

DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT IN THE INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

This study is a literature review that aims to describe the concept, forms, objectives, and challenges of implementing diagnostic assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum. The method used is a literature study by collecting and analysing various sources such as journal articles, books, and educational policy documents related to diagnostic assessment. The results of the study indicate that diagnostic assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum consists of cognitive and non-cognitive assessments conducted before learning begins to identify students' strengths, weaknesses, knowledge, skills, and characteristics. The information from these assessments serves as a basis for teachers in designing adaptive and needs-based learning, thereby supporting the achievement of differentiated and personalised learning. However, the implementation of diagnostic assessment still faces a number of obstacles, such as limited teacher understanding, time, and supporting infrastructure. Therefore, continuous training and mentoring are needed so that diagnostic assessment can be optimised as the main foundation of learning in the Merdeka Curriculum.

Keywords: Diagnostic Assessment, Merdeka Curriculum, Literature Review.

Introduction

The Merdeka Curriculum is one of the innovations in the Indonesian education system that emphasises learner-centred learning. This curriculum gives schools and teachers the freedom to design, implement, and develop learning processes according to the needs and characteristics of learners. One important aspect of the Merdeka Curriculum is diagnostic assessment, which serves as the foundation for designing adaptive and effective learning (Muharrom et al., 2023); (Aslan, 2016); (Astuti et al., 2023).

Diagnostic assessment is an evaluation process conducted before learning begins, with the primary objective of identifying students' initial abilities, learning needs, interests, and potential. Through this assessment, teachers can obtain comprehensive data on students' conditions, both cognitive and non-cognitive, enabling learning to be designed more relevant and meaningful (Setiawan, 2023).

In its implementation, diagnostic assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum is carried out systematically at the beginning of the school year or before entering new material. The instruments used can be written tests, observations, interviews, and technology-based assessments. The data obtained from diagnostic assessment is not

only useful for teachers but also for students and parents in understanding the initial position and learning needs of each individual (Tang & Zhan, 2021).

The existence of diagnostic assessment is very important because students in Indonesia have diverse backgrounds, abilities, and learning experiences. Thus, diagnostic assessment becomes a tool to map this diversity, enabling teachers to design differentiated and personalised learning strategies (Liang, 2021). This is in line with the spirit of the Merdeka Curriculum, which aims to create inclusive and equitable learning. In addition, diagnostic assessment also plays a role in identifying potential learning problems, both academic and non-academic, such as behavioural disorders, low motivation, or social-emotional barriers. With early identification, teachers can provide appropriate and timely interventions so that problems do not develop further and students can achieve optimal learning outcomes (Paulsen & Valdivia, 2022).

However, the implementation of diagnostic assessment in the field still faces various challenges. Many teachers do not fully understand the concepts and techniques of diagnostic assessment, so its implementation is not optimal. In addition, limited time, facilities, and training support are also obstacles often faced by schools and teachers in carrying out diagnostic assessment effectively (Lee & Louis, 2021).

Research results show that most teachers are aware of the importance of diagnostic assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum, but many still feel uncertain and lack confidence to implement it independently. This indicates the need for mentoring, training, and strengthening teachers' competencies in diagnostic assessment so that its implementation can run well and have a positive impact on the learning process (Destiana, 2020). In addition to teacher competence, policy support and infrastructure are also important factors in the successful implementation of diagnostic assessment. The government, through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, has issued various regulations and guidelines for the implementation of diagnostic assessment, but its implementation in schools still needs to be continuously encouraged and evaluated (Maut, 2022).

Conceptually, diagnostic assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum does not only function as a measuring tool but also as a basis for decision-making in designing learner-centred learning. Teachers are expected to be able to analyse the results of diagnostic assessments and use them as the main reference in developing teaching modules, learning strategies, and determining the necessary interventions (Pramudita, 2024).

Thus, diagnostic assessment is a crucial first step in the learning process in the era of the Merdeka Curriculum. Through this assessment, it is hoped that each student can obtain learning experiences that are in line with their needs and potential, so that the national education goal of creating Pancasila-based learner profiles can be optimally achieved.

Finally, it is important to continue developing research and studies related to diagnostic assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum, both in terms of concept,

implementation, and its impact on student learning outcomes. In this way, Indonesia's education system can continue to adapt and evolve in line with the demands of the times and the increasingly complex needs of students.

Research Method

The research method used in this study is a literature review with a descriptive-qualitative approach, which aims to collect, analyse, and present information related to diagnostic assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum based on secondary sources such as journal articles, books, education policy documents, and official publications from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology; the data obtained were then systematically analysed using content analysis techniques to describe the concepts, implementation, benefits, and challenges of diagnostic assessment in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum (Ferrari, 2020); (Green et al., 2006).

Results and Discussion

Concept and Purpose of Diagnostic Assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum

The concept of diagnostic assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum is one of the important innovations that supports learner-centred learning. This assessment is conducted specifically at the beginning of the learning process to identify the characteristics, competencies, strengths, weaknesses, and learning needs of each student. Through diagnostic assessment, teachers obtain a comprehensive picture of the initial condition of students, both in terms of cognitive and non-cognitive aspects, so that learning can be designed to be more relevant and effective (Kusumawati, 2021).

Conceptually, diagnostic assessment is an assessment tool used to map students' basic abilities, interests, learning styles, and psychological and socio-emotional conditions before learning begins. This assessment differs from formative and summative assessments, which focus more on the assessment of the learning process and outcomes. Diagnostic assessment emphasises mapping initial conditions so that learning can be tailored to the needs of individual students and groups of students (Hasanah, 2023).

The main objective of diagnostic assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum is to ensure that every student receives a learning experience that is appropriate to their abilities and needs. By identifying students' strengths and weaknesses from the outset, teachers can design more adaptive, differentiated, and personalised learning strategies. This is in line with the spirit of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasises freedom and flexibility in the learning process (Abidin, 2022).

Diagnostic assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum has two main aspects, namely cognitive and non-cognitive. Cognitive assessment aims to identify students' basic knowledge, conceptual understanding, and thinking skills in specific subjects. Meanwhile, non-cognitive assessment focuses on psychological, socio-emotional,

motivational, interest, and family conditions of students. These two aspects are very important for obtaining comprehensive data in designing effective learning (Prasetyo, 2023).

The function of diagnostic assessment is not only to identify weaknesses but also the strengths and potential of students that can be further developed. The results of diagnostic assessments are used as a basis for providing appropriate interventions, adjusting learning methods, and providing additional or remedial materials according to students' needs. Thus, diagnostic assessment helps minimise learning gaps in the classroom and ensures that every student receives optimal support (Istianah & et al., 2023).

In practice, diagnostic assessment can be carried out through various instruments, such as written tests, observations, interviews, pre-quizzes, diagnostic worksheets, group discussions, and concept maps.

Teachers can choose the most relevant instruments according to the objectives and characteristics of the material and students. The data obtained from this assessment is then analysed to determine the next learning steps (Nugroho et al., 2023). Diagnostic assessment also plays an important role in detecting learning problems that may not be apparent during the learning process, such as difficulty in understanding concepts or obstacles in applying certain skills. With early detection, teachers can immediately provide the necessary support or intervention so that students do not fall behind in their learning (Rusiadi & Aslan, 2021). The Merdeka Curriculum gives teachers and schools the freedom to design, implement, and develop diagnostic assessments according to the context and needs of the educational unit.

Teachers are expected to be able to analyse the results of diagnostic assessments and use them as a primary reference in developing teaching modules, learning strategies, and determining the necessary interventions or enrichment for students (Aslan & Wahyudin, 2020); (Suhardi et al., 2020). In addition to benefiting teachers, diagnostic assessments also provide advantages for students and parents. Students can identify their initial position in the learning process and understand areas that need improvement, while parents can better understand their children's learning needs and support the learning process at home. Thus, diagnostic assessments promote collaboration between teachers, students, and parents in achieving learning objectives (Aslan, 2023).

Diagnostic assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum also has a positive impact on improving the quality of education. With more targeted and needs-based learning, it is hoped that student learning outcomes will be more optimal and equitable. In addition, diagnostic assessment can also help schools design a curriculum that is more effective and relevant to the times (Hasanah, 2023). However, the implementation of diagnostic assessment in schools still faces various challenges, such as a lack of understanding among teachers, time constraints, and limited supporting facilities. Therefore, training

and guidance for teachers are essential to ensure that diagnostic assessment can be implemented optimally in all educational units (Zhan & Fan, 2021).

Overall, the concept and objectives of diagnostic assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum emphasise the importance of comprehensively understanding the initial conditions of students. This assessment serves as the foundation for designing inclusive, adaptive, and equitable learning so that every student can develop according to their potential and needs.

Thus, the proper implementation of diagnostic assessment is expected to create a more conducive, enjoyable, and meaningful learning environment for all students. This aligns with the national education goals of fostering Pancasila-based learners who are character-driven, independent, and ready to face global challenges in the future.

Forms and Procedures of Diagnostic Assessment

The forms and procedures of diagnostic assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum are designed to provide a comprehensive overview of the initial condition of students before they begin the learning process. This assessment is an important tool for teachers in designing relevant, adaptive, and differentiated learning strategies according to the diverse needs of students (Liang, 2021).

Diagnostic assessment is divided into two main forms, namely cognitive and non-cognitive diagnostic assessment. Cognitive assessment aims to identify students' basic abilities, mastery of concepts, and academic skills in certain subjects. Meanwhile, non-cognitive assessment focuses on psychological, socio-emotional, motivational, and family aspects of students (Fan, 2021).

The instruments used in diagnostic assessment vary widely, ranging from written tests (multiple choice, short answer, essay), oral tests, observations, interviews, pre-tests, diagnostic worksheets, group discussions, to concept maps. Teachers can also utilise digital tools such as Google Forms to conduct assessments more efficiently (Bradshaw & Levy, 2019).

The diagnostic assessment procedure begins with the preparation stage. At this stage, teachers create an assessment schedule, identify assessment materials based on basic competencies, and compile questions that cover the material to be studied as well as prerequisite material from the previous class. Thorough preparation will ensure that the assessment is effective and relevant to the students' needs (Brown, 2019).

The next stage is the assessment implementation. Teachers distribute assessment instruments to all students and ask them to work independently. At this stage, teachers can also observe student behaviour and interactions, both individually and in groups, to obtain more in-depth non-cognitive data (Csapo & Molnar, 2019).

After the assessment is complete, teachers analyse the results. The data obtained is processed to map students' level of mastery of the material. Typically, students are grouped into three categories: 'fully understood', 'partially understood',

and 'not understood'. This grouping forms the basis for teachers in determining follow-up learning (Dewi, 2023).

Follow-up to diagnostic assessment is very important. Teachers can provide additional or remedial learning to students who do not yet understand the material, while students who have mastered the material can be given enrichment. Thus, learning becomes more effective and tailored to the needs of each student (Sukriadi, 2022).

Diagnostic assessment can also be carried out periodically, not only at the beginning of the school year, but also every time a new topic or material is introduced.

This helps teachers to continuously monitor students' progress and learning needs dynamically. In addition, schools can form a diagnostic assessment team to analyse the general characteristics of students. All subject teachers are encouraged to conduct diagnostic assessments because each student may have different levels of understanding and interest in each subject (Wijaya, 2024). The importance of diagnostic assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum also lies in its ability to detect learning problems that may not be apparent during the learning process. With early identification, teachers can immediately provide the necessary intervention so that there is no significant lag (Bonal & Gonzalez, 2020).

Teachers are given the freedom to adapt the form and procedure of diagnostic assessment to the school context and student characteristics. This flexibility is a hallmark of the Merdeka Curriculum, where teachers and schools can develop assessment instruments that best suit the needs of their respective educational units (Aslan, 2018).

Overall, the form and procedures of diagnostic assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum emphasise the importance of comprehensively mapping students' initial conditions. Assessment results serve as the basis for designing inclusive and equitable learning, ensuring that every student can develop according to their potential.

Benefits of Diagnostic Assessment

Diagnostic assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum provides a number of significant benefits for teachers, students, and the learning process as a whole. One of the main benefits is that it helps teachers identify the initial competencies, strengths, weaknesses, and characteristics of students before starting the learning process. This information is very important so that teachers can design learning strategies that are more targeted and tailored to the needs of each student (Vhalery, 2022).

Another benefit is that it allows teachers to adjust the material, methods, and learning approaches to the actual conditions of students in the classroom. With accurate mapping, teachers can focus their teaching on aspects that still need improvement, making the teaching and learning process more efficient and effective. This also helps avoid repetition of material that has already been mastered and ensures that each student receives appropriate learning challenges (Sari, 2022).

Diagnostic assessment also plays a role in increasing student motivation and activity during the learning process. When students feel that the material provided is appropriate to their needs and abilities, they will be more motivated to actively engage in learning. The learning environment also becomes more conducive and enjoyable, as each student feels valued and cared for individually (Suryana, 2023).

Additionally, the benefits of diagnostic assessment can be felt in the early detection of learning problems that students may face. By identifying difficulties or obstacles early on, teachers can promptly provide the necessary interventions or support, such as remedial learning, special guidance, or enrichment for students who have already mastered the material (Maryani & dkk, 2023).

Another benefit that is no less important is the creation of better collaboration between teachers, students, and parents. Diagnostic assessment data can be used as a basis for communication to design learning strategies at home, so that parental support for their children's learning process becomes more optimal and focused (Lubis, 2024).

Diagnostic assessment also helps schools in designing a curriculum that is more relevant and adaptive to the needs of students. With comprehensive data, schools can conduct regular evaluations and adjustments to the curriculum to keep it aligned with the times and future educational challenges. From a character development perspective, diagnostic assessment encourages students to recognise their own potential, interests, and learning styles. This is important for building self-confidence, independence, and a sense of responsibility towards the learning process they are undergoing (Bonal & Gonzalez, 2020).

Overall, diagnostic assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum serves as the primary foundation for achieving inclusive, personalised, and equitable learning. With proper mapping, all students' potential and needs can be accommodated, thereby optimally fulfilling the national education goal of producing a generation that is competent, adaptable, and of good character.

Challenges and Issues in Implementation

The implementation of diagnostic assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum faces various complex challenges and problems in the field. One of the main challenges is the limited time available to teachers to conduct comprehensive diagnostic assessments, especially in classes with large numbers of students. This limitation often results in assessments being carried out hastily and suboptimally. In addition to time, limited resources are also a significant obstacle. Many schools, especially at the primary level and in rural areas, do not have adequate equipment or technology to support more sophisticated and varied diagnostic assessments. These infrastructure limitations result in a lack of assessment methods that teachers can use (Wijaya, 2024).

Another problem is the diversity of student characteristics. Teachers face challenges in designing assessments that are relevant and appropriate for all students,

including those with special needs or different learning styles. This requires a deep understanding and creativity in the development of assessment instruments. Teachers' lack of understanding of the substance and purpose of diagnostic assessments is also a major obstacle. Many teachers still equate diagnostic assessment with regular pre-tests and do not understand that this assessment should be able to map individual strengths, weaknesses, and learning needs in greater depth (Sukriadi, 2022).

Teachers also often experience difficulties in developing valid and relevant questions. The process of designing questions that can reveal students' initial competencies requires time, knowledge, and special skills that not all teachers possess. As a result, the instruments used are often not targeted and the results cannot be optimally utilised. In addition, teachers also face obstacles in controlling and ensuring that students answer assessments according to their actual abilities. Some students are not honest or open in their answers, either due to anxiety, lack of motivation, or environmental influences during the assessment. This has an impact on the accuracy of diagnostic assessment results (Dewi, 2023).

Another challenge is the lack of training and socialisation related to diagnostic assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum. Many teachers have never received special training on how to compile, implement, and follow up on diagnostic assessment results effectively. This causes teachers to feel uncertain and unprepared in implementing these assessments in the classroom (Csapo & Molnar, 2019).

Problems also arise in the analysis and follow-up of assessment results. Many teachers do not understand how to analyse diagnostic assessment data and use it to design learning that is appropriate to students' needs. As a result, the data obtained does not have a significant impact on lesson planning. Minimal support from school management is also an inhibiting factor. The lack of mentoring, allocation of special time, and coordination between teachers and with parents has caused the diagnostic assessment process to be less structured and not fully in line with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum (Brown, 2019).

Measuring abstract skills, such as problem solving or reading comprehension, is also a challenge. Teachers often find it difficult to measure these aspects objectively and validly, so the assessment results do not accurately reflect students' actual abilities. Student motivation to participate in diagnostic assessments is also a concern. Some students are unenthusiastic or consider these assessments to be mere formalities, so they do not take them seriously and the results are inaccurate (Fan, 2021).

Finally, dynamic changes in education policies and standards also add to the burden on teachers in adapting to the demands of diagnostic assessment. Teachers must continuously adapt to new regulations, even though they do not yet fully understand the concepts and practices of ideal diagnostic assessment (Bradshaw & Levy, 2019).

Overall, the challenges and issues in implementing diagnostic assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum require improved understanding, training, and support for school infrastructure and management to ensure that this assessment truly becomes the foundation for adaptive, inclusive, and meaningful learning for every student.

Conclusion

Diagnostic assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum plays a central role as a foundation before teachers design their lessons. This assessment aims to identify students' strengths, weaknesses, knowledge, skills, and characteristics comprehensively, both cognitively and non-cognitively. Thus, teachers can obtain accurate data on students' initial conditions and adjust their teaching strategies to be more relevant and effective according to individual and group needs.

The implementation of diagnostic assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum enables more personalised, inclusive, and adaptive learning. Teachers are given the freedom to design and implement assessments that are appropriate to the characteristics and needs of their students, so that learning is no longer uniform but truly student-centred.

The results of diagnostic assessments form the basis for designing teaching modules, determining methods, and providing necessary interventions or enrichment, thereby supporting optimal improvement in student learning outcomes and character development. However, in practice, various challenges remain, such as limited teacher understanding, time, and supporting infrastructure.

Therefore, ongoing training, mentoring, and teacher competency development are needed to ensure that diagnostic assessment is implemented optimally in all educational institutions. In this way, diagnostic assessment can truly become the cornerstone of achieving the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum, which is to create education that is relevant, meaningful, and aligned with the potential of every student.

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