning also provides opportunities for students to actively participate in the learning process, so that they can further develop their talents and interests (Rasyidi & Idrus, 2024).

In this digital age, Merdeka Belajar Curriculum utilises technology as an important learning tool. With access to various digital devices and platforms, students can create creative content such as videos, blogs and applications. Technology provides the means for experimentation and innovation, allowing students to explore new ideas and express themselves uniquely (Rubenstein et al., 2022). In addition, technology also enables more dynamic and interactive learning, which stimulates students' imagination and critical thinking. Thus, the integration of technology in the curriculum supports the development of creativity in a way that is relevant to today's needs (Ekantini & Damayanti, 2023).

In Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, teachers act as facilitators who support explorative and innovative learning. Teachers are encouraged to create a learning environment that is conducive to the development of student creativity by providing thought-provoking challenges and directing in-depth discussions (Azahra & Wahyudi, 2024). Constructive and encouraging feedback from teachers is essential to help students explore new ideas. Teachers' role as facilitators requires training and mentoring so that they can support students effectively. This change in teacher function is an integral part of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in promoting creativity, which ultimately aims to produce a generation that is innovative and adaptive to change (Farid et al., 2023).

Thus, Merdeka Belajar Curriculum has great potential to encourage student creativity through flexibility in learning, project-based learning, utilisation of digital technology, the active role of teachers as facilitators, and support from various stakeholders including the private sector, community, and parents. While there are

various challenges in implementation, solutions such as teacher training, investment in education infrastructure, and collaboration with various parties can overcome them. With a conducive learning environment, adequate emotional and psychological support, and the active role of parents, Merdeka Belajar Curriculum can form a generation that is creative, innovative, and ready to face the challenges of the times.

Conclusion

The Merdeka Learning Curriculum provides a much wider space for students to explore their own interests and talents, and encourages project-based learning. The application of this learning method allows students to integrate various disciplines in creative projects that are relevant to real life, so that they not only gain theoretical knowledge but also practical skills that can be applied in the real world. The use of digital technology as a supporting tool also plays an important role in opening up new opportunities for students to innovate and create.

However, the implementation of this curriculum faces some key challenges, such as the readiness of teachers and schools to adapt to a much more dynamic approach. Teachers need continuous training to be able to act as effective learning facilitators. In addition, adequate educational facilities and infrastructure are also important factors in supporting a conducive learning environment. Access constraints to technology and educational resources are barriers that must be overcome to ensure all students can access the same opportunities.

Collaboration with the private sector, local communities and the active role of parents are crucial in supporting the successful implementation of the Merdeka Learning Curriculum. Companies can provide support in the form of technology and mentoring programmes, while local communities can provide a real context for student projects. Parents also have an important role in supporting the exploration of their children's interests and talents at home. With a supportive learning environment and the involvement of various parties, the Merdeka Learning Curriculum has great potential in increasing student creativity in elementary schools.

The research results regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Learning Curriculum in enhancing student creativity in elementary schools have significant implications for educational practice. First, there needs to be intensive efforts in teacher training to increase their capacity as learning facilitators who can create a creative and dynamic learning environment. Secondly, investment in adequate education infrastructure, including technology and learning resources, should be prioritised to ensure accessibility for all students. In addition, collaboration between schools, the private sector, communities and parents should continue to be strengthened to support project-based learning initiatives and student creativity. Overall, this holistic approach involving various stakeholders can create an educational ecosystem that is conducive to developing the creative potential of every student.

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