

The Importance of Updating the 2013 Curriculum with the Independent Curriculum

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Abstract

This research aims to examine the urgency of updating the 2013 Curriculum with the Merdeka Curriculum as a response to the need for a more adaptive, contextual, and future-oriented education. The method used is a qualitative approach with a library research type, where data is collected through the analysis of relevant documents and literature, and then analyzed using content analysis techniques. The research results indicate that the 2013 Curriculum has several weaknesses, including its overly centralized nature, limited teacher flexibility, and unbalanced material load. As a solution, the Merdeka Curriculum presents three main pillars: project-based learning, focus on essential materials, and a flexible curriculum structure. This curriculum provides space for teachers and students to create more meaningful, personalized, and contextual learning experiences. From this research, it shows that the Merdeka Curriculum is capable of addressing the challenges of 21st-century education, strengthening students' character and skills, and realizing a national education system that is more relevant, inclusive, and transformative.

Keywords: Importance, Education, Merdeka Curriculum, Strengthening



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INTRODUCTION

Education plays a fundamental role in shaping the character and future of a nation. One of the core elements that determines the direction and effectiveness of education is the curriculum. A curriculum is not merely a list of subjects to be taught it is a comprehensive plan that reflects the values, needs, and aspirations of a society (Dwi & Lauchia, 2024). It is constructed based on cultural heritage, current conditions, and projected future challenges. In this sense, the curriculum becomes a strategic tool to prepare students to contribute meaningfully to their communities and to become productive citizens in an ever evolving world.

In Indonesia, the 2013 Curriculum commonly referred to as Kurikulum 2013 or K-13 was introduced as a national effort to improve the quality of education and ensure students are equipped with a balanced set of competencies. It includes the development of spiritual and social attitudes, cognitive skills, and practical abilities through four core components known

as Core Competencies (Kompetensi Inti). These include spiritual attitudes, social attitudes, knowledge, and skills (Utari et al., 2024). The goal of this curriculum was to create a holistic educational approach that goes beyond rote memorization and encourages character development alongside academic excellence.

While well intentioned, the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum over the years has revealed several limitations. Many educators and institutions have found the curriculum to be rigid and too centralized, limiting schools' ability to adapt content to the local context or student diversity. Teachers often experience challenges in balancing the required components within limited timeframes, and assessments tend to be overly focused on academic results rather than practical application and creativity (Hermawan et al., 2023). In addition, the rapid advancement of technology and the increasing complexity of global challenges demand a more dynamic, student-centered approach to learning one that the 2013 Curriculum struggles to fully accommodate.

These limitations have become more evident as Indonesia faces the pressures of global competition, digital transformation, and the evolving demands of the 21st century. In particular, the shift toward Society 5.0 a concept that envisions a society where digital innovation is integrated with human-centered values requires educational reforms that nurture not only knowledge, but also creativity, collaboration, adaptability, digital literacy, and critical thinking. To respond to these demands, the Indonesian government has introduced the Independent Curriculum or Kurikulum Merdeka (Mayanti, 2023).

The Independent Curriculum is a transformative framework designed to provide greater autonomy to schools and teachers while fostering the development of students' full potential. It moves away from the one size fits-all model by encouraging personalized learning that aligns with students' interests, talents, and local circumstances. It promotes flexibility in lesson planning, interdisciplinary learning, and the use of innovative teaching methods. Unlike the 2013 Curriculum, Kurikulum Merdeka empowers educators to focus on essential competencies and create learning experiences that are relevant, meaningful, and engaging (Dwitami et al., 2025).

Furthermore, this curriculum responds directly to the educational disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Salamudin & Kurniasih, 2025). During the pandemic, the rigidity of the previous curriculum became a significant barrier to effective learning, as teachers and

students were forced to adapt quickly to online and hybrid models. The Independent Curriculum was developed as part of the "Merdeka Belajar" (Freedom to Learn) initiative, which emphasizes restoring the core humanistic values of education, it recognizes the importance of both teacher innovation and student autonomy in the learning process (Nasrudin et al., 2025).

By shifting to the Independent Curriculum, schools are given the flexibility to implement context-sensitive education, incorporating local wisdom, culture, and socioeconomic factors into their teaching strategies. Students are no longer seen merely as recipients of knowledge, but as active participants in shaping their own learning journeys, this approach prepares them not only for academic success but also for life skills that are essential in the modern world (Wafda, 2025).

Given these developments, it is essential to explore and understand the importance of updating the 2013 Curriculum with the Independent Curriculum. This transition is more than a policy change it is a necessary evolution to ensure that Indonesia's education system remains responsive, inclusive, and future-oriented. Through this article, we aim to examine the reasons behind the urgency of this shift, with the hope that this article can be a reference in further curriculum development.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research method, which means it focuses on understanding concepts and ideas based on descriptive data. In this type of research, the researcher is the main instrument for collecting and analyzing information. The goal is to explore the topic in depth rather than using numbers or statistics.

Type of research used is library research, which involves collecting information from written sources such as books, journals, articles, and other academic publications. These sources are selected because they are relevant to the main topic of the study, which is the urgency of replacing the 2013 Curriculum with the Independent Curriculum.

Data collection technique used is document analysis. This method involves reviewing and examining existing texts and written materials to find information related to the research topic. After collecting the data, the researcher uses content analysis to understand and

interpret the meaning of the information. This helps to explain why updating the curriculum is important.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The curriculum, in its simplest definition, can be understood as the primary guide or main reference in the educational process. It is a systematically and structurally designed set of plans and arrangements that encompass various essential aspects of education, including learning objectives, subject matter content, and teaching methods and strategies employed by educators to deliver material to students. In other words, the curriculum acts as the fundamental foundation that directs all learning activities within the school environment so that the entire educational process runs in an orderly and structured manner, while also achieving the educational goals that have been previously established (Aulia et al., 2025).

In Indonesia, the curriculum is not arbitrarily formulated. It is determined by the central government as part of its responsibility in managing the national education system. The government designs and establishes the foundation and structure of the national curriculum, which can later be adapted and further developed by each educational unit according to local needs, student characteristics, and the potential of the region. In its preparation, the Indonesian curriculum also considers several crucial factors, such as strengthening faith and devotion to God Almighty, practicing the values of Pancasila as the nation's ideology, students' potentials and intelligence, their interests and talents, the diversity of social and environmental conditions, and the continuous advancement of science and technology (Mar'ah & Ningsih, 2021).

In line with the times and the dynamics of society, changes and improvements to the curriculum are inevitable. The curriculum must be continuously updated to keep pace with changes in educational needs, social and cultural demands, and rapid technological development. In Indonesia, efforts to improve the curriculum have been carried out continuously as part of the national initiative to improve the quality of education. The aim is not only to help students learn better and more effectively but also to encourage all education stakeholders from teachers and students to parents, schools, and the government to collaborate and learn from each other to improve the existing education system.

One of the most notable efforts in this curriculum reform was the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum, which marked a significant milestone in the transformation of

Indonesia's national education system. The 2013 Curriculum was introduced with a renewed focus on character education. This was considered highly important, particularly at the primary school level, as childhood is seen as the golden period for character and personality development (Mutia Ulfa, 2020). By embedding character education from an early age, it was hoped that children would grow into morally upright individuals with strong personal values in adulthood.

However, the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum was not without challenges and complex issues. One of the main problems encountered was the limited understanding among teachers regarding the content and philosophical foundations of the curriculum. Many teachers struggled to fully implement the curriculum due to inadequate training or a lack of supporting infrastructure and learning resources (Laia et al., 2025). As a result, some teachers reverted to older teaching methods or blended the new curriculum with elements from the previous one (KTSP), which ultimately led to ineffective implementation that did not align with the original goals of the 2013 Curriculum.

Despite these shortcomings, the 2013 Curriculum also brought several advantages, one of which was the integrated thematic learning approach. Through this method, multiple subjects are taught under a unified theme, allowing students to better understand the interconnection between concepts and to learn in a more holistic way (Hatima et al., 2025).

As an evaluation and further development, the government introduced the Merdeka Curriculum (Independent Curriculum). This curriculum is a strategic step in addressing the shortcomings identified in the 2013 Curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum adopts a more flexible approach, granting greater autonomy to schools and teachers in designing learning experiences that are suited to the specific conditions, needs, and characteristics of their students.

Overall, the Merdeka curriculum is based on three main pillars that can be the strongest reasons for the importance of updating K-13 to an independent curriculum, each of which plays an important role in forming a more student-centered, flexible, and relevant learning experience:

1. Project Based Learning (PBL):

The first foundational pillar is project-based learning, a pedagogical approach that places students at the center of the learning process through the completion of meaningful

and contextual projects. This method is designed to simulate real-life challenges and tasks, encouraging students to apply their knowledge and skills in practical, problem-solving scenarios (Masitoh & Aziz, 2025). The core objective of this pillar is not merely academic excellence, but also the holistic development of students, particularly in terms of character building and critical thinking. By engaging in projects, students are expected to collaborate with peers, analyze real-world issues, and formulate creative solutions thus fostering independence, responsibility, teamwork, and reflective thinking (Nurhidayati et al., 2025). This approach ensures that learning becomes more relevant to students' lives, and helps them connect academic content to broader societal and personal contexts.

2. Focus on Essential Material

The second pillar emphasizes the importance of streamlining the curriculum by focusing only on the most essential and fundamental learning content. Rather than burdening students with an excessive amount of material that may not all be necessary for their development, the Merdeka Curriculum seeks to prioritize core competencies and critical concepts (Nawanti et al., 2025). This allows both teachers and students to concentrate on deep understanding rather than surface level memorization. With a reduced and refined scope, educators can allocate more time for exploration, discussion, and mastery of concepts, resulting in a more meaningful and less stressful learning experience. This approach is intended to help students absorb knowledge at a pace suited to their cognitive development, while also creating space for creativity, inquiry, and the development of other important soft skills.

3. Flexible Curriculum Structure

The third pillar revolves around the flexibility of the curriculum's structure, which gives educational institutions and educators the autonomy to adapt learning content and strategies according to the local context, specific needs of the students, and available resources. This flexibility is vital in a diverse country like Indonesia where regional and cultural differences, economic backgrounds, and educational facilities vary widely from one area to another (Alya et al., 2025). Rather than enforcing a rigid, one-size-fits-all curriculum model, the Merdeka Curriculum acknowledges these differences and empowers teachers to make professional decisions that best support their students' learning. This autonomy enables teachers to design learning experiences that are more contextualized, relevant, and responsive to their students'

strengths, challenges, and local culture, ensuring that education becomes more inclusive and equitable across different regions.

The current Minister of Education emphasizes that the Merdeka Curriculum seeks to create a fun, engaging, and non-burdensome learning experience for both teachers and students. There is no longer excessive pressure on achieving minimum passing criteria, instead the focus is on meaningful learning and developing strong character and competitive skills in students (Adib, 2025).

The Merdeka Curriculum also aligns with the educational philosophy of Ki Hadjar Dewantara, Indonesia's national education figure, who advocated for the idea of "freedom in learning". According to him education should not impose a single model on all students but should instead recognize and embrace individual differences and uniqueness (Nanda & Prihandono, 2025). A diverse curriculum is necessary for the education system to respond effectively to local potential and individual student needs.

With this approach, learning becomes more student-centered, students are treated as unique individuals with different learning needs. Teachers are expected to be able to apply different learning according to their students' abilities and teachers can provide customized learning experiences based on students' ability levels and preferred learning styles. Curriculum, assessment, and teaching strategies must be integrated to ensure that learning objectives are truly achieved.

This transition is a real manifestation of educational innovation that is very relevant to the current context, with the development of the world the education system must continue to adapt by adjusting the old curriculum is updated again, in order to prepare students to face future challenges (Ramadan et al., 2025). Therefore, curriculum innovation is not only important but also very much needed and must continue to be pursued by all parties to foster a better and more capable society in the years to come.

CONCLUSSION

The conclusion that can be drawn from the explanation provided is that the transition from the 2013 Curriculum to the Independent Curriculum is an urgent and strategic step in addressing the challenges of 21st-century education. The 2013 Curriculum is considered to still have many limitations, such as a too centralized approach, lack of flexibility, and not fully able to

accommodate the needs and diversity of students. On the other hand, the Merdeka Curriculum offers a more relevant and adaptive approach by prioritizing student-centered learning, emphasizing essential materials, and providing a flexible and contextual curriculum structure. This curriculum provides space for teachers to innovate and encourages students to become independent, creative, critical thinkers, and ready to face the challenges of the times. Thus, the Merdeka Curriculum is seen as a concrete solution in realizing a more meaningful, inclusive, and transformative education in Indonesia.

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