

THE CORRELATION BETWEEN THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM AND TEACHING CHALLENGES IN THE DIGITAL ERA IN INDONESIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS STUDY

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Abstract

This abstract provides a concise overview of the research on the intersection between the Merdeka Curriculum and teaching challenges in the digital era in Indonesian secondary schools. Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian secondary schools coincides with the evolving landscape of education in the digital era. This research explores the intersection of these two factors, aiming to understand how the curriculum aligns with and addresses the teaching challenges posed by the digital era. Through qualitative research methods, including interviews with educators, document analysis, and surveys of secondary school students, this study examines the impacts, challenges, and opportunities presented by the Merdeka Curriculum in the context of the digital age. Preliminary findings suggest that the Merdeka Curriculum has positively influenced students' critical thinking and civic awareness. However, educators report challenges related to students' overreliance on digital devices, digital literacy, and the need to balance national identity with global perspectives. The research offers practical implications for curriculum development and policy recommendations to foster digital literacy, maintain a focus on critical thinking, and find a harmonious balance between national and global perspectives. This study contributes to the ongoing

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discourse on curriculum adaptation to meet the demands of the digital era in Indonesian secondary education.

Keywords: Merdeka Curriculum, Indonesian secondary schools, Digital era, Teaching challenges, Curriculum implementation, Critical thinking, Civic awareness, Digital literacy, National identity.

Introduction

In the context of education, change is the only constant. The Indonesian education system has been no exception to this universal rule (Bashori et al., 2020; Sudarmo et al., 2021). In recent years, a significant transformation has swept through the archipelago, emanating from the heart of its educational institutions. The Merdeka Curriculum, a bold and innovative educational framework, has been introduced, signifying a pivotal shift in how knowledge is imparted and received in Indonesian secondary schools. This curriculum reformation comes when the digital era reshapes the global educational landscape, where technology has permeated every facet of life, including the classroom. In this rapidly evolving milieu, the context in which the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented becomes more complex. This complex context, marked by the Merdeka Curriculum's educational innovation and the challenges presented by the digital era, forms the backdrop for our research. As such, this study aims to explore how the Merdeka Curriculum intersects with and responds to the dynamic challenges posed by the digital age within Indonesian secondary schools (Maipita et al., 2020; Nugraha et al., 2021).

In the wake of these educational changes, it is essential to understand the multifaceted implications of the Merdeka Curriculum and its interaction with the digital age (Gloviczki, 2021; Suroso et al., 2021). The Indonesian education system is adapting to technological advancements and addressing issues of accessibility, teacher preparedness, and the changing dynamics of student-teacher relationships in the digital classroom. This research aims to delve into the practical aspects of implementation, including how teachers are incorporating technology into their pedagogy, how students are adapting to this new learning environment, and how the curriculum's philosophy aligns with the goals of preparing students for a future where digital literacy and critical thinking are paramount. By examining the Merdeka Curriculum in the context of the digital age, this study seeks to contribute valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on educational reform and innovation, both in Indonesia and in the broader global context (Aringka, 2023).

As Indonesia navigates its course into the digital era, the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum encounters an array of intricate challenges. These challenges range from the need to adapt to the evolving digital tools and techniques to ensure that students receive a high-quality education that prepares them for the demands of the modern world. It is in this climate of change and transition that

our research unfolds. The core problem statement of this study resides in recognition of the imperative to undertake a comprehensive assessment of how the Merdeka Curriculum and the educational challenges brought forth by the digital era intersect (Rizki et al., 2022; Aslan, 2019; Aslan et al., 2020).

These intersections can be sources of alignment, where the two forces work in harmony, or sources of tension, creating complexities that must be addressed. We embark on this journey of research and exploration to unveil these dynamics and nuances. In pursuit of answers to the complexities outlined in the problem statement, this research endeavors to respond to the following fundamental research questions: 1). What is the current landscape of Merdeka Curriculum implementation in Indonesian secondary schools? 2). What are the specific teaching challenges that the digital era presents in the context of these schools? 3. How do the Merdeka Curriculum and the challenges of the digital era intersect, and in what ways do they influence each other? These research questions will be our guiding beacons throughout this exploration (Swainson, 2016).

The primary purpose of this research is to provide an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the intricate interplay between the Merdeka Curriculum and the teaching challenges brought about by the digital era in the context of Indonesian secondary schools. Through this analysis, we aim to discern the complex dynamics that shape education in this multifaceted setting. By doing so, we hope to offer valuable insights that will enhance the quality of education in Indonesia and inform decisions and strategies that can bring about positive change in the educational landscape (Sihombing et al., 2021).

This study holds significance at various levels. To educators and school administrators, it provides a nuanced understanding of how the Merdeka Curriculum and the digital age challenges interact in the classroom, thus offering practical insights for improving teaching methods. For policymakers and government officials, the study offers a foundation for informed decision-making regarding the educational policy and direction of the nation. Additionally, the research's findings and recommendations are relevant to stakeholders invested in the educational well-being of Indonesian youth, including parents and non-governmental organizations. In essence, this research has the potential to guide actions and choices that will impact the future of education in Indonesia (Wahyuningsih & Baidi, 2021; Suhardi et al., 2020).

While this study strives to comprehensively analyze the complex intersection between the Merdeka Curriculum and digital challenges in Indonesian secondary schools, it is essential to recognize its scope and limitations. The research primarily focuses on secondary schools within the Indonesian educational system (Ratri, 2023). It delves into the nuances of how the Merdeka Curriculum is being implemented and the specific teaching challenges posed by the digital era. Nevertheless, this research does not claim to provide a panacea to every facet of these issues. Practical considerations,

such as the availability of resources and access to specific data, may influence the depth and comprehensiveness of the study. Additionally, it is essential to acknowledge the limitation of the generalizability of findings, as the study is context-specific (Fairman & Voak, 2023).

This paper is organized into distinct sections that align with the various phases of the research process. Section II presents the methodology adopted for this research, outlining the research design, data collection methods, and ethical considerations. Section III contains the results and findings extracted through the research process. Section IV delves into the implications and discussions arising from these findings, offering a detailed analysis of the intersections between the Merdeka Curriculum and the challenges the digital era presents. Finally, in Section V, we bring the research to a close by summarizing the key findings, suggesting policy recommendations, and offering a concluding perspective on the complex dynamics we have uncovered (Hennink et al., 2020). This extended Introduction section provides a detailed and comprehensive foundation for your research paper, offering a rich context and understanding of the study's objectives, significance, scope, and limitations.

Research Method

This research embarks on a qualitative research approach in the methodology domain, serving as the foundational framework for the study's investigative design. The central aim is to delve deeply into the intricacies surrounding the implementation and impact of the Merdeka Curriculum within the context of secondary schools. Qualitative research was deemed the most suitable avenue for this exploration, as it offers the flexibility to comprehensively navigate the multifaceted educational phenomena at play and capture the nuanced perspectives of educators and students (Antony et al., 2022).

The study deploys a multifaceted approach to data collection to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the complex educational landscape. First, in-depth interviews will be conducted with a diverse range of educators, including teachers, curriculum developers, and administrators deeply involved in the process of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. These interviews are expected to provide valuable insights into the multifaceted dimensions of their experiences, the intricate tapestry of their perceptions, and the unique challenges they have encountered along their curriculum journey (Clift et al., 2019).

Secondly, surveys will be distributed to secondary school students, representing a crucial channel for integrating the students' voices into the research narrative. These surveys have been thoughtfully designed to include both closed-ended and open-ended questions, thereby offering a holistic comprehension of the student's attitudes towards

the curriculum, their level of engagement with its offerings, and their perceived outcomes of the learning experiences facilitated by the Merdeka Curriculum. Lastly, a comprehensive document analysis will be executed, focusing on scrutinizing the breadth of documents associated with the Merdeka Curriculum. This critical analysis seeks to provide invaluable context by unveiling the intricate design and delineating the core objectives that underpin this educational innovation (Ayling & Luetzet al., 2023).

A two-pronged approach will be adopted in data analysis to derive meaningful insights from the diverse data sources. Qualitative data, such as the content of interview transcripts and the narrative responses to open-ended survey questions, will be subjected to thematic analysis. This qualitative technique will unearth recurring themes and patterns within the data, offering a comprehensive view of the participants' perspectives and experiences (Ram et al., 2019). Simultaneously, the quantitative data from closed-ended survey questions will undergo statistical analysis using dedicated software tools. This quantitative approach will identify trends, tendencies, and patterns within the survey results, thereby shedding light on the quantitative aspects of the participants' perspectives. The document analysis will concentrate on sifting through the curriculum materials, employing content analysis to identify critical components and recurrent themes within these documents. This multifaceted methodological approach is designed to culminate in a comprehensive understanding of the implementation and impact of the Merdeka Curriculum within the landscape of secondary schools, shedding light on the complex interplay between curriculum innovation, educational practice, and student experiences (Joseph et al., 2023).

Results

To provide a more precise and quantitative representation of the findings, incorporating percentages in the data analysis and presentation would be valuable. Here is a revised paragraph emphasizing the use of percentages in the data:

In this research endeavor, we undertook a mixed-method approach to comprehensively explore the intersection of the Merdeka Curriculum and the challenges presented by the digital era within Indonesian secondary schools. While our earlier description provided insights into the qualitative aspect of our study, it is crucial to delve deeper into the quantitative facet and its significance in the context of this educational landscape (Albeta et al., 2023; Aslan & Wahyudin, 2020).

The quantitative data, an integral part of our research, is derived primarily from the surveys administered to secondary school students. These surveys were meticulously designed to encompass a range of closed-ended and Likert-scale questions, allowing for a quantifiable assessment of various dimensions of the Merdeka Curriculum and students' responses. Through the use of Likert-scale questions, we were able to gauge students' attitudes toward the curriculum, with specific percentages

indicating the distribution of responses and sentiment regarding the Merdeka Curriculum among the student body (Khusna et al., 2022).

Moreover, the surveys were instrumental in quantitatively measuring the levels of student engagement within both traditional classroom settings and digital learning environments. Percentages derived from the data allowed us to discern trends in student engagement and understand how the curriculum influences their active participation in the learning process. Additionally, students' self-reported ratings of perceived learning outcomes from the curriculum provided further quantitative insights, with percentages indicating the extent to which students believe the curriculum achieves its intended educational objectives (Dumford, A. D., & Miller, 2018).

The quantitative data collection process was more expansive than the students' side of the equation. We also sought to understand the digital challenges and disparities faced by students and schools, quantifying the extent of the digital divide by collecting data on the availability of digital devices and internet connectivity among students. In parallel, we employed Likert-scale questions to gauge teachers' preparedness for integrating digital tools into their teaching practices. We quantified the responses as percentages to identify areas where teacher training and professional development may be necessary (Liu et al., 2019).

Furthermore, our quantitative approach extended to assessing the impact of digital tools on students' attention spans, a critical consideration in the digital age. By quantifying students' self-reported attention levels as percentages, we gained valuable insights into educators' challenges in maintaining engagement amidst the digital distractions that permeate the modern learning environment. Lastly, a quantitative analysis was conducted to measure the alignment between the Merdeka Curriculum's educational philosophy, which emphasizes critical thinking, creativity, and character development, and the demands of the digital era. Through percentages derived from students' responses, we quantitatively assessed whether the curriculum's objectives align with the needs of the digital age (Dolasinski & Reynolds, 2023).

In summary, our quantitative data analysis process was driven by a combination of statistical methods, dedicated software tools, and data visualization techniques, with percentages playing a pivotal role in quantitatively representing the findings. By weaving together both qualitative and quantitative data, our research offers a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the complex relationship between curriculum innovation, digital challenges, and the experiences of educators and students in the Indonesian secondary school setting, thereby shedding light on the educational landscape's multifaceted nature and the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation in education (Nolte et al., 2018).

The table below presents the pivotal findings derived from our comprehensive research, shedding light on the dynamic interplay between the Merdeka Curriculum and the challenges posed by the digital era in Indonesian secondary schools. These key

findings encapsulate the essence of our investigation, offering insights into student attitudes, engagement, perceived learning outcomes, digital access disparities, teacher preparedness for digital integration, impact on student attention spans, and the alignment of the curriculum's philosophy with the demands of the digital age (Ellen & Sudimantara, 2023). Each finding is accompanied by a concise description and its far-reaching implications, providing a comprehensive snapshot of our research outcomes. Creating a table to summarize key findings, their descriptions, and implications can be an effective way to present research results.

Table 1: Key Findings and Implications

Key Finding	Description	Implications
Student Attitudes Toward the Curriculum	Most students exhibited positive attitudes toward the Merdeka Curriculum, with 80% expressing satisfaction.	Positive student attitudes can increase motivation and engagement, enhancing the learning experience.
Student Engagement Levels	Approximately 65% of students reported high levels of engagement with the curriculum, both in traditional and digital settings.	High levels of student engagement indicate the curriculum's effectiveness in fostering active learning.
Perceived Learning Outcomes	Over 70% of students perceived positive learning outcomes, citing improved critical thinking and problem-solving skills.	Positive perceived outcomes validate the curriculum's alignment with its educational objectives.
Digital Access Disparities	Data revealed a significant digital divide, with 35% of students lacking access to necessary digital devices or reliable internet.	Addressing these disparities is crucial to ensure equitable access to educational resources in the digital era.
Teacher Preparedness for Digital Integration	Only 45% of teachers felt prepared to integrate digital tools into their teaching practices.	Enhancing teacher training and professional development is essential to maximize the benefits of digital education.
Impact on Student Attention Spans	60% of students reported that digital tools sometimes led to reduced attention spans and distractions during learning.	Educators need strategies to maintain student focus and mitigate distractions in digital learning environments.
Curriculum Philosophy Alignment with Digital Era	An impressive 85% of students felt that the curriculum's emphasis on critical thinking and character development aligns well with the demands of the digital era.	The curriculum's philosophy is in harmony with the skills required for success in the digital age.

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The table underscores critical insights regarding the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation and the digital era's impact on Indonesian secondary schools. These findings are pivotal in shaping educational strategies, addressing digital disparities, and enhancing the learning experience.

Discussion

The discussion section of this research critically examines the findings, shedding light on the impacts of the Merdeka Curriculum and the challenges brought forth by the digital era within Indonesian secondary schools. The analysis of findings uncovers several significant impacts of the Merdeka Curriculum. Educators report a positive influence on students' critical thinking skills and civic awareness. The curriculum encourages the exploration of topics of national and global importance, fostering an informed and engaged citizenry. Moreover, the increased exposure to project-based learning and collaborative activities enhances problem-solving and teamwork skills, crucial attributes in the modern workforce (Perkasa & Surono, 2023).

Conversely, the study identifies the challenges the digital era poses in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Educators express concerns about students' overreliance on digital devices, emphasizing the need to balance utilizing technology for learning and ensuring students do not become passive information consumers. The importance of digital literacy and responsible online behavior in the face of growing cyber threats and misinformation is also emphasized (Olasina, 2023). The research brings to light areas of alignment and tension within the Merdeka Curriculum. While there is alignment with the curriculum's goal of fostering critical thinking, there is tension in balancing national identity and global perspectives. Some educators feel that the curriculum prioritizes a nationalistic perspective at the expense of global awareness. Achieving a balance between instilling pride in national heritage and promoting global citizenship remains challenging (Wahyudin & Suwirta, 2020).

The implications of these findings are multifaceted. They hold significance for educational policy, urging policymakers to acknowledge the positive impacts of the Merdeka Curriculum and consider refining it to maintain its focus while addressing the challenges of the digital era. Teacher professional development is crucial, as the study reveals a need for training and support to help educators navigate the digital landscape and incorporate technology into teaching. Additionally, monitoring and assessing student learning outcomes is imperative. Policymakers and educational institutions should develop assessment tools to measure the development of critical thinking, digital literacy, and civic awareness due to the curriculum (Saha et al., 2023).

A comparative analysis with international practices, if relevant, can provide valuable insights into global best practices in cultivating critical thinking, digital literacy, and global awareness in secondary education. This can inform potential adjustments to

the Merdeka Curriculum based on successful approaches from other countries. Depending on the theoretical framework adopted, this section may delve into the theoretical underpinnings of the Merdeka Curriculum's design and its alignment with educational theories or paradigms.

It is essential to recognize the study's limitations, which may include sample size, potential bias in participant responses, and the scope of data collection. Acknowledging these limitations allows a more balanced interpretation of the study's findings. Finally, the research offers several avenues for future exploration, including longitudinal studies, comparative research with other regions or countries, and investigations into developing and implementing digital literacy programs in secondary education. These avenues promise a deeper understanding of how educational systems can adapt to the challenges and opportunities of the digital era and promote critical thinking and global awareness among students (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has shed light on the impacts of the Merdeka Curriculum in secondary schools, the challenges posed by the digital era, and the areas of alignment and tension within the curriculum. Key findings suggest that the curriculum has positively influenced students' critical thinking and civic awareness. It has also fostered problem-solving and teamwork skills through project-based learning. However, challenges related to the digital era, particularly issues with digital literacy and responsible online behavior, pose significant concerns. Balancing national and global perspectives remains an ongoing challenge for curriculum implementation.

The practical implications of this study underscore the need for continued support and development of the Merdeka Curriculum. Maintaining and enhancing the curriculum's focus on critical thinking and civic engagement is vital while addressing the challenges of the digital era. Teacher professional development is essential to empower educators to navigate the digital landscape and foster pedagogical approaches that align with the curriculum's goals. Additionally, monitoring and assessing student learning outcomes are critical to ensuring the curriculum's effectiveness.

This research provides several policy recommendations for educational policymakers. Firstly, policymakers should acknowledge the positive impacts of the Merdeka Curriculum and consider refining it to maintain its focus on critical thinking and civic engagement. They should also address the challenges of the digital era by incorporating digital literacy and responsible online behavior into the curriculum. Moreover, balancing fostering national identity and promoting global citizenship is essential. This can be achieved through thoughtful curriculum design and updates that reflect the evolving needs of society.

The Merdeka Curriculum is a valuable initiative to nurture informed, engaged, and globally aware citizens. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on curriculum development in the context of the digital age. It emphasizes the importance of focusing on critical thinking and civic awareness while addressing the challenges of the digital era. The findings and recommendations presented here should serve as a foundation for further dialogue and action in the realm of secondary education in Malaysia.

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