

# The Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum: Impact on Students in Elementary Schools

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## Abstract

This study is based on the argument that changes in the curriculum bring both positive and negative impacts on students. The researcher aims to explore the effects experienced by primary school students. This research is a literature study using the Systematic Review (SR) method, also known as Systematic Literature Review (SLR), which is a systematic technique to collect, critically evaluate, integrate, and synthesize findings from various studies on a particular subject or research question. A total of 200 articles were screened, and 6 relevant articles were analyzed. Based on the analysis of the six reviewed journals, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in primary schools has diverse impacts on students. The positive impacts are reflected in increased motivation to learn, enthusiasm in participating in learning activities, and the development of student character through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project. This curriculum provides students with space to freely and enjoyably explore their interests and potentials, as well as encourages more varied and student-centered learning. However, on the other hand, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum also presents several challenges. Some of the negative impacts found include misuse of technology due to lack of supervision, students' unpreparedness to adapt to the new system, and disparities in mastery of materials among students. Moreover, the effectiveness of the Minimum Competency Assessment (AKM) and Character Survey is still suboptimal in fully depicting students' abilities, and the policy of automatic grade promotion raises concerns about lowering academic achievement standards.

## 1. Introduction

Education is one of the most important aspects of a country that requires special attention because the nation's future depends on the quality of its educated generation (Pramana et al., 2021). The government can consistently improve the quality of education by revising the curriculum, as the curriculum must follow the development of the times, and education cannot be implemented without a curriculum (Husna & Rigianti, 2023). The progress of a nation can be assessed by the success of its education, while the success of education itself depends on the curriculum used, since the curriculum functions as a plan, implementation guideline, and evaluation material for learning. However, the rapid development of the curriculum in Indonesia requires teachers to always keep up with the regulations that have been implemented. Teachers must thoroughly study the new curriculum and its components if they want to apply it effectively to achieve the desired goals. Likewise, students must be able to adapt to the learning system in the latest curriculum. This is evident in the current transition from the 2013 curriculum to the Independent Curriculum, which shows significant differences and certainly impacts both teachers and students (Mawati & Arifudin, 2023).

According to the Indonesian Dictionary published by the National Department of Education, the curriculum is defined as a set of subjects taught in educational institutions or a set of subjects related to specific fields of expertise. The curriculum can be defined as a plan to support learning. It consists of class assessments, a collection of teacher guidelines, lists of materials used at each grade level, and sets of materials for each grade. The curriculum is a plan to achieve educational goals. Everything planned in a curriculum is based on the objectives to be attained. Based on the definitions above, the curriculum is a set of learning tools or plans serving as a teacher's guide to achieve learning objectives (Suratno et al., 2022). In Indonesia, the curriculum is frequently revised or replaced; Indonesia has undergone eleven curriculum changes since 1947, starting with a very simple curriculum and continuing to the current implementation of the Independent Curriculum. These changes impact the

quality of education in Indonesia, and curriculum improvements are carried out to produce more effective results (Azzahra, 2023).

Curriculum updates are driven by many reasons. Primarily, the curriculum is expected to achieve educational goals. Due to the rapid advancement of information and the progressing era, as well as the swift development of technology, the curriculum is expected to keep pace with these changes to avoid delays in the information acquired. The ongoing curriculum changes in Indonesia over the years serve as valuable lessons for the development of an optimal curriculum that aligns with current technological progress and advancements (Andriani, 2020). The Independent Curriculum is one of Indonesia's educational policies aimed at providing flexibility in learning while emphasizing the development of students' competencies and character. The Independent Curriculum focuses on understanding the use of digital technology. Character education emphasized in this curriculum is not a new concept; character education has long been present but was not centered on a specific perspective such as the Pancasila character. Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) was designed to shift the learning concept from teacher-centered to a system focused on the student (Sucipto et al., 2024).

The Merdeka Curriculum introduces several changes, one of which is the elimination of the terms "Core Competencies" and "Basic Competencies" as benchmarks for student outcomes after completing the learning process. Instead, the curriculum adopts Learning Outcomes (Capaian Pembelajaran or CP), which consist of a set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes developed through a continuous process to form holistic competencies (Nurchayono & Putra, 2022). Another change in the Merdeka Curriculum is the renaming of the Lesson Plan to the Teaching Module. A teaching module is a collection of tools or media, methods, instructions, and guidelines systematically and attractively designed to implement the learning objectives derived from the learning outcomes. At the primary school level, the Merdeka Curriculum adopts a more flexible approach, allowing students to learn according to their interests and talents, thereby increasing motivation and engagement in the learning process.

The impact of curriculum reform can be attributed to various causes, such as the election of a new president, which often brings changes across multiple sectors including social, political, economic, ideological, and educational systems. One tangible outcome of such reform is the emergence of the Merdeka Curriculum, which has brought positive impacts such as increased learning enthusiasm, student independence, and flexibility in student-centered learning. This aligns with the research by (Pujiningsih et al., 2024), which reveals that the Merdeka Curriculum encourages students to be more active and independent in learning, shifting the focus beyond merely cognitive outcomes by allowing students to develop their interests and potential. However, on the other hand, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum also presents challenges, such as unequal access to educational facilities between schools, a lack of preparedness among teachers and students to adapt to the new system, and the potential misuse of technology if not properly supervised. As stated by (Annur and Mustika., 2024), the use of technology in learning without proper oversight may lead students to misuse it. Despite these challenges, it is hoped that the positive impacts of the new curriculum will further enhance the quality of education in Indonesia. Therefore, all education stakeholders must be capable of adapting to various changes.

To date, research related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has predominantly focused on the perspectives of teachers or broader educational policy. There remains a limited number of studies that specifically explore its impact on students, particularly within the three essential learning domains: cognitive (knowledge and understanding), affective (attitudes and values), and psychomotor (practical skills). In fact, the success of a curriculum greatly depends on the extent to which these domains are developed within students. Based on this gap, the present study aims to identify and analyze the impact of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation on elementary school students, viewed through cognitive, affective, and psychomotor lenses. This includes exploring students' perceptions of changes in the learning approach under the Merdeka Curriculum, such as the implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile reinforcement projects. The study also seeks to provide an overview of the challenges and opportunities encountered by students during the curriculum transition, offering valuable input for future educational policy formulation. Thus, the findings are expected to serve as a foundational consideration for improving educational policy moving forward.

## 2. Method

This research is a literature study using the Systematic Review (SR) method, also known as Systematic Literature Review (SLR) (Carrera-Rivera et al., 2022). It is a systematic technique for collecting, critically examining, integrating, and gathering findings from various studies on a subject or research question. The study begins by searching for articles relevant to the research topic. A systematic review is a method for reviewing a specific issue by identifying, evaluating, and selecting specific problems and posing questions that are clearly addressed based on established criteria (Norlita et al., 2023). This is a continuation of previous high-quality research that is relevant to the research question. The SLR method consists of several stages, including:

First, the question is: what is the impact of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum on students in elementary schools.

Second, the data population in this study consists of journals focused on the impact of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum on students in elementary schools. The literature search begins by using data available on Google Scholar, obtained through the Publish or Perish application. The keywords used are the impact of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools, with articles limited to those published between 2020 and 2025.

Third, after obtaining various articles, the researcher found 200 articles related to the theme of the impact of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools through the Google Scholar database search. Then, 10 articles that were related to the research topic were selected from the collected articles. These articles were studied in detail, and those relevant to the material on character education were included. Of the 10 articles, 6 were thoroughly reviewed and selected as fitting the theme of the discussion, while 190 articles were excluded from the discussion or search. The 6 articles were found to align closely with the theme of the research, and these will be presented in the discussion and conclusion sections. Below is a flowchart of the exclusion and inclusion process at the Systematic Review stage (n: number of articles)

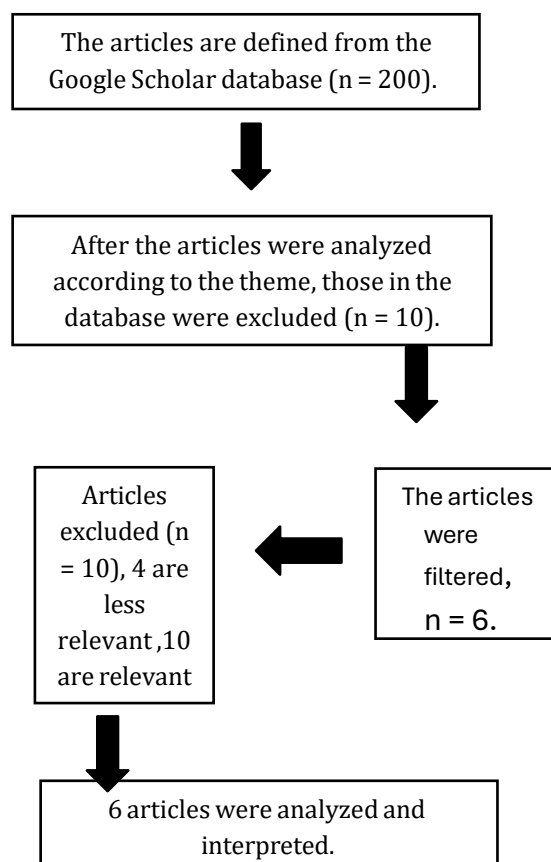


Figure 1. Flowchart related to the steps of systematic literature review.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The shift to the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools has had a significant impact on the development of students, both academically and non-academically. The Merdeka Curriculum introduces a more flexible approach that focuses on the individual learning needs of students, aiming to foster independence, creativity, and the development of the Pancasila Student Profile. This has led to changes in how students learn, where they are more actively involved in the learning process and given space to explore their potential. Additionally, students have begun to show improvements in critical thinking skills and communication abilities. However, this transition process also presents both positive and negative impacts. These impacts vary depending on the context of the school environment and the support available. Based on the analysis of seven journal articles that meet the inclusion criteria, the summary of the research on the impact of the Merdeka Curriculum transition on elementary students is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Research Results on the Impact of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum on Elementary School Students**

Researcher and Year of Research	Journal	Findings
Marsaa Alyaa Aufaa Adinda, Eka Titi Andaryani (2023).	Pedagogika: Journal of Educational Sciences: The Impact of National Education Transformation from the 2013 Curriculum to the <i>Merdeka Curriculum</i> : A Literature Review	The results of the research indicate that the implementation of the <i>Merdeka Curriculum</i> has a significant positive impact on students. They show greater enthusiasm and excitement in learning, especially during face-to-face lessons with the teacher. The learning process also feels more enjoyable because it is presented with a variety of different media. In addition, students participate in the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project, such as waste management activities. Through this project, students are able to learn more effectively while developing positive character traits, such as responsibility toward the environment and critical thinking skills (Aufaa & Andaryani, 2023).
Reza Annur, Mustika (2024).	Afrilis Dea Indonesian Research Journal on Education: Analysis of the impact of the Shift from the 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum on the Learning Process in Elementary Schools	The results of the research conducted at SDN 008 Pulau Rambai show both positive and negative impacts. The positive impacts include teachers and students being encouraged to actively use technology to create a more enjoyable learning atmosphere. Students find it easier to understand the material being taught, and parents are now more involved in the learning activities. On the other hand, the negative impact is that the use of technology in learning without proper supervision could lead to students misusing technology (Annur & Mustika, 2024).
Maskur Azzahra (2023).	Journal of Teacher Education and Educational Sciences: The Impact of Curriculum Changes on Elementary School Students	The results of the research show that the impacts felt by students in the implementation of the <i>Merdeka Curriculum</i> are as follows: 1. <b>Enjoyable Learning:</b> Students experience more enjoyable learning due to a more varied and interactive approach. In the <i>Merdeka Curriculum</i> , students are given the freedom to explore various learning materials in an engaging way that suits their interests. 2. <b>High Motivation during Face-to-Face Learning:</b> Although online learning is an option in certain situations, students feel more enthusiastic and motivated during face-to-face interactions with teachers and classmates. This direct interaction provides a livelier learning atmosphere. 3. <b>Strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile Project:</b>

		Projects such as waste management have a positive impact on students. They learn about the values of Pancasila through real-life activities that help develop their character and skills. 4. <b>Joy during the Pandemic:</b> <i>Merdeka Belajar</i> brings joy and renewed enthusiasm for learning to students, even during the ongoing pandemic. The more flexible and interactive approach allows students to explore learning in a more positive way. The impact of <i>Merdeka Belajar</i> in this curriculum has brought joy to students, especially during the pandemic period (Azzahra., 2023).
Putri Rahmadhani, Dina Widya, Merika Setiawati (2022).	Journal of Education and Social Sciences (JUPEIS): The Impact of the Transition from the 2013 Curriculum to the Independent Learning Curriculum on Student Learning Interest	Based on the research findings, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has both positive and negative impacts. The positive impact is that students in the learning process can follow the development of the times, which is becoming more advanced, and is supported by the school principal, teachers, instructors, and even the institution itself. On the other hand, the negative impact is that the quality of education can decline, and the rapid development of the curriculum creates new issues, such as the decline in student achievement. This happens because students are unable to adapt to the learning system in the newly implemented curriculum or the changes in the curriculum (Rahmadhani dkk., 2022).
Putri Rahmadhani, Dina Widya, Merika Setiawati (2022).	Journal of Education and Social Sciences (JUPEIS): The Impact of the Transition from the 2013 Curriculum to the Independent Learning Curriculum on Student Learning Interest	Based on the research findings, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has both positive and negative impacts. The positive impact is that students in the learning process can follow the development of the times, which is becoming more advanced, and is supported by the school principal, teachers, instructors, and even the institution itself. On the other hand, the negative impact is that the quality of education can decline, and the rapid development of the curriculum creates new issues, such as the decline in student achievement. This happens because students are unable to adapt to the learning system in the newly implemented curriculum or the changes in the curriculum (Rahmadhani dkk., 2022).
Yuliana Pujiningsih, Isnaini Wahyuningrum, Arum Emilia Salikha, Maulida Nurkhaliza, Afifah Fatin Pratiwi, Sri Suwartini (2024)	Journal of Social Education and Counseling: The Impact of the Merdeka Curriculum on the Learning Quality of Students in Elementary Schools	The results of the study show that the Merdeka curriculum facilitates students in developing their interests and potentials. This is because the Merdeka curriculum encourages students to be more active and independent in learning, and not solely focused on cognitive aspects. In this curriculum, students have the opportunity to develop both their interests and potentials (Pujiningsih dkk., 2024).
Adinda Bestari, Aulia Adrias, Adrias, Aissy Putri Zulkarnaini (2025)	Journal of Elementary Education (PENDAS): The Negative Impact of the Implementation of	The results of the study indicate that the effectiveness of the Minimum Competency Assessment and Character Survey (Askomi Suka), which is implemented in the Merdeka Curriculum, has not been optimal in measuring students' competencies comprehensively. There is a disparity in material mastery due to the policy of flexibility in learning, which consequently impacts the promotion

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the Merdeka Curriculum on the Learning Process of Elementary School Students	process, lowering academic standards and potential (Bestari dkk., 2025).
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Four out of the six analyzed articles indicated a significant increase in students' learning motivation. This suggests that the majority of interventions or instructional strategies examined in these studies had a positive impact on students' intrinsic motivation to learn. This increase in motivation is reflected in various aspects, such as greater active participation in learning activities, heightened curiosity toward the subject matter, and stronger efforts to achieve better academic performance. These findings support the assumption that appropriate teaching approaches can be key to optimizing student motivation and, ultimately, improving learning outcomes.

### 3.1. Impact of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Elementary Schools on Students

Findings from six reviewed journals indicate that the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka has had a notably positive impact on primary school students, particularly in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. This curriculum has proven to create a more enjoyable and meaningful learning experience for students. In the cognitive domain, one of the key findings is the improvement in students' academic achievement. This is supported by research conducted by (Herianty & Dwijayanti., 2024), which revealed a statistically significant difference between students' pretest and posttest results ( $p < 0.05$ ). The improvement in learning outcomes suggests that the instructional approaches employed in the Kurikulum Merdeka are more effective in enhancing content mastery. The use of varied and contextual learning strategies such as digital media, group discussions, and problem-based projects provides positive stimulation for students' reasoning skills and understanding.

In the affective domain, (Krzywinski & Altman., 2013) reported that approximately 75% of students felt more motivated and enthusiastic about learning, particularly in face-to-face settings. A more flexible and interactive classroom environment encouraged students to be more active, confident, and engaged in the learning process. This aligns with the learning approach that emphasizes students' needs and interests. Activities such as the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (Project to Strengthen the Profile of Pancasila Students) also significantly contribute to the development of character values such as responsibility, empathy, and cooperation. As stated by (Melati., 2023), this curriculum is designed to shape learners with holistic character development based on the six dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile, including religiosity, collaboration, and critical thinking. These findings indicate that the curriculum does not only focus on academic achievement but also on personality development and national values.

In the psychomotor domain, the implementation of project-based learning and differentiated instruction encourages students to be more physically active and engaged in skill development. Students are not merely passive recipients of information, but active participants in the learning process, as seen in activities such as waste management and other hands-on skill practices. This approach not only provides room for exploration but also strengthens collaboration and problem-solving abilities, which are essential components of 21st-century skills. One of the significant innovations of the Kurikulum Merdeka is the application of differentiated learning, which allows each student to learn according to their individual abilities and learning styles. This has a positive impact on students who may have previously been marginalized in a one-size-fits-all learning system, while also promoting inclusivity in education. With instruction tailored to individual needs, students feel more valued and engaged in the learning process. Furthermore, the Kurikulum Merdeka approach also indirectly facilitates the development of soft skills such as collaboration, effective communication, creativity, and self-management. These soft skills are crucial for navigating the

challenges of the modern world and are essential elements within the framework of transformative education.

However, despite the various positive impacts, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum also has negative effects that need attention. One of these is the potential misuse of technology by students if not properly supervised by teachers or parents. Unstructured use of technology can disrupt concentration and open opportunities for students to access content that is not aligned with the learning objectives. Additionally, the rapid curriculum changes may cause confusion and adaptation difficulties for both teachers and students. This was also highlighted by (Mooy & Nawangsari., 2024) in their research, which found that students were unprepared for learning under the Merdeka Curriculum. Students reported feeling bored and monotonous in certain subjects because only traditional learning media, such as chalkboards and printed books, were used. This lack of preparedness for the changes could lead to a decline in education quality and student achievement, especially if they are unable to adapt to the new learning system. The effectiveness of the Minimum Competency Assessment (AKM) and the Character Survey (Askomi Suka) is also considered suboptimal in measuring students' overall competencies, as these assessments are unable to capture the full range of student abilities across various contexts. On the other hand, while the flexibility in the Merdeka Curriculum allows freedom, it also creates disparities in subject mastery among students, particularly in schools with limited facilities and resources.

These disparities pose a serious challenge in the effort to create educational equity. Schools in remote areas or those with limited infrastructure often struggle to implement the Merdeka Curriculum approach to its fullest extent. This raises concerns about the potential gap in educational quality between regions. Without appropriate policy intervention, the goal of educational equity could potentially remain unmet. Furthermore, teachers' preparedness to carry out their role as facilitators of active learning is still inconsistent, which means the implementation of this curriculum may lack uniformity. Additionally, the policy of automatic grade promotion may lower academic standards, as students who have not achieved the required competencies are still promoted without adequate remedial learning processes.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools brings two complementary impacts on students: significant benefits for the development of character and learning motivation, as well as challenges that must be addressed in order for its implementation to be optimal. Continuous evaluation and improvement must be part of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation to ensure that all students, regardless of their background, receive quality learning experiences. Thus, synergy between educators, parents, and policymakers is needed to oversee the application of this curriculum, ensuring that the holistic educational goals focused on character development are achieved equitably across all educational institutions.

### **3.2. Conclusion**

Based on the analysis of six reviewed journals, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Curriculum) in primary schools has had diverse impacts on students. The positive effects include increased learning motivation, greater enjoyment in learning activities, and the development of students' character through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project. This curriculum provides students with more freedom and enjoyment in exploring their interests and potential, while also promoting more varied and student-centered learning experiences. However, on the other hand, the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka also presents several challenges. Negative impacts identified include the misuse of technology due to lack of supervision, students' unpreparedness in adapting to the new system, and disparities in subject mastery among students. Moreover, the effectiveness of the Minimum Competency Assessment (AKM) and the Character Survey has yet to fully capture students' abilities in a comprehensive manner. The policy of automatic grade promotion is also a concern, as it may lower academic achievement standards. Therefore, continuous support and evaluation from all relevant stakeholders are essential to ensure that the Kurikulum Merdeka is implemented more effectively, equitably, and sustainably in order to improve the quality of education in Indonesia. Future research is expected to employ more robust and complex research methods to support more concrete and efficient data validation. As this study is limited to a literature review, it may not fully represent the actual conditions in the field. Accordingly, field studies at various levels of primary education are recommended to validate the findings and provide a more comprehensive picture.

## Author Contributions

Refa Enystianingsih made substantial contributions to the conceptualization of the research, data curation and management, formal analysis, and investigative processes. She was also responsible for drafting the initial manuscript and actively participated in the review and final editing stages.

Candra Utama contributed through overall supervision of the study and provided validation to ensure the accuracy and feasibility of the research findings.

All authors have read, reviewed, and approved the final version of the manuscript submitted for dissemination in this academic forum.

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The authors declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest that could have influenced the objectivity of the research process, the writing of the manuscript, or the decision to publish this article in the proceedings of the international seminar.

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