



## Implementation of Curriculum Merdeka in Early Childhood Education (PAUD):

### Literature Study on Opportunities and Obstacles

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**Abstract:** This study aims to examine the opportunities and challenges in implementing the *Merdeka Curriculum* at the Early Childhood Education (PAUD) level through a literature review. The *Merdeka Curriculum* was introduced as a response to the need for a more flexible, contextual, and child-centered education system. Using a descriptive qualitative approach based on library research, this study analyzes various relevant sources such as scientific journals, reference books, and educational policy documents published between 2019 and 2024. The findings reveal that the *Merdeka Curriculum* presents significant opportunities through flexible learning, character development via the *Pancasila Student Profile Projects*, a holistic play-based learning approach, and empowering teachers in lesson planning. However, field implementation faces challenges, including uneven teacher readiness, limited facilities and infrastructure, overlapping curriculum understanding, and insufficient parental involvement. Therefore, a comprehensive strategy is needed through continuous teacher training, adequate provision of learning resources, and strengthened collaboration between schools, parents, and communities. This study is expected to serve as a reference to optimize the implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum* at the PAUD level, promoting a more inclusive and transformative early childhood education.

**Keywords:** Merdeka Curriculum, Early Childhood Education, literature review, opportunities, challenges

### Introduction

Early Childhood Education (PAUD) represents a critical initial phase in a child's development process, encompassing cognitive, socio-emotional, moral, and physical aspects. At this stage, children are in their golden age, a period crucial to determining the success of learning in subsequent educational stages. Therefore, the curriculum used in PAUD must accommodate children's comprehensive developmental needs and be appropriate for their age characteristics. As part of the national education system transformation, the Indonesian government launched the *Merdeka Curriculum* in response to the dynamic changes of the times and the need for more flexible, adaptive, and relevant education.

The *Merdeka Curriculum* offers a new paradigm in the learning process, including for the PAUD level. A key feature of this curriculum is its approach to providing learning freedom for students and flexibility for educators in designing learning activities that align with children's interests, talents, and needs. At the PAUD level, the *Merdeka Curriculum* emphasizes the importance of holistic and contextual learning, based on direct experiences, and integrates projects that strengthen the *Pancasila Student Profile*. Through these projects, children are introduced to national and moral values from an early age while being trained in critical thinking, collaboration, and empathy—all conducted through playful, meaningful learning approaches appropriate for their developmental stages. However, despite the great potential offered by the *Merdeka Curriculum*, challenges persist in its implementation, especially within PAUD settings. These challenges include limited teacher understanding of the new curriculum, insufficient supporting resources and facilities, and a lack of parental involvement in the learning process. Therefore, an in-depth



literature review is essential to explore the opportunities and barriers encountered during the implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum* at the PAUD level.

This study is conducted through a literature review by examining various sources such as scientific journals, reference books, educational policies, and relevant research reports. The objective is to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how the *Merdeka Curriculum* is implemented in PAUD, the opportunities that can be maximized, and the obstacles that need to be addressed. Consequently, the study results are expected to serve as a reference for educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders in improving the quality of early childhood education in Indonesia.

## Literature Study

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using library research methods. Library research was selected as the main objective of this study is to explore and analyze various written information sources relevant to the implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum* at the Early Childhood Education (PAUD) level, particularly concerning the emerging opportunities and obstacles.

### 1. Data Sources

The data in this study were obtained from secondary sources, including:

- a) National scientific journals discussing the *Merdeka Curriculum* and its implementation in PAUD,
- b) Reference books and educational literature relevant to curriculum theory, PAUD, and education policies,
- c) Policy documents such as Ministerial Regulations, *Merdeka Curriculum* Implementation Guides, and PAUD teacher training modules,
- d) Popular scientific articles and research reports from educational institutions and government agencies.

### 2. The selection criteria for the sources were:

- a) Published between 2019–2024, to ensure relevance to the *Merdeka Curriculum* policy that was widely implemented starting in 2022,
- b) Written in Indonesian by credible authors or institutions, such as the Ministry of Education, BRIN, or reputable universities,
- c) Directly or indirectly discussing the implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum* in PAUD, including project-based learning, teacher roles, character development, and parental participation.

### 3. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was carried out by:

- a) Searching online databases such as the National Library, Garuda, and Google Scholar,
- b) Selecting documents and articles based on thematic relevance, publication year, and source credibility,
- c) Initial coding of relevant content for further analysis.

### 4. Data Analysis Techniques



Collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following these steps:

- a) Reading and comprehending the documents thoroughly to identify content related to the implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum* in PAUD,
- b) Categorizing (coding) the information into major themes such as opportunities, obstacles, teacher readiness, facilities, and parental participation,
- c) Drawing conclusions based on the frequency and depth of the discussion in the sources,
- d) Synthesizing findings to produce a comprehensive picture of the actual conditions based on the literature review.

Through this approach, the study aims to provide a valid and objective overview of the opportunities and challenges in implementing the *Merdeka Curriculum* at the PAUD level, without conducting direct field data collection.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Research Findings**

This study reviews various scientific sources regarding the implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum* in Early Childhood Education (PAUD). The findings are summarized into two main focuses: opportunities and challenges in its implementation.

#### **A. Opportunities for Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in PAUD**

The *Merdeka Curriculum* is a new curriculum developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology to provide greater autonomy for educational institutions in designing child-centered, flexible, and contextually relevant learning. In PAUD, this curriculum emphasizes meaningful, enjoyable learning experiences appropriate to children's developmental stages.

Key Opportunities Identified:

##### **1) Flexibility in Learning:**

The *Merdeka Curriculum* allows PAUD teachers to design learning processes according to students' needs and learning environments. Teachers are no longer confined to rigid national syllabi but can develop independent teaching modules tailored to children's interests and needs, enabling more contextual and concrete learning experiences.

##### **2) Strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile through Projects:**

Projects become an integral part of learning under the *Merdeka Curriculum*. In PAUD contexts, activities such as planting, sharing food, or exploring local cultures are used to introduce children to Pancasila values like cooperation, diversity, and environmental stewardship.

##### **3) Holistic, Play-Based Learning Approach:**

The curriculum emphasizes play as the primary learning strategy in PAUD, supporting cognitive, motor, socio-emotional, and language development simultaneously. Play becomes both a learning medium and an entertaining activity suited to early childhood characteristics.

##### **4) Focus on Character and Socio-Emotional Skill Development:**



The curriculum highlights building positive character traits and socio-emotional skills from an early age, shaping independent, creative, cooperative, honest, and emotionally healthy individuals—fundamental aspects of early childhood education.

Teacher Autonomy in Designing Teaching Modules:

- 5) Teachers' roles shift to facilitators who guide and observe children's development. The curriculum encourages innovative, enjoyable teaching methods adjusted to local contexts, promoting greater responsiveness to class dynamics.

#### B. Challenges in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in PAUD

Despite the identified opportunities, several challenges were found:

- 1) Uneven Teacher Readiness:

Many PAUD teachers, especially in underdeveloped, frontier, and outermost regions (3T), lack full understanding of the *Merdeka Curriculum* concepts and implementation due to limited training and support.

- 2) Limited Supporting Facilities and Infrastructure:

Project-based learning requires appropriate tools, materials, and learning environments, which are often lacking, especially in thematic project settings.

- 3) Overlap with Previous Curriculum Understandings:

Some teachers still mix approaches from the previous PAUD curriculum (K13 PAUD), leading to inconsistent implementation and loss of the curriculum's new essence.

- 4) Lack of Parental Involvement:

The *Merdeka Curriculum* demands greater parental engagement, but many parents remain unaware of their crucial role in supporting project activities or home learning.

From the above findings, it is clear that while the *Merdeka Curriculum* offers great potential for enhancing PAUD education through a more child-centered, contextual, and holistic approach, its field realization faces considerable complexity. Stakeholder support, particularly in continuous teacher training, facility provision, and parental outreach, is urgently needed.

### Conclusion

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the Early Childhood Education (PAUD) level presents substantial opportunities to enhance the quality of early childhood learning through flexible, child-centered, and contextual approaches. Emphasizing project-based learning and character development, the curriculum fosters holistic growth in young learners. However, its successful implementation is highly dependent on several factors, including teacher preparedness, the availability of adequate facilities and infrastructure, and active parental involvement. Challenges such as uneven teacher readiness, limited resources, and a lack of understanding among parents highlight the need for comprehensive and collaborative strategies. To optimize the curriculum's impact, continuous professional development for teachers, improved learning environments, and stronger partnerships between schools and families are essential. With structured support and sustained commitment from all stakeholders, the Merdeka Curriculum has strong potential to drive transformative changes in early childhood education across Indonesia.

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