

## COMPARISON OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2013 CURRICULUM AND THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM IN INDONESIAN SCHOOLS: A LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE TRANSITION PERIOD TOWARDS A SINGLE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

Abdul Wahab Syakhrani

STAI Rasyidiyah Khalidiyah Amuntai, Kal-Sel, Indonesia

[aws.kandangan@gmail.com](mailto:aws.kandangan@gmail.com)

### Abstract

This study is a literature review that discusses the comparison of the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian schools during the transition period towards a single national curriculum. The background of this study is based on the dynamics of national curriculum changes that aim to improve the quality of education and adapt education to the needs of the times. The study aims to analyse the main similarities and differences between the 2013 Curriculum, known for its standardised structure, thematic learning, and administrative assessment, and the Merdeka Curriculum, which offers flexibility, character development through the Pancasila Student Profile, project-based learning, and more reflective assessment. The research method used is a literature review with content analysis of relevant literature, policy documents, and research findings. The results indicate that the 2013 Curriculum emphasizes the regularity and uniformity of the learning process, while the Merdeka Curriculum provides greater freedom for innovation, educational autonomy, and a focus on character development and critical thinking skills among students. The transition to a single national curriculum presents challenges in terms of resource readiness, teacher training, and differences in infrastructure and understanding across regions. The research conclusions emphasise the importance of socialisation, equitable training, and policy support during the transition process to ensure that national educational goals are achieved optimally across all educational institutions.

**Keywords:** 2013 Curriculum, Independent Curriculum, implementation, curriculum transition, Indonesian education

### Introduction

The development of the curriculum in Indonesia reflects the nation's long journey in building an education system that is relevant to the needs of society and the demands of the times. Since the early days of independence, education in Indonesia has been an important instrument for shaping the character and identity of the nation, so that changes to the curriculum are not merely a response to developments in science and knowledge, but also ensure that the noble values of the nation are preserved and developed (Muharrom et al., 2023) ; (N. Astuti & Pramudito, 2025) . At the beginning of independence, the curriculum used was still influenced by the Dutch and Japanese colonial education systems. However, the 1947 Curriculum was soon implemented as the first effort to replace the colonial curriculum legacy in order to prioritise national interests under the foundation of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. This curriculum

placed greater emphasis on the development of character and national spirit rather than merely the cognitive aspects of students (S. E. P. Astuti et al., 2023) .

Curriculum change is a response to the never-ending dynamics of social, political, technological, and scientific change. The cycle of curriculum change in Indonesia tends to occur almost every decade, in line with the need to continuously reform education so as not to fall behind global and regional developments (Hikmawati, 2022) . From the 1947 Curriculum to the 2013 Curriculum era, every change has always brought a spirit of renewal in the objectives, content, methods, and evaluation of learning. The transition from one curriculum to another is not merely an administrative change but an effort to align education with the challenges of the times and address various long-standing issues, such as low educational quality, weak national character, and the need to strengthen the competitiveness of the younger generation (Aminullah & Dewi, 2024) .

The 2013 Curriculum was introduced as an effort to improve the shortcomings of previous curricula. This curriculum emphasises strengthening the attitudes, knowledge, and skills of students through an integrated thematic approach. Authentic assessment systems have also been integrated as part of the learning process, rather than merely measuring learning outcomes at the end of the process. However, in its implementation, the 2013 Curriculum faces various challenges, ranging from the readiness of educators, the availability of adequate facilities and infrastructure, to significant disparities in socio-economic conditions across regions. These issues have hindered the effectiveness of the 2013 Curriculum's implementation, which has not yet fully met expectations. (Utami, 2022) .

In response to the dynamics of the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum, the government launched the Merdeka Curriculum, which is more adaptive, flexible, and focused on developing the Pancasila Student Profile. The Merdeka Curriculum offers flexibility for educational units and teachers in managing the learning process, including integrating project-based learning and strengthening literacy and numeracy. The implementation of this curriculum also aims to accommodate the diversity and unique characteristics of each school in Indonesia's diverse landscape. The development process of the Merdeka Curriculum emphasises the importance of collaboration, innovation, and the courage to experiment in seeking more effective teaching methods (Hodijah & Nugraha, 2025) .

The transition period towards the Merdeka Curriculum is an important phenomenon in the history of Indonesian education. This period is marked by diversity in practices in the field, as not all schools are able to adopt the changes fully and uniformly. During the transition period, there are significant challenges in terms of policy socialisation, teacher training, preparation of teaching materials, and adaptation of learning cultures within each educational institution. The government has provided schools with the flexibility to implement the Merdeka Curriculum gradually, while continuing to evaluate its effectiveness and real-world impact on learning ( , 2022) .

In the midst of an increasingly dynamic global education landscape, the need for a contextual and relevant curriculum has become increasingly evident. The Merdeka Curriculum is viewed as a strategic initiative to equip students with both competencies and strong character, enabling them to tackle global challenges while maintaining national identity ( ). With a project-based approach and a focus on strengthening the values of Pancasila, the Merdeka Curriculum is expected to produce a generation of Indonesians who are not only intellectually intelligent but also competitive, adaptive, and of noble character (Ali, 2024) .

The transition to a single national curriculum is a process that requires commitment and readiness from various related parties. Teachers, as the frontline implementers of the curriculum in schools, are required to possess professional, pedagogical, and innovative competencies in managing the learning process. In addition to the role of teachers, support from the central government, local governments, and the education community is a key factor in the success of this transition period. The implementation of a single national curriculum also requires adequate availability of resources, including infrastructure, technology, and learning materials (Rahmadayanti & Hartoyo, 2022) .

At the same time, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum does not mean eliminating all positive aspects of the previous curriculum, particularly the 2013 Curriculum. Many values, approaches, and best practices remain relevant and can be adapted to enrich the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in schools. The curriculum transition process should ideally serve as a momentum for reflection and innovation, so that the curriculum truly becomes a vehicle for optimally developing students' potential. (N. A. Lestari, 2023) .

A comparison between the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum is important in order to identify the effectiveness of each policy and assess the extent to which the transition process is able to support the achievement of national education goals. A literature review on the implementation of both curricula can provide insights into their strengths and weaknesses at the practical level. Aspects that need to be compared include curriculum structure, teaching methods, assessment systems, the role of teachers, and their impact on student development. (Fitria, 2024) .

Research on the comparison of the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum during the transition period is also highly relevant for providing policy recommendations for future education. The findings of this literature review can serve as a foundation for the government to establish more appropriate policies in promoting the realisation of a single, excellent, inclusive, and competitive national curriculum. In the long term, the proper implementation of the curriculum is expected to bring about an Indonesian education system that is not only responsive to changes in the times but also strong in building the nation's identity.

Considering the historical journey, the dynamics of curriculum change, and the challenges of transition, this research is very important for understanding the main points in curriculum development in Indonesia. Every curriculum change should be based on the spirit of educational transformation that is capable of creating a competent future generation with noble character. The evaluation of the comparison between these two major curricula is an important contribution to national education development.

In the context of global educational transformation, Indonesian education is also required to continue to improve and learn from past experiences. History shows that effective curriculum change must involve the active participation of all stakeholders, especially teachers, students, parents, and the community. The success of the transition to a single national curriculum is greatly influenced by synergy and shared commitment in implementing educational policies.

Finally, comparative research on the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum during the transition period towards a single national curriculum is expected to contribute significantly to the development of a more adaptive and responsive national education system capable of producing a future generation that is resilient and highly competitive.

## **Research Method**

The research method used in this study is library research, in which data and information are obtained through searching, reading, and critically analysing various relevant literature sources such as books, journal articles, research reports, policy documents, and other scientific sources that discuss the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian schools (Eliyah & Aslan, 2025). The collected data were analysed qualitatively using content analysis techniques to identify similarities, differences, and challenges of the two curricula, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the transition period towards the Single National Curriculum (Maulina, 2021).

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Similarities and Key Differences in the Implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian Schools**

The implementation of the curriculum in Indonesia has undergone significant changes since the country's independence. Two of the most prominent curricula in the last decade are the 2013 Curriculum (K13) and the Merdeka Curriculum. Both were introduced with the vision of advancing national education, but they have different approaches and characteristics in their implementation in Indonesian schools. The following is a 16-paragraph analysis discussing the main similarities and differences in

the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum (N. A. P. Lestari & Habibah, 2023).

Both curricula are subject to the main objectives of the National Education System (Sisdiknas) and national education standards. Within their basic framework, the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum aim to develop students holistically in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. This ensures that the orientation of the curriculum in Indonesia always maintains the quality of national education (K. Lestari & Yusuf, 2025). Both the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum focus on developing students' competencies. Character education and moral values are established as the foundational pillars integrated into daily learning. Both also emphasize the importance of strengthening soft skills as the primary capital for facing global challenges, rather than merely cognitive aspects or mastery of subject matter (Aslan, 2016).

Another similarity lies in the active and student-centred learning patterns. Teachers in both curricula are no longer the sole source of knowledge but act as facilitators, guides, and motivators who facilitate the optimal growth of students' interests and potential. Although there are fundamental similarities, the two have significant differences in their learning objectives and outcomes (Widodo, 2020). The 2013 Curriculum specifies objectives in the form of basic competency indicators (KD), which consist of core competencies (KI) and basic competencies for each subject. Meanwhile, the Merdeka Curriculum outlines learning outcomes in the form of descriptive paragraphs that describe knowledge, attitudes, and skills at each stage of students' development (Jenita et al., 2022).

Curriculum structure is an important distinguishing factor. K13 uses an integrated thematic approach that requires the integration of several subjects, especially at the elementary level. In contrast, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasises flexibility and gives educational units and teachers the freedom to develop school operational curricula in accordance with local needs and characteristics (Daga, 2020).

In terms of teaching approaches, K13 mandates the use of the scientific approach—observing, questioning, experimenting, reasoning, and presenting—in every subject. The Merdeka Curriculum places greater emphasis on differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and adaptation to students' needs and interests (Alam & Dewi, 2024).

Flexibility in the structure of time and learning load is also a key feature distinguishing the two implementations. In K13, lesson hours are set per week in a structured manner, while in the Merdeka Curriculum, lesson hours can be arranged per year, allowing space for projects to strengthen the Pancasila Student Profile (P5). This enables the integration of co-curricular activities and contextual learning experiences (Sari & Rugaiyah, 2024).

In terms of assessment, K13 places greater emphasis on assessment based on three main domains: attitude, knowledge, and skills. Assessment is conducted in a formative and summative manner and is more administrative in nature. The Merdeka Curriculum implements diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments that are more focused on improving the learning process, as well as project-based assessments to evaluate the holistic development of the Pancasila Student Profile ( ) (Yuliza, 2022) .

Both curricula recognise the importance of technology in the learning process. However, the Merdeka Curriculum encourages more intensive and adaptive use of technology, including digital platforms for teaching materials, assessment, and communication between teachers, students, and parents (Syarifah, 2023) .

The 2013 curriculum is more centralised, with each school required to follow the structure, material, and schedule determined by the central government. The Merdeka Curriculum, on the other hand, gives greater autonomy to schools and teachers to organise content, processes, and assessments according to local needs and contexts without compromising national learning outcomes.

Character building, soft skills, and the values of the Pancasila Student Profile in the Merdeka Curriculum are developed through the P5 project, a collaborative learning programme that fosters care, independence, mutual cooperation, critical thinking, and creativity. In the K13 curriculum, character development is integrated into all subjects but is not explicitly project-based or structured around thematic activities like in the Merdeka Curriculum (Muchlip, 2023) ).

Implementation in schools indicates that in K13, limitations in human resources and teaching materials pose significant challenges. Many teachers require ongoing training to master the scientific approach mandated by K13, as well as adaptation to digital technology in teaching.

Conversely, in the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers have more room for innovation. Teachers can design more varied learning strategies that are tailored to the characteristics of their students. However, other challenges arise, such as the need for creative teaching modules, intensive mentoring, and awareness among teachers to utilise this autonomy responsibly (Aslan, 2017) ; (Aslan & Wahyudin, 2020) .

At the student level, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasises the development of lifelong learning skills. Students are trained to find, process, and present information independently and collaboratively in various real-life projects that are directly related to their lives. The 2013 Curriculum, although it also aims to develop similar skills, is implemented in a more structured and facilitated manner within the constraints of a fixed schedule and mandatory subjects ( ) (Paramita et al., 2025) .

The paradigm shift is also reflected in the final assessment system for graduation. K13 continues to refer to national examinations and school examinations as the main requirements for graduation. Meanwhile, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasises formative assessment and project outcomes as benchmarks, and provides flexibility for

schools in determining assessment mechanisms in accordance with student learning outcomes (Kusmawan et al., 2025).

In general, a comparison of implementation shows that the 2013 Curriculum emphasises structure and standardisation of the learning process, while the Merdeka Curriculum offers flexibility, innovation in learning, and more explicit character building. The choice or transition between the two curricula must be tailored to the readiness of school resources, teacher competencies, and the needs of students in achieving the expected graduate profile.

Thus, the adoption and refinement of both curricula in Indonesian schools is an important step towards ensuring that national education is truly relevant, contextual, and provides ample space for all students to develop their potential in the era of globalisation.

### **Challenges Faced During the Transition Period Toward a Single National Curriculum**

The transition period towards a single national curriculum in Indonesia presents opportunities for educational system reform, but also brings complex challenges. The shift from the 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum requires readiness and adaptation from all education stakeholders. The following is a 16-paragraph description of the main challenges during this transition phase.

One of the main challenges is the readiness of teachers to adopt a new paradigm. Many teachers who are accustomed to the conventional methods of the 2013 Curriculum are now faced with the need to innovate and adapt to project-based approaches and differentiated learning, which require creativity and a deep understanding of student characteristics (Akib, 2020).

Limited teacher training is also a significant obstacle. Not all teachers have access to intensive and continuous training. As a result, understanding of the philosophy and practices of the Merdeka Curriculum is not yet evenly distributed across all regions, particularly in 3T (remote, frontier, and outermost) areas. Infrastructure limitations, especially in rural areas, are a major obstacle (Kristiyuana et al., 2025). Facilities such as internet access, digital devices, and adequate learning spaces are not yet fully available, limiting schools' ability to implement technology-based and project-based learning. Administrative burdens are also a serious issue. Teachers are required to prepare more complex reports and lesson plans, especially for project-based learning. This often reduces the time that should be used to prepare creative learning processes in the classroom (Hidayah & Rahmawati, 2022).

The dissemination of the curriculum to all parties, including school principals and parents, has not been optimal. Many still do not fully grasp the essence and objectives of the curriculum reform, leading to resistance, unpreparedness, and misconceptions regarding its implementation on the ground. Resistance to change is also evident among some teachers who feel comfortable with the old system. Uncertainty about the

benefits of the new curriculum and concerns about increased workloads are key barriers to the full adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum (Prastowo, 2023).

Mapping student needs and characteristics has become more complicated. Teachers must diagnose each student's learning needs individually to support differentiated learning, but they are not always supported by adequate data, time, and tools. Parent participation tends to be minimal, especially in supporting home-based learning projects or literacy activities. Parents' lack of understanding of their new role in supporting their children's learning has an impact on the low effectiveness of the programme (Sari & Rugaiyah, 2024).

Learning resources and supporting materials are often insufficient or not contextual to specific regional conditions, forcing teachers to go the extra mile to find or even develop their own teaching materials tailored to students' needs. During the transition period of the 2013 Curriculum ( ), many schools are facing challenges in conducting assessments. The assessment model of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes formative, summative, and project-based assessments, is a new concept that is sometimes difficult for teachers to implement effectively (Pratama, 2024).

The collaborative climate between schools and regions is still underdeveloped. Many schools feel they are working alone in finding solutions, even though sharing good practices and mentoring are crucial for accelerating adaptation during the transition period. The quality gap between schools in urban centres and remote areas is becoming increasingly apparent. The availability of facilities, the quality of human resources, and government support are uneven, meaning that quality disparities in education could widen if not addressed promptly. (Aslan, 2023).

The motivation and adaptation of young teachers differ from those of senior teachers. Teachers who have been teaching for a long time tend to experience "culture shock" towards new learning and evaluation models that focus on the competencies and character of students. Challenges in planning and developing teaching materials also arise, especially for teachers who previously relied heavily on standard documents. Under the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers must be more independent in developing objectives, outcomes, and learning pathways (Setiawan, 2018).

School principals and local education authorities are expected to be the main drivers of change, but not all are ready to serve as role models or effective facilitators, especially in monitoring, supporting, and evaluating implementation at educational institutions. (Maulidina, 2024).

Regarding students, many are not yet accustomed to exploratory, reflective, and project-based learning. Students' adaptation to more independent and collaborative learning styles also varies between classes and regions, requiring special assistance.

Finally, the challenges of integrating and ensuring the continuity of the transition programme must also be addressed. The success of the transition period will largely depend on the long-term commitment of all stakeholders, including the willingness to



evaluate, reflect on, and improve policies in line with the evolving needs of Indonesia's education system.

## Conclusion

Based on literature studies, the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian schools shows fundamental differences in learning approaches, curriculum flexibility, and assessment systems. The 2013 Curriculum is known to be more structured, with a thematic approach, standardised learning document development, and administrative assessment that separates aspects of attitude, knowledge, and skills. On the other hand, the Merdeka Curriculum offers greater flexibility, prioritises project-based learning and differentiation, and emphasises character development through the strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile ( ). Assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum is more integrated and reflective, supported by two types of report cards: subject-based report cards and character development project report cards.

During the transition to a single national curriculum, the main challenges faced are the readiness of teachers and schools to adapt to the new paradigm, limited comprehensive training, and differences in infrastructure between regions. Although the Merdeka Curriculum encourages creativity and innovation, its implementation in the field still faces obstacles in the form of a need for creative teaching modules, intensive mentoring, and adaptation to greater school autonomy. On the other hand, resistance from some parties to change and the limited involvement of parents can impact the effectiveness of the new curriculum's implementation.

Overall, the comparison of the implementation of these two curricula emphasises the importance of adapting education policies to the diverse conditions of schools and students in Indonesia. The 2013 Curriculum excels in terms of standardisation and regularity of the learning process, while the Merdeka Curriculum emphasises innovation, flexibility, and character building. The success of the transition to the Single National Curriculum depends heavily on the collective commitment of all stakeholders, the readiness of resources, and the quality of support and training provided to all schools.

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