

Internalizing contemporary education philosophy in teachers through the merdeka curriculum

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ABSTRACT

High-quality education is essential for advancing human civilization. A good education is closely linked to the role of teachers who are capable of understanding educational philosophy, especially contemporary educational philosophy. The purpose of this study is to explore how the internalization of contemporary educational philosophy can be fostered in teachers through the Merdeka Curriculum. The research method used in this study is a literature review, based on sources from books and academic journals. The findings from the literature review indicate that the internalization of contemporary educational philosophy in teachers through the Merdeka Curriculum can be implemented through professional training and development, supportive policies and infrastructure, as well as collaboration and best practices. The implication of this study is the enhancement of teachers' pedagogical competence in teaching.



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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a crucial element in building human civilization across the world. A high level of civilization is determined by how individuals receive quality and effective education. Good education will produce high-quality outcomes. One indication of successful education is the emergence of innovative and creative outcomes. This aligns with the current era of postmodernism, characterized by a contemporary state in which human interaction is no longer limited by space and time. People across the globe now

interact through highly advanced means, thanks to rapid developments in information technology.

In this era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 and Society 5.0, humans must be able to survive and compete. Through education, teachers must be able to equip students with contemporary competencies. These competencies can only be imparted by teachers who themselves understand and can articulate the implications of contemporary educational philosophy.

Currently, many teachers in Indonesia—particularly in West Java—still lack a solid understanding of educational philosophy. Most of them focus more on teaching techniques that are not grounded in a strong philosophical foundation. The challenges of teaching in today's postmodern era can only be overcome if students receive the right kind of education.

Article 1, Paragraph (19) of the 2003 National Education Law defines curriculum as a set of plans and arrangements concerning educational goals, content, teaching materials, and the methods used to achieve specific educational objectives. Meanwhile, according to the official website www.ditptksd.kemdikbud.go.id, the Merdeka Curriculum is described as “a learning approach that offers variations in intraclass activities, with an emphasis on simplifying content so that students have more time to strengthen competencies and gain a deep understanding of concepts. Teachers are given the flexibility to choose various teaching tools, thereby allowing them to tailor learning to the needs and interests of students.”

Therefore, it is essential to internalize contemporary educational philosophy within the Merdeka Curriculum for educators. This is intended to enable teachers to manage classroom learning in a holistic manner.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The internalization of contemporary educational philosophy in teachers through Indonesia's *Merdeka Curriculum* represents a critical academic discourse that interweaves pedagogical freedom with philosophical awareness. Several studies have explored this integration from both conceptual and contextual perspectives, offering insights into the curriculum's philosophical foundations and implementation challenges.

Sukiastini (2024) analyzed the Merdeka Curriculum through both Western educational philosophies and the indigenous philosophy of Ki Hajar Dewantara. The study highlighted the integration of progressivism,

perennialism, essentialism, and constructivism in the curriculum design. While the work offers a multidimensional comparative analysis and stresses the enrichment from combining academic and local traditions, it remains largely descriptive and lacks empirical exploration of how these philosophies are internalized by teachers in practice.

Nascimento (2024), from a Brazilian context, emphasized the role of philosophy in teacher education and criticized the commodification of teacher training through distance education. The study underscores the transformative and ethical potential of philosophy in countering reductionist education policies. However, its contextual focus limits its direct applicability to Indonesia unless appropriately localized.

Hakiky et al. (2023) examined the constructivist underpinnings of the Merdeka Curriculum, affirming the alignment between student-centered learning and constructivist theory. This study successfully demonstrated the curriculum's coherence with constructivist strategies but did not engage with other philosophical frameworks, thus narrowing the philosophical scope.

Cahayani and Suastra (2024) explored John Dewey's progressivism as the foundation of self-directed learning, emphasizing creativity, project-based learning, and expressive freedom. Though offering practical insights, their research remained conceptual, leaving unexamined the internalization process at the teacher level.

Similarly, Herlambang (2023) assessed the philosophical relevance of Ki Hajar Dewantara's values within the curriculum. While emphasizing the curriculum's cultural and philosophical alignment with Indonesian identity, the study also fell short in empirically investigating how such values are operationalized and lived by educators.

Research Gap

The reviewed literature affirms the rich philosophical orientation of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, yet most studies are situated within conceptual or policy-level discussions. Few have investigated the subjective experiences of teachers in internalizing philosophical values through the curriculum. This study aims to fill this empirical gap by exploring how teachers undergo personal and professional transformation through their engagement with the philosophical tenets embedded in the *Merdeka Curriculum*.

Theoretical Framework

The philosophy of education serves a foundational role similar to that of philosophy in general: addressing fundamental questions regarding the nature, value, and purpose of education. Al-Syaibanny (in Sadulloh, 2018) asserts that educational philosophy guides pedagogical processes by critically examining the truth and reality behind educational practices. Therefore, educational philosophy functions not only theoretically but also normatively and axiomatically in shaping educational policy and practice.

Contemporary educational philosophy reflects a transformation aligned with the emergence of modern philosophical traditions. Hasan (2023) outlines that approaches such as pragmatism, existentialism, and perennialism—recognized from the 13th century onward—have significantly influenced the conceptualization of education and the role of learners as active agents in meaning-making.

Pragmatism, advanced by Peirce, James, and Dewey, posits that education must be dynamic, responsive to social and scientific change, and focused on reconstructing meaningful experience. Dewey's progressivism, derived from pragmatism, maintains that current knowledge must be continuously revised to remain relevant (Sadulloh, 2018).

Existentialism, rooted in Kierkegaard's philosophy, emphasizes individuality, freedom of choice, and personal responsibility. In education, it urges the acknowledgment of learners' uniqueness and active roles in constructing meaning, with schools not merely reproducing social orders but engaging critically in their reconstruction (Sadulloh, 2018).

These philosophical values are inherently reflected in the *Merdeka Curriculum*, which positions students as autonomous individuals with unique potentials. The curriculum promotes competence development, character formation, and personalized learning pathways (Rahayu et al., 2022).

Hasmar and Ismail (2024) also stress the need for teacher training that embeds philosophical perspectives, arguing that internalization involves more than theoretical understanding; it is a process of constructing a professional identity grounded in philosophical values.

From an organizational lens, internalization theories from Buckley (2024) and Narula and Lee (2024)—though developed in business contexts—offer insights into how external values become structurally embedded within systems. These theories can be adapted to explain how philosophical values are institutionalized in school cultures, policies, and practices.

3. METHODS

The method used in this study is a literature review method, drawing from various relevant reference sources. Research employing a literature review is a qualitative study that operates at an analytical level and adopts a perspective-based approach. Literature review research involves examining and analyzing data derived from both primary and secondary sources. This study explores primary and secondary literature related to contemporary philosophy within the Merdeka Curriculum. Primary sources were obtained from research articles published in accredited journals indexed by Sinta and Scopus. Meanwhile, secondary sources were gathered from an examination of books related to contemporary philosophy and The Merdeka Curriculum.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Educational Philosophy

According to Al-Syaibanny (as cited in Uyoh Sadulloh, 2018:72), the role of philosophy of education is similar to that of general philosophy—namely, to explore truth, essence, and issues related to the educational process. In this regard, the philosophy of education aims to examine educational concepts in depth and analyze the root causes underlying educational problems. Thus, philosophy of education can serve as a guiding framework for teachers in carrying out their educational duties with accuracy and meaning.

Irjus Indrawan et al. (2020:12) state that “through philosophical thinking, a person can become more educated and build themselves.” This suggests that teachers need to understand the philosophical foundations underlying their teaching practices. Such understanding is essential to advancing education in a meaningful direction. Teaching that lacks a proper philosophical foundation may lead to disorganized instruction and a chaotic education system. A teacher who possesses a deep understanding of the philosophy of education is more likely to avoid trial-and-error methods or blind experimentation in their teaching process.

According to Dur Brutu (2023), contemporary philosophy of education places special emphasis on the development of 21st-century skills, such as critical and creative thinking, collaboration, and technological and information literacy. These competencies are essential for students to navigate the challenges of rapid change and compete on a global scale. This paradigm implicitly encourages education to focus not only on knowledge delivery but also on developing a broad range of other skills, including problem-solving, character development, digital literacy, and humanistic values. As a result,

teachers are expected to act as facilitators who can integrate these values into learning processes aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum.

The role of educational philosophy is crucial in providing direction and conceptual grounding for those involved in the planning and implementation of educational processes (Uyoh Sadulloh, 2018:75). This view emphasizes that teachers must have a solid understanding of educational philosophy. They must be able to recognize the significance of philosophy in every educational activity they undertake. Therefore, before carrying out their educational duties, teachers need to first strengthen the philosophical foundations of their practice (Santi Hendayani, 2018).

A review of the role of educational philosophy must also consider the three core domains of educational philosophy: metaphysics (ontology), epistemology, and axiology. In education, metaphysics or ontology concerns human existence and the educational activities humans have engaged in from past to present. This is the educational reality that teachers must comprehend, as school curricula are designed based on the reality we understand. The epistemological domain of philosophy of education relates to how teachers acquire educational knowledge. Uyoh Sadulloh (2018:85) explains that there are five different approaches to acquiring knowledge that often concern educators: knowledge derived from authority, divine revelation, empirical experience, logical reasoning, and intuition.

The final domain is axiology, which is the branch of philosophy concerned with values—such as good and evil, beauty and ugliness—that are deeply relevant in the educational context. In education, the axiological aspect reflects the ultimate goals to be achieved. Therefore, axiology serves as a directional compass, policy guide, and foundational framework for educational programs and objectives. Axiology in education encompasses both ethical and aesthetic dimensions.

The Concept of Contemporary Educational Philosophy

Forward-looking education emphasizes that educational success is not solely measured by students' academic ability, but also by their readiness to respond to the dynamics of changing times and to actively contribute positive impacts to society. Modern thought in education began to develop alongside the philosophy of the Enlightenment in Europe. Thinkers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau made significant contributions in this regard.

Contemporary educational philosophy is a field of study that explores the principles, goals, and practices of education within the context of the modern

world. It includes a variety of perspectives and approaches aimed at addressing current and future educational challenges.

Adeel Hasan (on the LMS of the University of Sargodha, 2023) stated: “Educational philosophies are generally divided into two main groups: traditional (ancient) philosophies and modern (contemporary) philosophies. Ancient philosophies refer to early schools of thought that emerged before the Common Era, such as Plato's Idealism, Aristotle's Realism, Rousseau's Naturalism, and others.” This means that philosophy is divided into two categories: ancient educational philosophy and contemporary educational philosophy. Furthermore, Hasan added: “In contrast, contemporary philosophies are more recent in origin, having been developed and recognized from around the 13th century onward. Examples include Dewey's Pragmatism, Sartre's Existentialism, and Hardler's Perennialism, among others—each representing key strands of modern educational thought.” This statement explains that contemporary educational philosophy is a newer form of philosophy supported by thinkers from the 13th century onward, such as Dewey's Pragmatism, Sartre's Existentialism, and Hardler's Perennialism. These are examples of contemporary educational philosophies. Others include Essentialism, Progressivism, Humanism, and Reconstructionism. However, four major streams of philosophy have had a direct influence on contemporary education: Pragmatism, Progressivism, Reconstructionism, and Existentialism.

Pragmatist Philosophy of Education

The term pragmatism originates from the word “pragma,” which means “practice” or “I act.” This definition suggests that the meaning of anything is determined by its relation to action or experience. Pragmatist philosophy is also commonly referred to as instrumentalism or experimentalism.

Pragmatism is often considered a philosophy rooted in America. However, its core intellectual roots lie in the tradition of British empiricism, which holds that human knowledge is derived from experience. Key pioneers of pragmatism in America include Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), William James (1842–1910), and John Dewey (1859–1952). This philosophy views continuous change as a fundamental reality. Thus, the essence of pragmatism is change. Values are seen as relative, and intelligence must be applied critically.

Nurcholis (2013) stated that “the pragmatist perspective makes a concrete contribution to the field of education, as reflected through its various implications. First, in terms of educational goals, pragmatism encourages experiences that lead to new discoveries—both in social life and personal

development. Second, in terms of curriculum, pragmatism emphasizes the importance of tested and flexible experiences. Students' interests and needs, which they bring into the school environment, become crucial factors in shaping the curriculum."

Based on Nurcholis' analysis, it can be concluded that teachers must thoroughly understand the philosophy of pragmatism. They should also implement it in the learning process, as it significantly influences the formulation of learning objectives and curriculum development.

Progressivism Philosophy of Education

Uyoh Sadulloh (2018:142) stated that "According to the philosophy of progressivism, knowledge considered true today may become irrelevant or no longer valid in the future." Based on this reasoning, it is important for teachers to recognize that one of the most strategic ways to prepare students for future challenges is through learning that emphasizes the development of problem-solving skills. This process can be nurtured through continuous self-analysis and reflection, enabling students to identify and assess values appropriate to the situations they encounter.

The philosophy of progressive education emphasizes that every individual possesses unique characteristics; therefore, education should be responsive to the individual needs of each student by creating a conducive learning environment. In practice, progressivism highlights the importance of active learning, engagement in real-life experiences, and character development as an integral part of the educational process (Ekopramudiya Laksana, 2023; Henny Indreswari, 2023; Yuliati Khotifah, 2023; Bayu Koen Anggoro, 2023; Laksono Budiarto, 2023; Betty Masruroh, 2023:85). From a progressivist perspective, students are believed to understand subject matter more effectively when they are directly involved in the learning experience (Ibrahim, 2018; Ruslan, 2018; Sumini, Fuadi, & Fauziati, 2022).

Based on the findings of the aforementioned researchers, it is evident that progressivist philosophy can be applied in educational practice with the aim of equipping students to overcome life's challenges—both now and in the future. Therefore, in implementing this approach, teachers must be able to teach effective problem-solving techniques so that students can survive and thrive.

Reconstructionist Philosophy of Education

According to Caroline Pratt (1948), as cited in Uyoh Sadulloh (2018:166), "Schools are not merely responsible for conveying knowledge about existing

social structures; they must also actively participate in efforts to reconstruct them.” This means that schools should serve as a space for students’ social reconstruction, rather than requiring students to conform to the existing school environment.

Reconstructionism emerged as an extension of the progressivist school of thought, driven by the belief that progressivism tended to focus only on current social issues. The movement was pioneered by George S. Counts in the 1930s, with the central idea of shaping a new, more just and humane social order.

According to George S. Counts, as quoted by Uyoh Sadulloh (2018:168), schools can play a significant role if they are capable of becoming centers for the comprehensive development of a new society, including efforts to eliminate poverty, war-related conflicts, and group divisions. In this way, schools are expected to help eradicate social inequality, thus fostering prosperity and justice in society.

Power (1982), as cited in Uyoh Sadulloh (2018:171), outlined the implications of reconstructionist philosophy in education as follows: 1) Theme: Education is a social endeavor. 2) Educational Goals: The transmission of culture, especially within pluralistic societies. 3) Curriculum: It should reflect culture but must not be dominated by a single majority. 4) Student Role: Students bring their cultural backgrounds to school and are expected to respect one another. 5) Method: Learning by doing. 6) Teacher’s Role: Teachers must demonstrate sincerity and respect toward all cultures.

Existentialism Philosophy of Education

The existentialist school of thought is rooted in the ideas of Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), whose central concern was the fundamental question of the nature and meaning of human existence. Other prominent existentialist figures include Martin Buber, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, Paul Tillich, and others.

Existentialism is a branch of philosophy that holds that all human experiences and phenomena stem from human existence itself. Its primary focus lies in how individuals realize their own existence. From the existentialist perspective, everything outside the human self—including objects and the physical world—holds no meaning unless it serves as a means or purpose in human life. In other words, material things only possess value when they have significance for human existence.

Existentialism plays an important role in developing and maintaining students' psychological well-being. According to research by Cahyaning Wulan and Suryo Ediyono (2023), “in existential psychology, there is a concept known as being-in-the-world, which refers to the view that a human being is a unified whole composed of the individual and their environment, and this unity can be observed in everyday life. Each person possesses existence and the potential to be fully present in the world, where subjectivity, self-identity, and the reality of the world are integrated. At the beginning of life, a person undergoes a phase of alienation—being born into a world they do not yet know—until they eventually grow into a complete individual through social relationships with others.”

Existentialism also plays a significant role in individual health—particularly for students—who live within a broader community. Maintaining the balance of this community requires mental well-being. This idea aligns with findings by Michelle Aurelia Wang (2023) and Suryo Ediyono (2023), who highlight the importance of maintaining a balance between authenticity and the tendency to conform. Such balance is essential to allow individuals to preserve their personal identity without disrupting harmony in their social environment.

The Merdeka Curriculum

The *Merdeka Curriculum* is a new curriculum launched by the Indonesian government in the 2020s. It emerged in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, during which students in Indonesia experienced significant learning loss. To address this, the Minister of Education, Nadiem Anwar Makarim, introduced a curriculum focused on essential content—meaning the learning materials are simplified and centered around core concepts.

The *Merdeka Curriculum* emphasizes the development of students' individual potential, tailored to their unique abilities and characteristics (Rahayu, Rosita, Rahayuningsih, Hernawan, & Prihantini, 2022). Therefore, teaching in this curriculum is implemented through differentiated instruction. The aim is to enable students to learn optimally while accommodating their interests and learning preferences.

In the *Merdeka Curriculum*, the teacher holds a central role. This curriculum allows teachers to independently design the sequence of learning objectives. Additionally, active learning methods can be implemented by teachers in various ways. A key feature of the curriculum is the *Strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile*, which aims to help students internalize and embody the values of Pancasila while fostering creativity to meet future

challenges. To achieve this, teachers must understand contemporary education—by first understanding contemporary educational philosophy.

According to Syarifudin (2023), “The Ministry of Education and Culture’s regulations indicate that a paradigm shift is part of the macro design of *Merdeka Belajar*, as well as in curriculum and instruction.” This statement implies that the teacher’s paradigm is crucial in implementing the *Merdeka Curriculum*. In other words, if teachers do not understand contemporary educational philosophy, they will not be able to apply or carry out the *Merdeka Curriculum* effectively.

Internalizing Contemporary Educational Philosophy in The Teaching Profession

According to the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language), *internalization* refers to the process by which an individual accepts and adopts external ideas or values as part of their personal belief system. Based on this definition, the internalization of contemporary educational philosophy in teachers can be understood as the embedding of philosophical ideas into the personal framework of a teacher, specifically those related to contemporary educational thought.

In the implementation of teaching and learning in schools, it is essential that teachers understand contemporary educational philosophy. This is because the expected outcomes of education will inevitably face the increasingly intense challenges of globalization in the 21st century. A study conducted by Arni Sastrawati Hasmar, A.R. (2024), and Ismail (2024) on the integration of educational philosophy into the learning process emphasizes the importance of training programs for teachers. These programs aim to equip teachers with both the understanding and practical skills necessary to apply philosophical approaches within their instructional practices.

Based on the recommendations by Arni and Ismail, the internalization of contemporary educational philosophy among teachers can also be supported through the following strategies:

- 1) Professional training and development: Ongoing training for teachers on the principles of contemporary education and how to implement them through the *Merdeka Curriculum* is essential.
- 2) Policy and infrastructure support: Government support and the provision of adequate infrastructure are key factors in the successful internalization of contemporary educational philosophy.

- 3) Collaboration and best practices: Encouraging collaboration among teachers through learning communities and the sharing of best practices can accelerate the internalization process.

5. CONCLUSION

Instilling contemporary educational philosophy in teachers through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is a highly essential endeavor. It provides teachers with opportunities to adopt more reflective and critical teaching approaches. Contemporary educational philosophy teaches that education is not merely a process of transmitting knowledge, but also a means of transformation that includes character formation, the reinforcement of ethical values, and the development of students' critical thinking abilities. By understanding and applying these principles, teachers can create a more responsive and inclusive learning environment—one that aligns with the unique needs and potentials of each student—making the learning process more relevant and meaningful.

Furthermore, internalizing this philosophy enables teachers to face the challenges and changes of the times with greater adaptability and innovation. The Merdeka Curriculum offers teachers flexibility in designing contextualized instruction that focuses on students' holistic development. Teachers who are grounded in contemporary educational philosophy are more effective in motivating students, fostering 21st-century skills, and cultivating open-minded and critical thinking. Therefore, education serves as a crucial medium in shaping a younger generation that not only possesses academic intelligence but also strong character and the capability to meet global challenges and change.

The internalization of contemporary educational philosophy in teachers through the Merdeka Curriculum can be implemented through teacher training, supportive policies and infrastructure, as well as collaboration and dissemination of best practices. With these values deeply embedded in teachers, the direction of educational implementation is expected to align with its ideal goals, ultimately producing excellent learners who are ready to compete and thrive in the 21st-century global landscape.

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