

INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM, DEEP LEARNING, AND THE CURRICULUM OF LOVE

Nur Laili *, Nur Sa'adatul Abadiyah, Muhammad Zaqi Nur Azizi, Mohammad Yahya

Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember

Jl. Mataram No.1, Karang Miuwo, Mangli, Kec. Kaliwates, Kabupaten Jember, Jawa Timur 68136, Indonesia

Email: nurlailiy26@gmail.com

Abstract

This article examines the integration of the Merdeka Curriculum, Deep Learning, and the Curriculum of Love as progressive approaches to strengthen the quality of education in Indonesia. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes flexibility, student-centered learning, and the development of essential competencies to address learning loss and support students' individual potential. Deep Learning offers a transformative pedagogical model that encourages students to think critically, construct meaningful understanding, and connect knowledge with real-life experiences. Meanwhile, the Curriculum of Love promotes humanistic, ethical, and spiritual values by fostering empathy, compassion, and emotional maturity. Through a qualitative and conceptual analysis, this study highlights that the synergy of these three approaches creates a more holistic and humane educational paradigm. When implemented together, they can cultivate learners who are intellectually capable, emotionally balanced, spiritually grounded, and prepared to face the challenges of modern society.

Keywords: Merdeka Curriculum, Deep Learning, Curriculum of Love

Introduction

The rapid changes of the times demand that the world of education adapt to the needs of the 21st century. The world of education can no longer focus solely on cognitive aspects, but must also shape the character, morals, and spirituality of students. In this context, the Merdeka Curriculum, Deep Learning, and the Love Curriculum have emerged as efforts to renew the paradigm of education to be more humane, profound, and meaningful.

The Merdeka Curriculum is an innovation from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology that emphasizes learner-centered, flexible, and contextual learning so that each student can develop according to their potential and interests. This curriculum is expected to be the answer to post-pandemic learning problems and a paradigm shift from simply "teaching" to "facilitating learning."

Meanwhile, the concept of Deep Learning in the context of education is not only related to artificial intelligence technology, but also describes a learning model that encourages students to understand knowledge deeply (deep understanding). Through this approach, students do not just memorize information, but relate concepts to real life and are able to think critically, creatively, and reflectively.

On the other hand, the Love Curriculum was born out of a reflection on education that tends to lack human values. This curriculum emphasizes the values of compassion, empathy, spirituality, and social awareness as the core of the learning process. In Islam, education based on love is a manifestation of the principle of rahmatan lil 'alamin, where knowledge and morals combine to shape individuals with character and civility.

These three approaches, the Merdeka Curriculum, Deep Learning, and the Love Curriculum, share the same goal: to create education that is liberating, profound, and full of human values. The integration of these three approaches is expected to shape a generation that is intellectually intelligent, emotionally mature, and spiritually strong.

Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach through a conceptual and literature-based analysis. The research focuses on examining and synthesizing scholarly works, policy documents, and authoritative sources related to the Merdeka Curriculum, Deep Learning, and the Curriculum of Love. Data were collected from books, journal articles, official regulations issued by the Ministry of Education, and relevant contemporary studies discussing pedagogical innovation and humanistic education. The researchers analyzed the collected data using content analysis, which involved identifying core concepts, comparing perspectives, and drawing connections among the three curriculum approaches. Through this method, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these educational frameworks can be integrated to create a more holistic, flexible, and value-based learning paradigm.

Results

Definition of Merdeka Curriculum

Merdeka Curriculum is a curriculum developed as part of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology's efforts to overcome the long-standing learning crisis in society, which has worsened due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This curriculum emphasizes more diverse intracurricular learning with the aim of simplifying the material so that students have more time to explore ideas and develop their skills. Teachers are given the freedom to choose various learning resources so that the learning process can be tailored to the interests and needs of students (Ma'rifatunnisa', 2025).

The concept of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum focuses on providing freedom in the field of education. Merdeka Belajar is a form of reconstruction of the education system to welcome change and progress for the nation. This curriculum was officially established in 2019 by Nadiem Makarim. The Merdeka Belajar Curriculum was implemented by the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia as a replacement for the 2013 Curriculum. In this curriculum, students are given the freedom to acquire knowledge through both formal and informal education, because the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum emphasizes the importance of independence in the learning process.

The Merdeka Belajar Curriculum provides opportunities for students to optimize their potential to the maximum. In addition, this curriculum also focuses on character development in accordance with the Pancasila Student Profile. The government has introduced various initiatives that encourage students to learn through reading and direct experience so that the objectives of the Pancasila Student Profile can be achieved. This curriculum is designed to help the millennial generation understand the subject matter in depth, not just memorize it (Ma'rifatunnisa', 2025).

Through instilling a sense of responsibility for the environment and building self-confidence, the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is expected to nurture students to become independent and inspiring individuals. Based on this description, it can be concluded that the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum aims to help students explore and discover their interests and abilities. This curriculum creates a more meaningful, in-depth, relaxed, and enjoyable learning experience by adjusting learning to the developmental stage of students.

Objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum

a. Creating Enjoyable Education

The first objective of the Merdeka Curriculum is to create enjoyable education for students and teachers. This curriculum emphasizes Indonesian education on the development of skills and character in accordance with Indonesian national values.

b. Catching Up on Learning Loss

One of the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum is to catch up on learning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This curriculum was created with the aim of making education in Indonesia similar to that in developed countries, where students are given the freedom to choose what they are interested in learning.

c. Equipping Students with Potential

The next objective of the independent curriculum is to develop the potential of students. This curriculum is simple and flexible so that learning will be more in-depth. In addition, the independent curriculum also focuses on essential material and the needs of students at their stage.

With the independent curriculum, it is hoped that the competencies of students can be developed. This is a distinct advantage, as this curriculum emphasizes the freedom of students. This curriculum also makes it easier for teachers to teach students (Suherman, 2023).

The Basis of the Independent Curriculum

The Independent Curriculum, introduced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), is a major transformation in the philosophy of national education. This curriculum is designed to create a learning system that is more flexible, contextual, and student-centered. Its main objective is to achieve learning outcomes that focus not only on mastery of knowledge, but also on the development of students' skills, character, and emotional intelligence (Dkk, 2024).

The main philosophy of the Merdeka Curriculum is rooted in the idea of “Merdeka Belajar” (Freedom to Learn), which means the freedom to learn according to the interests, needs, and potential of students. Thus, students are encouraged to be more active and independent in building learning experiences that are relevant to themselves.

Philosophically, the Merdeka Curriculum is based on eight fundamental aspects as stipulated in Permendikbudristek Number 12 of 2024. The first aspect places the values of Pancasila as the main foundation in shaping the character of students. Pancasila is the reference in formulating a curriculum that instills the values of divinity, humanity, unity, democracy, and social justice. These values are applied comprehensively in every stage of learning, from planning and implementation to evaluation.

The main objective of Pancasila-based character development is to shape a generation of Pancasila adherents who have a strong national identity and are able to compete globally. The character traits developed include religious, humanistic, nationalistic, democratic, and just attitudes (Kemendikbudristek, 2024) (Kemendikbudristek, 2024) (Dkk, 2024).

The second aspect emphasizes freedom of learning, which is at the core of educational transformation. Each student is seen as having unique potential that must be facilitated in order to develop optimally. This paradigm shifts the focus of education from merely transferring knowledge to developing individual potential. Through this concept, students are given the freedom to explore their interests and talents and determine their own direction of learning. The principle of flexibility is also reflected in the curriculum design, which allows for adjustments to local contexts and needs (Kemendikbudristek, 2024).

The third aspect is mutual cooperation, which reflects the local wisdom of the Indonesian people. This value is emphasized in the learning process to foster collaboration, empathy, and social solidarity among students. Through collaborative learning activities, students learn to understand that

success is not only determined by individual abilities, but also by mutual support and synergy. This value of mutual cooperation encourages the creation of a learning community that respects and strengthens each other (Dkk, 2024).

Furthermore, the fourth aspect is diversity, which emphasizes the importance of respecting cultural and social diversity as the nation's wealth. Its implementation is evident in practice-based learning. Teachers are encouraged to conduct field observations and collaborate with colleagues to broaden their horizons and improve the quality of learning. Through such cooperation, teachers can design learning strategies that suit the unique characteristics of their students.

Inclusive learning is also an important part of the Merdeka Curriculum. This approach instills mutual respect for differences and fosters a harmonious learning atmosphere. The values of Pancasila are integrated into learning activities to strengthen the moral foundation and tolerance of students.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum

It must be acknowledged that in its development, education in Indonesia has undergone numerous curriculum changes. It can even be said that “every time there is a new minister, there is a new policy and a new curriculum.” From this situation, several advantages and disadvantages have emerged that are inherent in the Merdeka Curriculum as the latest curriculum.

a. Disadvantages of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum

In reality, there are a number of disadvantages in the Merdeka Curriculum that can hinder its implementation in the field. These disadvantages are as follows (Mudiono, 2024):

1) Immature Preparation

The Merdeka Curriculum was only launched by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in 2021. This new curriculum is considered to be immature in its preparation, requiring further review, improvement, and evaluation to ensure its effective and targeted implementation in the learning process.

2) Poorly Planned System

The Merdeka Curriculum will be implemented starting in the 2022/2023 academic year, but there has been minimal discussion regarding efforts to improve the quality of education in Indonesia in terms of the procedures for implementing education and teaching. Therefore, this curriculum is considered to not yet fully lead to a well-planned education and teaching system and does not provide sufficiently clear technical guidelines.

3) Lack of Human Resources

The newly launched Merdeka Curriculum requires thorough socialization and preparation in order to have a well-structured system. In addition, this curriculum also requires adequate human resources, namely competent and skilled educators, so that its implementation can run smoothly. In this case, the available human resources are considered insufficient to meet the demands of the new curriculum.

b. Advantages of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum

Despite several shortcomings, the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum also has various advantages. With these advantages, it is hoped that there will be acceleration and improvement in the quality of learning. These advantages are as follows (Mudiono, 2024):

1) Relevant and Interactive

Through a project-based learning system, the Merdeka Curriculum is expected to provide students with more opportunities to actively explore current issues. In addition, this curriculum also supports the development of character and competencies in the Pancasila student profile, making the learning process more relevant and interactive.

2) Simple and In-depth

One of the main characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum is that it focuses on essential material so that students have enough time for in-depth learning of basic competencies such as literacy and numeracy. In this curriculum, the learning process is changed to be more enjoyable, simple, and meaningful, so that students can understand the material in a more focused manner.

3) Free and Flexible

The Merdeka Curriculum will eliminate specializations for high school students so that students can choose subjects that suit their interests and talents. In addition, teachers also have the flexibility to teach according to the development of students in receiving lesson material so that learning is more flexible and adaptive.

Advantages and disadvantages of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum Of course, every policy implementation has its advantages and disadvantages. This also applies to the implementation of the independent curriculum at various levels of education. The most prominent advantage of implementing this curriculum is that students must complete special projects to become active, creative, and independent in their own efforts to explore themselves. In addition, this syllabus is also more interactive and up-to-date. Meanwhile, the disadvantages of this curriculum are that it is rushed and lacks socialization from the outset, and it seems to be less open in both its design and implementation stages. Because this curriculum requires student learning experience, students with limited learning experience are less responsive to changes in their learning environment (Suherman, 2023).

Deep Learning

Deep learning is a subfield of machine learning that focuses on artificial intelligence (AI) algorithms inspired by the structure and function of the brain, called artificial neural networks. These elements are designed to create a learning environment that not only focuses on knowledge but also provides experience. When applied in a school curriculum, through the concept of Mindful Learning, a teacher will pay attention to the uniqueness of each student, including their individual potential and needs (Nur Alim Arrazaq, 2020).

For example, in a lesson about heat. Students are invited to experiment in the laboratory. They can understand the process and benefits of heat in everyday life. The next element is Meaningful Learning. Later, students are encouraged to understand the reasons and benefits of each subject in real life. This creates a learning atmosphere that is not only fun but also stimulates students to think deeply about the material being studied.

Benefits of Deep Learning

Benefits of Deep Learning in Education Deep Learning has a number of very significant benefits for students, including:

a. Critical Development

Students are encouraged to think critically and explore the material in greater depth. Application of Knowledge: Students can connect their learning to everyday life and real-world situations.

b. Active Engagement

This approach requires students to be actively involved in learning, rather than passively receiving information.

c. Improved Collaboration Skills

Deep learning also encourages students to work together on projects, developing effective communication and collaboration skills. Teachers also play an important role in this approach. They

not only transfer knowledge, but also encourage students to participate actively, provide positive feedback, and appreciate students' efforts without focusing too much on mistakes. This creates a more supportive and fair learning environment (Diputera, 2024).

Advantages and Disadvantages of Deep Learning

Deep learning in education offers a range of significant advantages that focus on developing students' comprehensive and continuous understanding. The deep learning approach focuses on developing deeper understanding through a comprehensive approach, involving all aspects of the student's learning experience, both emotional and cognitive. This means that deep learning is not only oriented towards intellectual aspects, but also pays attention to how students feel and respond to learning materials, making it a more personal and meaningful experience. This deep learning model (Khotimah, K. D., & Abdan, 2025).

Fundamentally contributes to increasing student activity during the learning process. By focusing on a deep learning experience, students are no longer passive recipients of information, but become active agents involved in the discovery and construction of their own knowledge. Furthermore, this approach creates a deep and sustainable learning experience and effectively trains students to think critically and creatively. These advantages can be further elaborated as follows.

- 1) Improves Students' Deep Conceptual Understanding
- 2) Increases Student Motivation to Learn
- 3) Develops Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills
- 4) Encourages Creativity and Innovation

Deep learning has a number of significant drawbacks despite offering advanced capabilities in data processing. One major drawback is the need for large and varied data sets in order for the model to learn complex patterns well. This is a particular obstacle in fields where data is limited, such as health and the environment. In addition, the process of training deep learning models requires very high computational resources, including specialized hardware such as GPUs, which are often difficult for small organizations or institutions with limited budgets to access. Furthermore, deep learning models are known as “black boxes” due to their high complexity, which makes them difficult to understand and interpret. The difficulty in explaining how the model makes decisions makes this approach less suitable for applications that require transparency and clear reasoning, such as in the medical or education fields. The risk of overfitting is also a problem, where models adapt too much to the training data and are less able to generalize to new data, especially if the data is unbalanced or unrepresentative. Data quality also greatly affects deep learning performance. Unstructured, noisy, or inconsistent data can significantly reduce model accuracy. This is exacerbated by the need for large amounts of clean data for optimal training. On the other hand, the implementation of deep learning in education and other sectors is often hampered by limitations in digital infrastructure and user literacy, meaning that the potential of this technology has not been fully utilized (Suwandi., Putri, R., 2024).

Curriculum of Love

The concept of a curriculum of love refers to the development of an education system based on the values of compassion, care, and love in a universal sense. The curriculum of love in Islamic education is rooted in the basic concept that love is the main foundation of religiosity and humanity in Islamic teachings. Love in Islam is not merely an emotion, but an ethical and spiritual principle that binds the relationship between humans and Allah, fellow humans, and the surrounding environment. This concept is based on the teaching of rahmatan lil 'alamin, which emphasizes universal compassion as a core value that must be internalized in all aspects of life, including education. Islamic education based on love refers to the fundamental objectives of Islamic education according to al-Ghazali and

Imam al-Syafi'i, namely the formation of perfect human beings who have noble character and deep spiritual awareness (Aslan, 2025).

The Love Curriculum is designed as an educational framework based on the values of compassion, tolerance, and care for others. In its design, this curriculum not only targets academic achievement but also fosters emotional and spiritual sensitivity in students. This concept is reinforced by the views of Qamariah and Anwar (2025), who state that education based on love will create a harmonious and spiritually profound learning atmosphere. This is certainly very important in responding to the needs of Islamic education today (Aslan, 2025).

Objectives of the Love Curriculum

The objective of the Love Curriculum is to instill moral and ethical values into every aspect of students' lives. Education is no longer defined as an academic process alone, but also as a process of forming a strong spiritual and social identity. Therefore, the Love Curriculum aims to revive the values of love and empathy as an important part of the learning process. In this case, the Love Curriculum emphasizes the importance of building students' self-awareness so that they care for others, the environment, and the nation. This curriculum also aims to create a warm, open learning atmosphere that supports the growth of mutual respect. When students feel loved and cared for, they will find it easier to accept lessons and express themselves. This is in line with the principles of Islamic education, which emphasize the importance of mercy and compassion in the learning process.

Thus, the Love Curriculum is a comprehensive approach to Islamic education. It not only shapes intelligent students, but also shapes people who are full of love, empathy, and responsibility. In the modern context, which is fraught with moral crises, this approach is becoming increasingly relevant and important. This curriculum is in line with efforts to build a generation that not only excels in achievement but also has noble character and is ready to face the challenges of the times with the values of love and humanity (Aslan, 2025).

Implementation of the Love Curriculum in Education

The implementation of the Love Curriculum in Islamic education is carried out through an integrative approach, namely by combining the values of compassion, empathy, tolerance, and responsibility in every learning process. In the context of Islamic education, the application of the love curriculum aims to instill values of faith that are not merely ritualistic, but also transformative, encouraging students to love Allah, the Prophet Muhammad, fellow human beings, knowledge, and the environment. These values are realized through a learning process that is loving, gentle, and touches the spiritual side, so that students not only understand the meaning of love in theory, but also feel it in their attitudes and actions. The implementation of the Love Curriculum covers five main forms of love, including:

- 1) Love for Allah and the Messenger
- 2) Love for Fellow Human Beings
- 3) Love for Knowledge
- 4) Love for the Environment
- 5) Love for the Homeland

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Love Curriculum

a. Advantages of the Love Curriculum

- 1) Shapes a more humanistic character and noble morals. This curriculum is able to foster empathy, compassion, tolerance, humanity, and other universal values. This makes students not only intellectually intelligent, but also emotionally and spiritually mature.

- 2) Provides a safe, inclusive, and loving learning environment. The love curriculum is expected to create a school atmosphere that is free from violence, bullying, intolerance, and discrimination. This makes the learning process much more comfortable and enjoyable.
- 3) Strengthening positive teacher-student relationships. Teachers become role models of compassion and facilitators of values, not just conveyors of material. This encourages warmer and more meaningful interactions.
- 4) Learning is more relevant and contextual. This curriculum encourages dialogue, cooperation, reflection, and real learning experiences that are close to the social lives of students. This is in line with humanistic and social theories.
- 5) Responding to the challenges of moral degradation and intolerance. This curriculum is a solution to the prevalence of violence, intolerance, and low empathy in the educational environment.
- 6) Encouraging the development of emotional intelligence and creativity. Students are encouraged to be confident, able to manage their emotions, and dare to express their creativity so that they are ready to face the changes of the times.

b. Disadvantages of the Love Curriculum

1. Requires high teacher competence. Teachers must be able to be role models of compassion, have emotional intelligence, and be accustomed to a humanistic approach. Not all teachers are ready for this major paradigm shift. (Implicit in the emphasis on the role of teachers as role models).
2. Potential difficulties in implementation in the field. The values of love must be integrated into all school activities (intra, co, and extra). This requires a transformation of school culture, which is not easy to do quickly.
3. Ineffective if not supported by the school ecosystem as a whole. This curriculum requires the involvement of teachers, students, parents, and the community. If one of these groups does not play an active role, the objectives of the curriculum will be difficult to achieve. (This is implied in the section that emphasizes a loving educational ecosystem).
4. Risk of being considered “abstract” if not translated into clear indicators. Values such as empathy, love, and compassion are easy to understand conceptually, but difficult to measure quantitatively and require more complex assessment instruments.
5. It takes a long time to see results. Character change cannot be instantaneous. The implementation of values of love requires long-term habituation, so the results cannot be measured as quickly as academic achievement (Mahfud Ifendi, 2025).

Conclusion

The Merdeka Curriculum, Deep Learning, and the Love Curriculum are three approaches that share the same goal, namely to create education that is humane, reflective, and oriented towards the development of the full potential of students. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes freedom and flexibility in learning, Deep Learning fosters deep understanding and critical thinking skills, while the Love Curriculum instills values of compassion, empathy, and spirituality in the learning process.

If all three are implemented in an integrated manner, education in Indonesia will not only produce academically excellent students, but also students with strong character, a gentle heart, and high spiritual awareness, in accordance with the essence of Islamic education, which is a blessing for the entire universe.

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