

## Curriculum Merdeka Concept Based on The Perspectives of John Dewey's Progressivism Philosophy

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**Abstrak:** Pendidikan dapat menciptakan pengetahuan yang kreatif dan inovatif karena selalu diperbarui. Pendidikan juga bertujuan untuk meningkatkan keterampilan, membangun karakter, mencerdaskan kehidupan bangsa, serta meningkatkan kualitas hidup dan martabat manusia di Indonesia. Salah satu cara untuk menyempurnakan konsep sistem pendidikan nasional adalah melalui pendekatan progresif. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengulas pandangan filosofis progresivisme John Dewey yang diterapkan pada kurikulum merdeka belajar kampus merdeka. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian, ditemukan bahwa peran merdeka belajar di perguruan tinggi sangat penting dalam pengembangan masyarakat pendidikan di Indonesia. Hal ini disebabkan karena merdeka belajar pada kampus merdeka merupakan salah satu bentuk percepatan respons terhadap permasalahan pendidikan dan globalisasi. Ini juga sejalan dengan kecenderungan progresivisme yang sangat berpengaruh, yang menuntut perubahan yang cepat.

**Kata kunci:** Kurikulum Merdeka, Filsafat Pendidikan, Progresivis

**Abstract:** Education can create the creative and innovative knowledge because it is always updated. Education also aims to improve skills, build character, educate people's lives, and improve the quality of life and human dignity in Indonesia. One way to perfect the concept of the national education system is through a progressive approach. The purpose of this study is to review the literature review of several research findings that have been published in a journal related to the philosophical view of John Dewey's progressivism which was carried out on the independent learning curriculum of the independent campus. Based on the literature review, it was found that the role of independent learning in universities is very important in the development of the Indonesian educational community. This is because independent learning on an independent campus is one form of accelerating the response to educational and globalization problems. This is also in line with the very influential tendency of progressivism, which requires rapid change.

**Keywords:** Merdeka Curriculum, Philosophy of Education, Progressivism

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## INTRODUCTION

In essence, education can create creative and innovative knowledge that follows the development of the times. (Sopacua & Fadli, 2022) said that education is a driver of culture, traditions in every era can change along with the changes resulting from the education process itself. If a country wants to create a much better life, its citizens must undergo education to prepare and fulfill the aspirations of its citizens.

Education in Indonesia certainly aims to create a better life, especially as a very valuable and valuable need and policy, so that it is determined as a valuable goal stated in the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, namely in the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution, all four of which explicitly state that the intellectual life of the country has become the responsibility of the state (Yunus, 2016). In addition, the goals of national education stated in Law no. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System

explain that the goals of national education are to improve skills, shape character, educate the nation's life, and improve the quality of life and dignity of the Indonesian people. One way to improve the concept of the national education system is through the concept of a progressivism approach.

This article presents a literature review of several research findings published in journals related to the philosophical perspective of progressivism as applied by John Dewey to independent curriculum learning. The Independent Curriculum embodies the philosophy of progressivism in education, expressed through policies aimed at curriculum changes or improvements. The philosophy of progressivism, pioneered by the philosopher John Dewey, emphasizes the importance of student-centered education.

According to Fadlillah (2017), progressivism supports the implementation of education that focuses on students and aims to develop their individual abilities and skills to face the challenges of modern times. Progressivism underscores that humans advance constructively and actively. In the context of Independent Learning, it is essential to recognize that, from a progressivism perspective, individuals possess unique and distinct abilities to address various challenges and problems.

The novelty of this research lies in its exploration of the Independent Curriculum through the lens of progressivism philosophy, offering a unique perspective on how this educational approach aligns with contemporary educational needs and values. While previous studies have examined progressivism as a philosophy in general, this study delves specifically into its application within the Independent Curriculum framework, which is designed to emphasize student-centered learning and foster independent, critical, and creative thinking. By analyzing the Independent Curriculum as a practical embodiment of John Dewey's progressivism, this research contributes to the understanding of how philosophical principles can be operationalized in modern education systems. Furthermore, it highlights the relevance of progressivism in addressing the challenges of modern times, particularly in fostering a generation with strong character and moral integrity, as envisioned in the goals of national education in Indonesia. This approach not only advances the theoretical discourse but also provides practical insights for policymakers and educators aiming to enhance the quality of education in Indonesia.

Based on the explanation above, this study aims to examine the concept of the Independent Curriculum through the lens of progressivism philosophy. The Independent Curriculum is envisioned to cultivate a generation with strong character and noble morals, spanning from basic education to higher education. This curriculum emerges as an effort to promote independent learning among students, grounded in the principle of freedom. By doing so, it aspires to advance Indonesian education, enhance its quality, and align it with the aspirations of all Indonesian people.

## **METHOD**

This study employs the literature review method as its primary research approach. A literature review is a crucial component of any research, serving to compare the object of discussion with previous studies or related theories. By analyzing and synthesizing

existing scholarly works, the study aims to build a comprehensive understanding of the topic under investigation, ensuring that the research is grounded in established knowledge. This method enables the researcher to identify gaps, establish connections, and provide a broader context for the current study.

The review process involved citing various recent sources, with a primary focus on the latest journal articles, supplemented by relevant books. These sources were carefully selected to provide a robust theoretical foundation and to ensure the validity of the findings. The citations were then compiled and elaborated upon to align with the article's objective, which seeks to examine the alignment between John Dewey's progressivism philosophy and the Merdeka Curriculum in the context of education. This method allows for a deeper exploration of how progressivism principles are reflected in the Merdeka Curriculum and their implications for education in Indonesia.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Education in John Dewey's View**

John Dewey is a prominent modern pragmatist thinker who views education as a means to shape students into useful individuals. According to the pragmatist philosophy, the knowledge gained must have practical value, meaning it should provide tangible benefits for both students and their environment. Dewey emphasizes that the outcomes of the learning process should contribute meaningfully to society (Wasitohadi, 2014).

In Dewey's perspective, education is a continuous process of organizing and reconstructing life experiences. It is not about chasing a fixed standard of excellence but about enabling students to derive meaning from their experiences. This allows knowledge to flow seamlessly as a part of their lives. Dewey argues that students must be able to interpret and integrate their learning experiences into their personal and communal growth (Wasitohadi, 2014).

Education, as a reconstruction of human experience, shifts the focus to new and relevant ideas. Dewey's pragmatism posits that ideas only hold value when practiced and proven useful. Abstract concepts that remain confined to the mind are meaningless. Therefore, learning should center on practical activities, encouraging students to explore, act with enthusiasm, and enhance their participation in fulfilling shared needs.

Dewey strongly opposes traditional education, which treats students as passive recipients of information and instruction. In such settings, students are restricted, unable to develop their potential or apply their experiences to communal life. Dewey advocates for a democratic approach to education, where students are treated as active participants, not mere objects. He emphasizes the need for a system that empowers students to freely express themselves and develop their intelligence in a supportive environment (Arifin, 2020).

Education, according to Dewey, plays a critical role in cultivating new habits and awakening moral values. He establishes a strong connection between experimental practice and reflective thinking, which naturally fosters moral growth. Dewey prioritizes learning freedom as a means to encourage creativity, critical thinking, and the courage to express ideas. A democratic atmosphere in education allows students to actively

participate in decision-making, problem-solving, and shaping the learning process itself, fostering both personal and collective development (Arifin, 2020).

John Dewey's philosophy of education highlights two main characteristics: participatory and progressive. Participatory education emphasizes the active involvement of students in the learning process, with the teacher acting as a facilitator. Teachers provide guidance and materials to encourage students to explore, discover, and solve problems independently while offering support when necessary. This approach nurtures creativity, independence, and emotional intelligence, equipping students to take charge of their learning journey (Arifin, 2020). Meanwhile, progressive education is deeply connected to human social life, integrating real-world experiences into the learning process. Dewey viewed the school environment as a microcosm of society, where students are prepared not only for academic success but also for meaningful societal participation. For instance, when students study natural gas properties, they might investigate harmful gases from vehicle emissions or cigarette smoke, leading them to identify problems and propose solutions to reduce environmental harm.

Dewey's progressivist education can be understood through four essential principles. First, humans are central to the educational process, serving as agents of change who actively contribute to educational organizations. Second, a dynamic and responsive curriculum is essential, aligning with the evolving conditions of the school environment and society. Third, education should integrate with society, enabling students to actualize themselves as morally and socially responsible individuals who contribute positively to their communities. Finally, Dewey emphasized academic freedom, allowing students to pursue their interests, fostering innovation and creativity. These principles ensure that education remains relevant, practical, and capable of shaping individuals who are prepared to address societal challenges and contribute to collective progress.

### **Merdeka Curriculum**

*Merdeka Belajar* is a transformative policy introduced by Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture under the leadership of Minister Nadiem Anwar Makarim. During his National Teachers' Day speech in 2019 (Directorate General of Education and Education Personnel, 2019), Nadiem outlined the vision of *Merdeka Belajar*, which emphasizes freedom for schools, teachers, and students. This freedom encompasses the liberty to think critically, innovate, and learn independently and creatively.

The concept of the Independent Curriculum aligns with this vision by striving to enhance Indonesia's education system. It aims to alleviate the pressures often associated with grades or class rankings, recognizing that each child possesses unique talents, characteristics, and intelligences. By embracing these individual differences, *Merdeka Belajar* seeks to foster a learning environment that is inclusive, empowering, and conducive to the holistic development of every student.

## The Concept of the Merdeka Curriculum from the Perspective of Progressivist Philosophy

Yunus (2016) describes the curriculum from a progressivist perspective as a pedagogical experience that is experimental, planned, and follows a structured sequence of steps. The learning experience is designed to provide students with various experiences aligned with educational goals, fostering their growth and development. A well-designed curriculum should focus on developing students' diverse potentials while offering meaningful and practical life experiences.

The alignment between the Independent Curriculum (*Merdeka Belajar*) and progressivist philosophy lies in their shared emphasis on independence and flexibility for educational institutions to explore the unique abilities and potentials of students, acknowledging their natural differences. Independence in education begins with the educators, who are encouraged to adopt a student-centered teaching approach, creating a comfortable and engaging learning environment. Juita and Yusmaridi (2021) highlight that both students and teachers are afforded opportunities to explore their potentials during the learning process, leading to optimal outcomes. This autonomy and freedom are expected to drive Indonesian education toward greater quality and national progress.

Another point of convergence is the emphasis on natural student development through direct and experiential learning outside the classroom, which optimizes their abilities. Teachers play a vital role as facilitators, while schools serve as a nurturing environment for students to achieve independence. These principles closely mirror John Dewey's educational philosophy, particularly in terms of fostering student-centered learning and practical, experience-based education. Both perspectives aim to create an educational system that is adaptive, dynamic, and aligned with the demands of a progressive society.

Table 1. Progressivism Philosophy

No	John Dewey Education	Education of Merdeka Curriculum
1	Experience-based students' education are directly involved in the real life.	Through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), students can learn outside the classroom, in direct contact with the community environment.
2	Active learning process, students do not just sit and listen, but also explore the learning material.	Through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), students learn actively in creating products.
3	Democratic education, students are formed to be actively involved in community life and are able to think critically.	Through the Student Profile Strengthening Project Pancasila (P5) students are formed into characters based on Pancasila social (justice).
4	Focus on practical uses	Focus on essential material so that students have more free time to explore knowledge and create real projects that are useful for students' lives.
5	Cooperation in social interaction through collaboration with friends/group	Differentiated learning overcomes the problem of differences in students' backgrounds so that good social interaction is created.



## CONCLUSION

The philosophy of progressivism views education as more than just the transfer of knowledge; it emphasizes the process of nurturing and developing the diverse potentials of students. As times evolve, education should align with the abilities of students and aim to equip them to address future challenges effectively. The Independent Curriculum aligns closely with the principles of progressivism, as both prioritize independence and freedom for schools and educational institutions to explore students' abilities and potentials in a flexible, natural, and enjoyable manner. Furthermore, the emphasis on direct experience and learning beyond the classroom is intended to optimize the development of students' competencies. By integrating the progressivist philosophy into the Independent Curriculum, it is hoped that the quality of education in Indonesia can be maximized, fostering the creation of superior human resources capable of addressing future challenges in a rapidly changing world.

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